LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY IN MELBOURNE’S FRANCOPHONE MAURITIAN COMMUNITY

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Submitted to the Department of French, Italian and Spanish Studies of the Arts Faculty of the University of Melbourne in November 2007 in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts (by Thesis only)
ABSTRACT

Australia’s 18,000-plus Mauritian immigrants make up the country’s largest single French-speaking community, but they also speak Kreol, a creole language specific to Mauritius and its dependent island Rodrigues. Kreol is both the lingua franca of Mauritius and the L1 of a growing majority of people there. Census data show that in Australia, Mauritians maintain French as a language at home at much higher rates than Kreol, while this and earlier research by the author (Adler, Lord & McKelvie 2003) indicates that the two languages are used and valued differently in the immigrant community.

A starting point for this study was the idea that although social conditions affecting immigrants after they have settled in their adopted country must impact on their ability to maintain first language(s), their pre-migration experiences, beliefs and identities should also be taken into account but are often ignored in accounts of language maintenance and language shift (LM/LS). Through a thematic analysis of interviews with 17 French- and Kreol-speakers from Melbourne’s Mauritian community, this study explores the language attitudes these immigrants acquired growing up in Mauritius, and investigates the impact of these attitudes on post-migration maintenance of French and Kreol. It then examines the part French and Kreol play in post-migration identity construction. The study shows that their pre-migration beliefs, attitudes and experiences were in fact extremely relevant, even decisive, to subsequent LM/LS and language use for this group of Mauritians.

Specifically, the study shows that the attitudes to and beliefs about French and Kreol that the study participants brought with them from Mauritius led them to put more effort into transmitting French than Kreol to their children, but have also led them not to resist a shift by children to English at home. However, for themselves, the participants continued to use both French and Kreol at home with spouses and in the Mauritian immigrant community, and in the latter context, some of the dominant French-speakers appeared to be using more Kreol socially than they would once have done in Mauritius.

The research harnesses Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of practice, in particular his concepts of ‘habitus’ and ‘symbolic violence/domination’, to show how the participants’ attitudes were formed and how they have played out in post-migration language choices and use. For these 17 participants growing up in Mauritius, dissatisfaction with the economic and social disadvantages of using Kreol and with the low status offered
to Kreol-speakers was transformed – in an instance of the symbolic violence described by Bourdieu – into an undervaluing of the language itself, and that French was misrecognised as an inherently superior and more useful language, a differential valuation embedded in diglossic usage in Mauritius. This process led the study participants to accord French a greater symbolic value, which has persisted in the post-migration context regardless of the fact that in that broader Australian context French and Kreol are of similar value to the Mauritian community.
DECLARATION

This is to certify that the thesis comprises only my original work except where indicated in the preface; due acknowledgment has been made in the text to all other material used; the thesis is 39,000 words in length, inclusive of footnotes, but exclusive of tables, maps, appendices and bibliography.

Jennifer A. Lord
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank the many members of the Mauritian community in Melbourne whose co-operation and assistance made this research possible, and whose patience, generosity and hospitality made it easier to carry out.

I would also like to thank my supervisors, Jane Warren and Gillian Wigglesworth, for their patience, perseverance, advice and support.
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CHAPTER 1

Description of the research

1.1 Why study language maintenance in the Mauritian community?

In summarising sociolinguistic approaches to understanding language shift, Clyne (2003, p.69) remarked that ‘language shift has emerged as a product of pre-migration and post-migration experience, mediated by culture’. Yet sociolinguistic studies of language maintenance and shift, particularly in the contact-rich Australian context, have focussed largely on the post-migration dynamics of language contact, and on post-migration attitudes to language maintenance and to the assertion of ethnic identity. They have paid little attention to the pre-migration values, ideologies and experiences that must have helped shape those attitudes, and little to what motivates migrants to migrate, although why people migrate, and how they manage the process, may reveal a range of orientations to first language maintenance, to ethnic identity, and to cultural change in general.

Australian Mauritians are multilingual migrants from a country where the historical interaction of ethnicities has been complex, and from which emigration to Australia has mostly been confined to a few decades. As such, they provide us with a useful opportunity for exploring the impact of personal and social history on language maintenance.

Immigrants from Mauritius and its dependent island, Rodrigues, make up Australia’s largest single French-speaking group (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001) and they generally also speak Kreol¹, which is the first language of a growing majority of people in Mauritius (Republic of Mauritius 2002). A proportion of Australian Mauritians² are dominant in Kreol and have limited proficiency in French. In Melbourne, which is home to about half of Australia’s Mauritius-born population, French, Kreol and English are all used within Mauritian community networks.

¹ Also called Mauritian Creole or Morisyen, a French-lexified Creole language developed in the 18th century in contact between slaves and slave owners in Mauritius. In this study ‘Kreol’ refers to the language, while ‘Creole’ refers to a specific ancestry/ethnicity.
² The Australian census figures quoted in Ch 3 for the percentage of people who reported Mauritian Creole as the main ‘language used at home’ other than English (5.2% in 2001) are the only guide to the size of this section of the Mauritian community, although that figure may under-represent the number of people who use Kreol as the main language at home. See in 3.
Australian census data suggest that people born in Mauritius are maintaining French in the home at much higher rates than Kreol, although Australian Mauritians may under-report their actual use of Kreol. A questionnaire-based study of 48 respondents in 2003 (Adler, Lord and McKelvie 2003) found that rates of language shift to English in the home were higher for Kreol L1-speakers than for French L1-speakers among Melbourne’s Mauritians. The data in that study also suggested that French-speakers and Kreol-speakers may have different attitudes to Mauritian identity, which may in turn influence how much each group is prepared to invest in maintaining their first language as an identity marker. A re-examination of that data has shown, however, that the Kreol-speakers in the study were all native Rodriguans, so their different responses to questions on specifically Mauritian identity may have arisen more from regional political differences than language differences.

The literature confirms that French and Kreol do have different statuses as languages and that these are historically determined (see Chapter 2). Perceptions of the relative global status of French and Kreol and of their relative status within the Mauritian community are important to maintenance of both languages, and may be a factor also in how identity is constructed and expressed. Kreol-speakers also appear to have low social status relative to French-speakers in Mauritius, supporting the aim of the current research to investigate pre-migration experience and migration motivation as relevant to current language practices.

In investigating these questions and in analysing the data, my research draws primarily on the theoretical framework provided by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s ‘theory of practice’. Broadly speaking, Bourdieu sees all social behaviour as a response to and expressive of power relations, and his theory of practice sets out to explain how social structures and individual agency interact to produce particular practices, including cultural and language practices, in specific contexts of competition and domination.

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3 Statistics reported in Ch 3. There is anecdotal evidence from ABS that where Mauritians listed ‘Creole’ as their first language in the census, it may have been miscoded within ABS under ‘Oceanic Pidgins and Creoles’ (a Pacific language grouping) rather than under ‘Mauritian Creole’, further confusing the picture (personal communication, Census Section, Dept Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 23 Oct. 2003).
1.2 The research problem

The research problem has two parts:

1. What is the relationship between, on the one hand, Mauritians’ pre-migration experiences, migration motivation and their beliefs about their languages and, on the other, their post-migration language maintenance?

2. What is the relationship between ethnic identity and first language maintenance in the Mauritian community in Melbourne?

I addressed the research problem via an investigation of the following questions:

1. What attitudes do Mauritians in Victoria have to French and Kreol, and how were these attitudes formed?

2. How do Mauritians in Victoria use French and Kreol?

3. How important is it to French- and Kreol-speakers in Victoria to maintain French and Kreol a) at home and b) in the community?

4. What motivations for Mauritian migration to Australia can be identified?

5. Can these be linked or attributed to experiences to do with ethnolinguistic identity?

6. How important to French- and Kreol-speakers is maintaining a Mauritian/Rodriguan identity after migration?

7. Is maintaining French or Kreol important to maintaining a Mauritian or Rodriguan identity?

8. What do French-speakers and Kreol-speakers do to express a Mauritian or Rodriguan identity?

1.3 The research

The research is based on qualitative data in the form of self-reports about attitudes, experiences, and cultural and language practices, and my approach to the data was both exploratory and interpretive. I did not seek to measure objectively the extent of this community’s language maintenance (defined primarily as transmission of first languages to children and grandchildren, but extending also to continued use of the first language by immigrants within the home and the community), nor to statistically correlate different rates of maintenance in each language with other variables. Rather, I have explored the way a range of historical, cultural, ideological and biographical
factors play out in the language choices of individuals of each gender who represent a community cross-section in terms of their first/dominant language (French or Kreol), migration vintage (from 1960s through to 1980s) and birthplace (the main island of Mauritius or the island of Rodrigues). The relevance of these particular factors is explored in Chapters 2 and 3.

The data consist of interviews with 17 participants from the Mauritian/Rodriguan community in Melbourne. Initially, eight interviews were conducted using a questionnaire to test both the questions and the interview method (Group 1). This led to some finetuning of questions but mainly to a less structured interview format which was used in the subsequent nine interviews (Group 2). The relatively small sample size was a result of the change in the research method, combined with time and data collection constraints (discussed further in section 4.3.).

The aim of the interviews was to establish pre- and post-migration language use for French L1 and Kreol L1-speakers and the importance to them of a continued Mauritian/Rodriguan identity, and to investigate their reasons for migration. The relevance of the key constructs – ‘pre-migration experiences’, ‘core beliefs about language’ – to language maintenance and strength of Mauritian identity after migration was then explored with participants via their own beliefs and understandings of:

- the positive and negative consequences for them in Mauritius of being French- or Kreol-speakers;
- the value of French and Kreol language maintenance in Australia;
- the cultural and linguistic legitimacy of Kreol in relation to French;
- how they enact Mauritian identity.

1.4 Structure of the study

Chapter 2 presents Bourdieu’s theory of practice as applied to language use, and goes on to critically review sociolinguistic and sociopsychological accounts of language maintenance in which ethnic identity plays a part. Relevant studies of the Mauritian language background and of other migrant communities in Australia are considered.

Chapter 3 explains how Mauritius became a multi-ethnic, multilingual society and how its colonial history has produced ethnolinguistic identities and a range of language attitudes and values. The chapter then explores the background and timing of Mauritian emigration to Australia and describes the immigrant Mauritian community.
Chapter 4 outlines the study methodology and explores some validity issues raised in the course of interviewing.

Chapter 5 analyses the interview data in terms of the impact of past experiences, attitudes and practices on language maintenance in the present, while Chapter 6 examines the relationship(s) between identity and language use that emerge from the interview data.

Chapter 7 concludes the study by demonstrating how we can understand Mauritians’ language practice through Bourdieu’s theory of practice, and of cultural and symbolic capital and symbolic domination in particular.

1.5 Significance of the research

Very little research has been undertaken to date into the language use of this reasonably large migrant community. While the results are not expected to be directly applicable to other communities, they may be relevant to researchers considering the ideological dimensions of diglossic relationships and in particular to those studying Creole languages. However, the two significant aspects of this research are that it advocates adding a retrospective and historical perspective to sociolinguists’ current set of strategies for understanding language behaviour in the present, and shows how Bourdieu’s theory of practice can be productively applied in that context.
CHAPTER 2

Conditional freedom and the presence of the past –
Literature review

2.1 Introduction
The ‘theory of practice’ developed by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and his related idea of an ‘economy of linguistic exchanges’ provide the most useful framework for explaining the language practice of Mauritian immigrants in Melbourne. Bourdieu’s theory, outlined in the first part of this chapter, enables us to account for first language maintenance and shift in a migrant community in a way which integrates migrants’ pre- and post-migration language use and attitudes. The chapter will explore the broader and at times problematic concepts of identity and ethnicity which underpin the inquiry, and then discuss the ways in which the relationship between language and ethnic identity has been theorised for situations where languages are in contact and degrees of language maintenance and language shift become apparent. The diglossic/multilingual situation in Mauritius itself is considered next, and relevant aspects of studies of diglossic communities in Australia are discussed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the very limited number of studies which deal with the Mauritian community in Melbourne. No general studies have been found to date that explore the specific salience of pre-migration experience or migration motivation to language maintenance and cultural/identity maintenance.

2.2. Bourdieu’s theory of practice

2.2.1 Overview and key concepts
The ‘theory of practice’ developed by Pierre Bourdieu, and applied in his analysis of a diverse range of social practices, offers a set of concepts for understanding why people do what they do in a range of social fields. As such, it is much broader than a theory accounting just for the interaction between language and ethnicity in contact situations. It can, however, be usefully applied to understanding the latter, since ‘what people do’ includes the language varieties and registers they use and how they use them, as well as how they adapt their social (and linguistic) practices to changing contexts. The specific additional value Bourdieu has for this study is that ‘context’ for him encompasses not just the social structures that surround people but also, through the operation of ‘habitus’ (explained below), the historical formation of individual subjects as social agents.
One of the distinctive aspects of Bourdieu’s research is his insistence on moving beyond the antagonism between objectivism and subjectivism as modes of knowledge. His position is that these theoretical modes of knowledge are ‘both equally opposed to the practical mode of knowledge which is the basis of ordinary experience of the social world’ (1990, p. 25) [my italics]. Bourdieu offers a critique of both epistemologies (1990, pp. 25–29) and insists throughout his work on the need for social researchers to resist choosing between the identification and classification of objective criteria (such as class) on the one hand and the ‘ratification of [individual] wills and representations’ (1991, p. 227) on the other; instead they must ‘keep together what go together in reality’ by making the focus of inquiry ‘the game’ itself: the dynamics of the processes whereby social agents both produce and transform, and are produced and transformed by, objective social structures in any given time, situation and place.

Critical to this undertaking of bringing together structure and agency in an integrated analysis is his concept of ‘habitus’, a set of acquired predispositions which enable and regulate the dynamic interaction of individuals and their social contexts. Habitus refers to the set of behaviours and values we learn from earliest childhood in a social, gendered group (usually the family) and in a cultural and class context, and which predispose us to act and react in certain ways. Bourdieu defines habitus as ‘a system of structured, structuring dispositions, constituted in practice’ (1990, p. 52) and as ‘embodied history, internalised as second nature and so forgotten as history […] the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product’ (1990, p. 56). The properties of the habitus are that it is durable and transposable (it remains with us across contexts) and it is oriented towards the practical; so while it allows for improvised and strategic, even transformative, responses, it generally disposes us to make a ‘virtue out of necessity’: ‘[t]he most improbable practices are excluded, as unthinkable, by a kind of immediate submission to order that […] inclines agents to refuse what is anyway denied and to will the inevitable’ (1990, p. 54). For some this makes Bourdieu’s theory of practice ‘a theory of conditional freedom: the freedom to acquire practical knowledge or skills, to strategise, to interpret, to manipulate one’s habitus, to improvise, all within the parameters of fluid but nonetheless structural boundaries’ (McCaughan 1993).

Bourdieu calls the contexts in which social practices are produced cultural ‘fields’. A field (such as education, government, politics, the media, the legal system, the military, the health system, the art world, academe, business) consists of hierarchically ordered

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4 ‘Of all the oppositions that artificially divide social science, the most fundamental, and the most ruinous’ (Bourdieu 1990, p. 25).
institutions, rules and regulations, conventions, rituals and values, together with the discourses produced in and authorised by the field. Each field is characterised by forms of capital specific to it, whether material objects (money, property etc., which can have a symbolic as well as an actual value), attributes such as authority and prestige which have symbolic value (‘symbolic capital’), and ‘cultural capital’ (knowledge, skills, tastes, networks etc.). Each field offers social agents a number of positions, of greater or lesser power, and each field is also constituted dynamically by the struggles that arise over the definition, valuation and distribution of capital in that field. Individual practices arise, mediated by habitus, in response to the demands of the field, while the position each agent can occupy, and his/her ability to effect any transformation of the field, will partly depend on the field-specific capital s/he can mobilise.

Another key concept in Bourdieu’s theory, particularly in relation to the operation of fields, is that of ‘symbolic domination’. Bourdieu uses this term to describe the process whereby those who are dominant in a field through monopoly or substantial control of its resources use discourse and other institutional practices (often in a symbolically violent way – for example, through systemic discrimination on the basis of skin colour or sex) to ‘naturalise’ their own dominant positions. In this way those ‘dominated’ in the field ‘misrecognise’ social practice as natural, internalise the logic of their own subordinate position and help, through their own practices, to reproduce it.

2.2.2 Bourdieu and language

Bourdieu specifically addresses the role of language in and as social practice in Ce que parler veut dire: l’économie des échanges linguistiques (What speaking means: The economy of linguistic exchange, 1982). He argues there that language use constitutes ‘an economy’ capable of generating actual material, but also symbolic, advantage for speakers in a ‘linguistic marketplace’, depending on the cultural/linguistic capital they possess.

For Bourdieu a person’s linguistic capital is constituted by their knowledge of a specific language and how to deploy it within a particular field. This is pragmatic as well as systemic knowledge, and it is shaped by the habitus in particular ways: through the body’s physical idiosyncracies and through learned behaviours (such as accent, intonation or available vocabulary) which may shape and limit actual language performance. Bourdieu distances himself from the notional speaker of Saussure’s uniformly and universally accessible langue or Chomsky’s ‘ideal speaker-listener in a homogenous speech community who knows its language perfectly’ (1989, p. 43). For
Bourdieu *every* speaker/writer (and therefore all speech/writing) is socially and culturally situated, and *every* use or exchange of language ‘bears the traces of the social structures that it both expresses and helps to reproduce’ (1989, p. 1) In addition, *every* linguistic exchange expresses relations of power in three ways:

- through (variations in) accent, intonation and usage;
- through the authority claimed by and/or attributed to the speaker; and
- through the strategic use of words to achieve domination or distinction, e.g. to coerce, impress, abuse, persuade, condescend (1989, p. 1).

To explain the way linguistic capital is differentially valued in particular cultural fields within a unified linguistic market, Bourdieu talks about ‘legitimacy’ and ‘authoritative speech’. Drawing on the French historical example, he points to how the process of nation-building or colonisation involves the promotion or imposition of the language variety of those most powerful in the field (such as the nation-builders/colonisers) as a standard (1991, p. 44). This ‘standard’ is then legitimised and naturalised at the expense of other dialects or minority languages, and its legitimacy reinforced both through the education system and through academic standardisation of the dominant variety. In a similar way, some class-based usages within one language are stigmatised and others promoted. Again, these processes involve a symbolic violence, in that not only do those who speak the dominant language gain an advantage across a range of fields, but those who do not, or who do not speak it ‘well’, come to devalue their own forms of speech as cultural capital, misrecognising the dominant language as naturally or inherently superior.

The creation of language ‘legitimacy’ involves not just legitimate speech but also authorised/authoritative speakers. Bourdieu harnesses ‘speech act’ theory developed from J.L. Austin’s concept of ‘performative utterances’ and the idea that there are ‘felicity conditions’ which ‘ordinary people automatically accept’ if certain utterances are to be effective (Crystal 1987, p. 121). One of these is conditions is that the speaker has to be authorised to make the particular utterances. Unsurprisingly, Bourdieu sees both the claiming by and the attribution to a particular speaker of performative authority as a function of power relations, and argues that there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between speaker authority and language legitimacy: the legitimacy of a particular usage/variety is reinforced because of the identity of the (authorised) speaker, whose authority/authoritativeness is in turn bolstered by the fact that they choose the ‘legitimate’ language (1991, p. 44–45).
2.2.3 Applications of Bourdieu’s theory in applied linguistics

Bourdieu’s idea of a linguistic marketplace has been applied by some sociolinguists studying language maintenance and language shift (LM/LS) in an arguably reductive way – by investigating, for example, whether the actual market value of a language proficiency leads inexorably over time to its maintenance or loss (Jaspert & Kroon, 1988; van Avermaet & Klatter-Folmer, 1998). It seems to have been relegated in this narrowed form to the margins of LM/LS studies because it fails to accurately predict the range of actual outcomes. However, this over-literal application of Bourdieu’s model misses his central point, that all social relations involve competitive struggles for power and advantage, and that language is both a tool in and a site for the creation of dis/advantage relative to others. It also downplays the symbolic nature of both the costs and benefits associated with language use. Because Bourdieu’s theory involves contextual dynamics as well as social structures, it is inherently more suited to informing an analysis of what is happening in any specific contact situation than to being a predictive universal model.

Other researchers have harnessed elements of Bourdieu’s theory more profitably to analyse language use and interactions between dominant language speakers and minority language speakers or L2 learners. Heller (1992, p. 124) ‘builds on Bourdieu’s concepts of symbolic capital and symbolic markets’ in her study of French–English codeswitching in Quebec as a political strategy aimed at ethnic mobilisation, and sees language choices there as both participation in and resistance to power struggles. Peirce (1995) argues for a rethinking of second language teaching strategies, drawing on Bourdieu to argue that power relations affect the interaction between language learners and target language speakers, and therefore the SLA process, and that the acquisition of proficiency also involves acquiring ‘the right to speak’ – or what Bourdieu calls ‘the power to impose reception’. Angelil-Carter (1997) analyses her own interview with a SLA student from the perspective of how ‘the right to speak’ shifts between them depending on the topic, and shows how perceptions concerning authority and legitimacy in discourse can facilitate or impede the language learning process. Blackledge (2001) makes use of Bourdieu’s concepts of ‘habitus’, ‘symbolic domination’ and ‘linguistic or cultural capital’ to explore how Bangladeshi women in the north of England are marginalised or excluded from participation in their children’s acquisition of literacy at home, because they have ‘the wrong sort of capital’, that is, literacy in their own languages is devalued/not recognised by the school or education field.
2.2.4 Relevance of Bourdieu’s framework to this study

Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’ potentially allows individuals’ and groups’ present language behaviour and choices to be understood in terms of formative historical and cultural factors, a central concern of this investigation. His contention that language skills act as cultural capital, the value of which is contingent on cultural fields and a linguistic market, could help explain any differences found in Mauritian immigrants’ maintenance of French vs Kreol; while the concepts of ‘legitimate language’, ‘symbolic violence’ and ‘misrecognition’ may be useful in making sense of the ideologies evident in Mauritian thinking about French and Kreol (discussed below in section 2.6). Finally, the idea of a dynamic interaction between habitus and field may shed light on the extent to which first language maintenance is, or is not, crucial to identity at the individual level.

2.3 Identity

2.3.1 Why make identity a focus of language research?

‘Identity’ is of interest to language researchers because of the idea that it is implicated in the way we use language. This interest has arisen in the context of modern and postmodern debates about ‘the subject’ in general, but it also reflects a paradigm shift within sociolinguistics from a view of language use as the automatic outcome of social forces to a view of it as the product of speaker choice, however constrained (see, for example, Coulmas, 2005).

Quantitative ‘variationist’ language usage studies of the type pioneered by Labov in the 1960s demonstrated statistical correlations between social categories such as class and gender on the one hand, and speech variables on the other, but tended to present these as self-explanatory, a case of ‘language reflecting society’ (Cameron 1990, p. 85). Romaine (1984), followed by Cameron (1990), objected to the inference of a causal relationship between the two, referring to this as a ‘correlational fallacy’ and criticising sociolinguistics’ ‘quantitative paradigm’ for failing to explain how social conditions produced or contributed to speech variation, and for ignoring the role played by speakers’ own choices and attitudes in that process. Other researchers have subsequently turned to an investigation of whether, and how, ‘expressing an identity’ or ‘constructing an identity’ or ‘negotiating an identity’ might motivate, but also shape or constrain, speakers’ choices (e.g. Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985; Heller 1992; Myers-Scotton 1993; Ochs 1993; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1999, Blackledge 2001).
However, this still begs the question of what ‘identity’ actually is; while the options ‘express’ vs ‘construct’ (or ‘negotiate’) raise the issue of whether identity *precedes* language use or is created *within* language/discourse.

### 2.3.2 Competing theories of identity

The challenges to the Cartesian idea of the unitary subject mounted over the past 50 years by poststructuralist and postmodern theory have resulted in a significant shift in the related idea of ‘identity’ (Hall 1996, p. 1). In their study of discourse and identity, Benwell and Stokoe (2006) provide a comprehensive historical overview of the way ‘identity’ has evolved from being conceived of as a ‘project of the self’ to a ‘product of the social’, and from there to being thought of as something ‘constituted in discourse’.

As a ‘project of the self’, identity is understood as a self-conception ‘with an intrinsic and essential content’ (Grossberg 1996, p. 89) that is unitary and stable and which we arrive at ourselves as autonomous subjects and agents. This notion was followed but not necessarily displaced by the more recent sociological understanding that who we (think we) are depends on who we are with and what we are doing – that identities have provisional rather than essential content, are intersubjective and social rather than subjective, and are multiple, unstable, incomplete, impermanent, evolving, and relational or context-dependent (Grossberg, 1996, p. 89).

The third, more recent, set of theories sees identity (whether individual or social/collective) as not *preceding* discourse but as created by/within it. This approach to identity as discursive is grounded in postmodern theory and has two versions, the first most commonly associated with the work of Judith Butler, in which identity is realised as a ‘discursive performance or construction … in interaction’, and the second with French theorists Althusser and Foucault, in which individuals temporarily take up or are required to take up identities or subject positions produced by ‘a historical set of structures with regulatory power’ (Benwell & Stokoe 2006, p. 29).

It is outside the scope of this study to engage in these debates at a theoretical level and take a position on whether identity is pre-discursively or discursively constructed. What matters here is that there is broad theoretical consensus at least that identity is implicated in language use, with different theoretical orientations to the question leading to a range of methodological approaches and models being applied by language researchers to identity. Some of these, in particular those relevant to ethnic identity, are discussed in sections 2.4 and 2.5.
2.3.3 Bourdieu’s view of identity

Bourdieu sees discourse as performative in relation to identity: he says identities are both ‘revealed’ and ‘constructed’ by being ‘objectified in discourse’ (1991, p. 223), while in his discussion of regional identity, he defines identity as a ‘particularity’ and ‘that being-perceived which exists fundamentally through other people’ which ‘the public act of naming frees from the unthought and even unthinkable’ (1991, p. 224). Bourdieu has been criticised for failing to come to terms with subjectivity in his account of how social practices are produced and reproduced (Jenkins 1992, p. 130), and it is clear that for him ‘identity’ is not a way of describing the content of a person’s ‘essential self’ with no relation to discourse. Bourdieu’s definition suggests that an identity can be understood as a position that we can occupy relative to others – either by claiming it or by having it assigned to us – and in which we are recognised or ‘named’ by others. A person’s ‘identity’ is thus both a claim to position and a label produced during processes of social classification in and through language, which in turn reflect individuals’ struggles for distinction and status (lit. ‘standing’, or position as social value). Our ability to construct an identity (or to claim a position or status) effectively in and through language depends on both our speaker authoritativeness and our ability to deploy legitimate language, because these increase our chances of being able to impose our claim to position on others.

2.3.4 Does ‘Mauritian identity’ have an objective meaning outside the research?

Changes to ways of thinking about what identity is have necessarily involved debates about the role representations of identity play in its construction, and they have at least one methodological implication for the research which needs to be addressed.

The research makes an (ethnic) Mauritian identity one of the objects of its investigation, thereby assuming that there is such a thing as ‘Mauritian identity’. If, as Foucault asserts, there are no ‘knowing subjects’ but only (temporarily available) subject positions constructed by and within discourse and which individuals are ‘summoned’ to occupy, and if research such as this forms part of the discourse on identity and ethnicity, then it is arguable that asking research participants questions about their ‘Mauritian identity’ runs the risk of calling that identity into being, or at least of representing it to them in a way that contributes to its reality by actively inviting them to take it up as a subject position. This dynamic is implicit also in Bourdieu’s definition which sees identity as arising through others’ naming and recognition. These
theoretical positions raise the methodological question of how to talk to participants about identity, an issue discussed further in Chapter 4, Methodology.

2.4 Ethnicity

2.4.1 Theories of ethnicity

One of the difficulties in understanding the interaction of (ethnic) identity and language in the Australian immigrant context is in knowing how to hypothesise the relationship, and therefore where to look for indicators/evidence of its impact. This is partly due to the many disciplinary perspectives available on the question (see, for example, Fishman 1999), but also because of longstanding debates on how to conceptualise and define ethnicity itself.

Fishman (1977, p. 41) argues that the link between language and ethnicity (discussed in section 2.5 below) cannot be understood without a systematic understanding of the ‘nature, mutability and manipulability of ethnicity’ itself. Ross (1979) sees lack of agreement over definitional criteria for ethnicity as a methodological problem compromising all ethnicity studies.

Edwards (1994) outlines three key definitional concerns emerging from the prior literature. The first is whether ethnicity should be conceived of as relating only to minorities. The second, reflecting positions originally taken by anthropologists Geertz (1963) and Barth (1969) respectively, is whether ethnicity should be defined by its content (with membership limited by birthplace, descent and/or cultural practices) or by the continuing existence of boundaries between groups (in which case the practices which determine content, such as use of a particular language, or rituals, or dress code, as well as links to homeland, could change over time without involving a discontinuance of the ethnic group).

The third is whether ethnicity should be defined by objective criteria, observable from the outside (such as language use, or race or ancestry), or by subjective criteria, the shared feeling of a group of people that they make up a collectivity even if once-central cultural practices have fallen into abeyance – that ethnicity is ‘above all a matter of belief’ rather than of historical fact.
2.4.2 Mauritian ethnic identity

Studies of society in Mauritius have focussed on the entrenched divisions between its ethnic groupings and the resulting lack of a unified Mauritian ethnicity, and this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. Simmons (1982), Selvon (1991) and Eriksen (1998) show how consciousness of ethnic identity and ethnic group membership has always been of primary importance in Mauritian society, and how ethnic communalism has often undermined and displaced other potential forms of political solidarity or social identity. For several informants in Lau Thi Keng’s (1991) study, for example, an integrated Mauritian national identity remains a political ideal yet to be attained. Any ‘Mauritian identity’ experienced by Mauritians in Australia may be a new phenomenon, a by-product of migration which has led to the dissolving of formerly important intergroup boundaries and possibly to the homogenising of Franco-Mauritian and Creole, and perhaps also Indo-Mauritian, cultural values and practices.

2.5 Theories of language and ethnic identity

In investigating the relationship between language and (ethnic) identity we can look at language at a group level (in the form of language preferences and choices across social groups, and as language maintenance or shift by groups) or at an individual level (in terms of the features of individual speech or of conversation/dialogue). As this research is based on self-reports of attitudes to language choice and language maintenance, rather than on examples of language-in-use, this section will only consider theories relating to language used at the group level, and will not deal with methodologies for analysing language-in-use such as discourse analysis and conversation analysis. Fishman (1999) provides a useful overview of the perspectives offered by numerous social science disciplines on the relationship between language and ethnic identity at this group level. The two most relevant to this study are sociolinguistics and social psychology.

2.5.1 Sociolinguistics – predictive LM/LS models

Sociolinguists have tried to develop predictive models of language maintenance and shift by looking at the social and demographic variables which might influence changes in language use when languages come into sustained contact. In these models
(e.g. Kloss 1966; Conklin & Lourie 1983) ethnic identity and sociohistorical circumstances (both concerns of this research) feature as variables used to account for differences in language maintenance or shift between groups which should have similar outcomes based on other social variables.

Clyne and Kipp (1997) have reviewed data across three successive Australian censuses to identify trends in language shift for different ethnolinguistic (generally immigrant) groups in Australia, and have arrived at a list of factors that they argue are the most predictive of language shift by first and second generation immigrants in that context. They are: gender (with men appearing less likely to maintain the community language than women); exogamy; age; and period of residence. Clyne and Kipp nevertheless also acknowledge that there are community-specific factors, such as migration history, community dynamics, degree of distance from the dominant culture, and cultural values around language, which influence individual communities’ language maintenance and language shift (1997, p. 472) and produce differences between ethnolinguistic communities in LM/LS outcomes.

However, the shortcoming of all such models for the purposes of this study is that they do not generally explore how interethnic and cultural differences actually operate to generate these different outcomes.

Smolicz’s theory of ‘core cultural value’ (1981) tries to remedy this by tying differing maintenance or shift levels to the strength or weakness of an ethnic group’s cultural dependence on its language. It is tempting to use this theory to explain the different maintenance levels of French and Kreol – the first could be seen as central to Mauritian culture, the other not. However, one of the problems with the theory is that the question of whether a language has core cultural value to its speaker group is determined by the attitudes reported by group members. Not only does symbolic language attachment not necessarily lead to language maintenance, as Clyne (2003) has pointed out, but failure to see language as having core cultural value may come after and be a response to loss of the language. Is language maintained because it is a core value? Or is it held to be a core value (or not held to be one) because the group has so far maintained its language (or has failed to do so)? Another problem with this theory is the view it takes of culture. It firstly implies that a group’s culture is fixed and static – culture is presumed never to change, so if a group’s language changes, that must mean it was not central to their culture. Secondly, it depends on a group’s culture being able to be easily identified and demarcated; this is problematic for a multilingual group such as the Mauritians who are heirs to a number of cultural traditions (further
discussed in section 2.6.1 and in Chapter 3) which each contribute elements to Mauritian culture while their languages run across these traditions.

2.5.2 Social psychology and social identity theory

Social psychology reverses sociolinguistics’ emphasis on language variation as an effect of social factors and focuses on the way social identity is formed in society through individuals’ categorisation of themselves and others into groups, through their attempts to find ways to positively value their own group over others, and through the competitive interaction of groups (Tajfel 1974; Tajfel & Turner 1979). Because the categories to which people assign themselves and others change according to context, social identity is not fixed but also changes with context. From this sociopsychological perspective, language functions primarily as an identity marker, and language status as a dimension of group comparison.

In a study arguing for the relevance of social identity theory as a way of explaining migrants’ language strategies, McNamara (1987) used social identity theory to convincingly explain the language attitudes prevailing in Melbourne’s immigrant Israeli community and to predict a rapid language shift to English in the second generation. The Israeli immigrants chose an ‘Australian’ identity rather than accept the lower status ‘Jewish’ one offered by the wider Australian society – being Jewish had not previously been a salient part of their identity.

In the same study McNamara criticised language attitude studies for ignoring the contextual dynamics of maintenance/shift and, in a parallel study which reanalysed the findings of several other Australian studies in the light of social identity theory, for an atheoretical and descriptive tendency which reported the impact of language attitudes but failed to explain how they came about (McNamara 1987, p. 34). However, a similar criticism could be made of the Tajfel theory: while it gives an explicit explanation of how attitudes are generated in a competitive intergroup context, it does not address the ideological content of such attitudes (for example, essentialist beliefs about race and gender), which may express more than groups’ unequal status at the time.

Clyne (2003) has also questioned the usefulness of the Tajfel theory to the Australian context where many minority groups and languages are present. Clyne argues that the theory has more relevance in a stable situation of one majority/one minority language. Both of these criticisms point to the difficulty of applying social identity theory to the Mauritian immigrant situation: there is undoubtedly an ideological dimension to the
French-Kreol interaction (discussed in more detail below) and it is not clear how ingroups and outgroups should be defined in the three-way interaction between bilingual French/Kreol-speakers, Kreol-dominant-speakers and the dominant English-speaking host society.

2.5.2.1 Ethnolinguistic vitality and intergroup relations

Ethnic identity is one form of social identity, and Giles’ theory of ethnolinguistic vitality and intergroup relations (Giles, Bourhis & Taylor 1977) incorporates a number of sociolinguistic variables (the ‘ethnolinguistic vitality’ measure) into Tajfel’s social identity theory in order to predict and explain the long-term survival of ethnic groups, and their language maintenance in a language contact situation. It seems common, however, for researchers to apply the ethnolinguistic vitality measure predictively to groups’ language maintenance and language shift without attempting to explain groups’ behaviour using the whole theory of social identity formation and intergroup relations.

The vitality measure combines indicators of actual status (i.e. economic and social status) with indicators of perceived status. The latter are

a) socio-historical status (of the language, not the group), referring to the extent to which the group language has functioned historically as a mobilising symbol for the group, and

b) status of the language itself, which encompasses its status within the group and the status it has outside the group (e.g. nationally or internationally).

For the purposes of the present study, clearly some distinctions can be made between the past economic and social status within Mauritius of French L1-speakers and Kreol L1-speakers, but these probably no longer apply in Australia, except to the extent that a higher level of educational attainment by French-speakers would continue to operate to their advantage in Australia. French and Kreol do have a different language status and socio-historical status within Mauritius and these were explored with participants in the course of the research.

2.6 Diglossia and multilingualism

2.6.1 Multilingualism as a Mauritian cultural value

The multilingualism of Mauritians in their homeland has been well documented (Baker 1972, Baggioni & de Robillard 1990, Adone 1994, Nallatamby 1995). These studies
show that use of ancestral Indian and Chinese languages is tied to ethnic group membership but that use of French or Kreol, while it may reflect Franco-Mauritian or Creole ancestry in specific cases, is not restricted to those groups. In the Mauritian context, multilingualism takes on a particular value and usefulness, as the shared languages of Kreol and French function as common denominators in a society divided along racial, ethnic and religious lines (Lau Thi Keng 1991, Eriksen 1998). A majority of respondents in the Adler, Lord & McKelvie (2003) study described multilingual proficiency as a feature of Mauritian identity which they valued.

On the other hand, access acquired through education to the high-prestige languages of French and English opens up opportunities that may favour a shift from Kreol as a first language within Mauritian society (Moorghen & Domingue 1982) so that the identities associated with use of French and English are no longer ethnic but reflect class status. De Robillard (1993) has described how the high status of French attracts upwardly mobile speakers who, having acquired French at school as a second language, pass it on to their children as a first language, so that French is gradually moving from being an ‘ethnolect’ to the ‘sociolect’ of the Mauritian professional and middle classes.

2.6.2 French-Kreol diglossia

2.6.2.1 Relevance of speaker status

The relationship between French and Kreol has been described as functionally diglossic (de Robillard 1993) but as the extent of personal proficiency in French (and English) is a function of education, a functionally diglossic use of Kreol and French (and of French and English) is not equally available to all, and class/level of education also plays a part in determining which languages are employed when. While the prestige level of the languages determines which functions are assigned to French (high) and which to Kreol (low), the social status of the speaker also plays a role within domains and certain situations, with lower status speakers being addressed in Kreol and higher status speakers in French (Nallatamby 1995).

Adler, Lord & McKelvie (2003) found that French-Kreol diglossia has persisted in Australia but our survey instrument allowed for no exploration of whether the relative status of speakers is a factor in choice of language in an interaction. However, English now occupies the positions of both French and Kreol in Australia in domains such as the workplace, and as functionally diglossic domains shrink, status may have increased as a factor in language choice. One question which has been put to
participants in the current study is how Mauritians know or decide which language to use when initiating a conversation, while their perceptions of the relative status of French, Kreol and English have also been explored.

2.6.2.2 Ideological dimensions of French-Kreol diglossia

In addition to its social and economic status dimension, French-Kreol diglossia also has an ideological dimension. The diglossia does not have its roots in geographic adjacency of varieties, nor in the imposition of one variety over others during the establishment of the nation-state, nor in the narrowly functional diglossia that can arise between ritual/literary languages and vernacular/non-written languages. Kreol came into existence as a contact language between French colonists and their imported slaves, and between the slaves themselves. Embedded in the diglossic usage are two core beliefs arising out of that history:

- that Kreol is just ‘bad French’ and is not really a proper language;
- that Creole culture lacks legitimacy because, as descendants primarily of a displaced slave population, the Creoles, unlike other Mauritians, have no links to an ancestral homeland outside Mauritius, while other Mauritians can derive cultural legitimacy and superiority by reference to the (superior) cultures of France, India and China (Simmons 1982; Selvon 1991). (It should be noted that France and India have actively supported Franco- and Indo-Mauritian populations culturally and linguistically.)

Similar ideological frameworks have been documented for other Creole languages (see for example March 1996 on French-Créole diglossia on Martinique), and this study explores the impact on language maintenance of those beliefs.

In a study looking at the role played by language ideology in the teaching of Spanish at American universities, Pomerantz (2002) observes that Spanish now functions in the USA both as a marker of ethnic identity for Latinos and as a form of social and economic capital for the professional middle classes. ‘Speaking Spanish’ thus simultaneously confers low status on the Latino speaker because speaking Spanish is seen as an impediment to their social mobility, but adds to the status of the non-native speaker who has learned it ‘as a foreign language’, because it expands their resource base for professional advancement. A similar ideology arguably functions in relation to French (like Spanish, a global and pluricentric language) both in Australia and in Mauritius itself, where people who do not have French as their home language acquire it as a second language within a foreign language teaching model. Belief in the economic and global usefulness of French may function to support its maintenance in
Australia even though in the Australian context it may no longer automatically occupy a high socio-economic status relative to Kreol.

2.6.3 Research on other diglossic Australian communities

The Australian context offers many examples of groups who share a regional or national origin but who do not belong to the same ethnic group or who, like the Mauritians, do not always have the same first language (see, for example, Clyne’s discussion (1999, 2003) of the many different cultural and ethnic profiles found within the German-speaking community). There are a number of studies which focus on the different language behaviour of dialect and standard variety speakers from the same national homeland, but they have only limited relevance to this study (for example, Bettoni & Rubino 1998, on the persistence of diglossia in Ventian and Sicilian immigrant communities; and Pauwels 1986 and 1988, on different approaches to maintenance of standard and regional varieties of Dutch within Australia).

2.7 Other language studies on the Mauritian community

Only two studies on language in the Mauritian community in Australia have been identified: Patron (2002) and Adler et al. (2003), both of which examine questions of language use and maintenance.

Patron’s (2002) dissertation on language use in the Mauritian community focuses on the impact on intergenerational French language maintenance of factors such as migration vintage, exogamy, educational support for the community language, pre-migration experience with language maintenance, and negative/positive acculturation experiences in Australia. However, the study was limited to 41 Franco-Mauritian subjects (‘educated Mauritians with French ancestry’) and although all of her participants were bilingual in French and Kreol, Patron considered that ‘a new set of determinants would be necessary in order to compare the loss of Kreol with the loss of French as a result of issues involving social classes and all that this encompasses’ (Patron 2002, p. 44).

To the extent that Patron’s study considered ethnic identity, it looked at whether cultural difference had led to culture shock and whether the subjects’ response was to assimilate (that is, to abandon their own cultural values and traditions for a wholesale adoption of the values and way of life of the host culture) or to integrate (adapting to the way of life of the host culture, while maintaining all or part of their original
cultural values and traditions). Patron found that the former led to increased language shift while the latter led to increased language maintenance. Participants expressed strong support for the maintenance of French language and culture but within the context of more general support for maintenance of Australia’s linguistic and cultural diversity. The persistence of a specifically Mauritian (rather than French) ethnic identification following language shift was not explored, although the study also noted the importance to Franco-Mauritians of non-European, Creole elements within Mauritian culture (such as traditional dance and Mauritian cuisine).

During Patron’s case study interviews undertaken as part of the research, questions to subjects included reasons for emigration, a central element in my study, but these are not reported on in the findings. A finding of relevance to my study was that the choice between assimilation or integration was linked to migrants’ date of arrival: it became easier, particularly for migrants of non-European heritage, to assert or maintain ethnic identity after the abolition of the White Australia policy at the end of the 1960s (discussed further in section 3.5.1).

The second study, one in which I participated (Adler et al. 2003), also looked at language use and maintenance, including diglossic use, of French and Kreol by 48 subjects. Factors examined were gender, year of arrival, age on arrival, ancestry and attitudes towards identity and language maintenance. Its finding that French-speakers and Kreol-speakers expressed different levels of support for maintaining a Mauritian identity as well as reporting different levels of home language maintenance was the starting point for the present study. Another finding of relevance was that multilingualism is a valued attribute, although it is enacted within community networks much more than in the home, where behaviour tends to be monolingual. Use of Kreol was found to be most evident when Mauritians socialised with each other at community events.

2.8. Conclusion

The literature confirms that while sociohistorical circumstances and pre-migration attitudes and values have been accepted as having an impact on language maintenance and language shift in immigrant communities, there has been little work done on exploring how this impact comes about in specific communities and whether it is as or more important to outcomes than the demographic and post-migration social variables more usually investigated.
The literature also shows that Mauritians do accord French and Kreol different statuses as languages and that these are historically determined. Perceptions of the relative status of French and Kreol both globally and within the Mauritian community are probably important to language maintenance and may be a factor also in identity expression. Overall, the literature supports the intention of this study to investigate pre-migration experience and reasons for migration as relevant to current language practice and identity.
CHAPTER 3

Who are the Mauritians?
The ethnolinguistic background

3.1 Overview: an ethnically constructed society

According to anthropologist Thomas Eriksen (1998, p. 15) ethnicity and ethnic membership are inescapable facts on Mauritius. He describes the ethnic basis of Mauritian identity as ‘a cognitive map’ and ‘an ontology shared by the overwhelming majority of Mauritians’, in which ‘the very construction of the social person [on Mauritius] is based on ethnicity’ (Eriksen 1998, p. 15). Simmons (1982, p. 15) conveys it in more concrete and personal terms: ‘In a small society where anonymity does not exist, status is ascribed rather than achieved. Some Mauritians try to change communities by changing names but no one can escape his or her family tree.’ And Rao and Sharma (1989, p. 2) harness the metaphor of ‘a melting pot that refuses to melt but remains a salad bowl’.

Although the Australian Mauritian immigrant community does not mirror Mauritius in its ethnic make-up, being drawn more from one section of Mauritian society than others (sees sections 3.2.3, 3.5.1 and 3.5.3), consciousness of ancestry or background and what they can mean remains a feature of the community ethos; some people remember that it was interethnic competition and intercommunal conflict which drove their emigration in the first place, while many wish to contest the identities they were originally assigned in Mauritius and do away with the communal divisions they grew up with.

An investigation of the impact of Mauritians’ pre-migration experiences and beliefs on their subsequent language maintenance in Australia and on the extent to which they use language as an identity marker therefore needs to take into account the Mauritian context and to look at the range of ethnolinguistic identities encompassed by the term ‘Mauritian’. This chapter will briefly outline how Mauritius was colonised, and how its ethnically and linguistically complex population came into being, and then look in more detail at the interplay of languages and ethnicity in modern Mauritius. The chapter will conclude with a profile of the immigrant Mauritian population in Melbourne, will outline trends in Australian Mauritians’ use and maintenance of
French and Kreol, and will briefly discuss the community’s current approach to traditional identities.

3.2 The people of Mauritius

3.2.1 Populating a desert island

The nation of Mauritius consists of an island (also Mauritius) in the western Indian Ocean approximately 800 km east of Madagascar, and a number of smaller islands and atolls. Once uninhabited, the main island is now home to over 1.14 million people, 97% of the national population of approximately 1.18 million. The rest of the population (just under 36,000 in 2000) live on Rodrigues, a much smaller island 560 km to the north-east.5

Mauritius was successively colonised by three European nations: the Dutch (1638–1658 and 1664–1710), the French (1715–1814) and the English (1814–1968). Dutch attempts to permanently settle Mauritius failed, and the French colony was initially precarious, but by the mid-1730s it had begun to prosper around the growing of sugar. After Mauritius was formally ceded to Great Britain in 1814 under the Treaty of Paris, Mauritian plantation society continued to function as culturally and linguistically French: to avoid French colonists’ resistance to their rule, the British ‘pledged to respect the cultural and legal set-up on Mauritius, thus enabling the inhabitants to retain their property, laws and customs and to practise their religion (Catholic) freely’ (Selvon, 1991, p. 20).

Between 1670 and 1810 the Dutch and the French brought an estimated 160,000 slaves to Mauritius as plantation labour from Madagascar (45%), Mozambique and East Africa (40%), India (13%) and West Africa (2%).6 By the time slavery ended in the early 19th century, slaves accounted for over three-quarters of a population of just over 101,000 (Selvon 1991, p. 156; Allen 1999, p. 13). Also included in the population were people designated as gens de couleur or ‘free coloured’. This term was applied to a wide range of people, chiefly former slaves who had purchased or been given freedom, but also sailors, merchants and traders from other French colonies, and from around the Indian Ocean and China, as well as Asian and Malagasy women brought in as brides for both European and non-European settlers. It also applied, of course, to their

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5 From the Mauritian Census of Population and Housing 2000: national population – 1,178,848; island of Mauritius – 1,143,069, island of Rodrigues – 35,779.
children, many of whom were of mixed ancestry and were among the first Creoles or native-born Mauritians. This ‘free coloured’ group grew from 3.1% of the total population in 1767 to 7.6% in 1807, while the ‘white’ population fell from 16.8% to 8.3% of the total, with the two groups almost equal in number by 1807.

The demand for plantation labour increased as the abolition of slavery approached, and in 1834 the colonists began to recruit indentured labour from India. Over the next 70 years almost half a million Indians arrived, and over 290,000 were to settle permanently. By 1846 Indian immigrants made up 35.5% of the population, and by 1901 people of Indian descent accounted for over half (53.6%) the population (Allen 1999). The 18th and particularly the 19th centuries also saw the arrival of merchants from China and from Muslim areas within India, and these smaller groups settled and constituted distinctive strands in the colonial population.

On Rodrigues, over 500 km away and more isolated, the pace of colonisation and development was slower. Most of its settlers arrived from the 1840s on, many of them former slaves seeking a new life. Rodrigues was not subject to large-scale sugar production and did not experience the dramatic changes to population mix and numbers that Mauritius underwent in the mid-19th century; Rodrigues remained a place of small-scale farming and fishing, less prosperous than Mauritius and with a largely Creole population (North-Coombes 1971).

3.2.2 The modern population

By the mid-20th century, the Mauritian population had become very diverse, with a great many of its citizens having, if not always acknowledging, mixed European, Indian, African and Asian ancestry. Nevertheless, strong separate communal identities based on ethnicity had developed out of the nation’s colonial history, and these became more entrenched as the country began discussing and moving towards a universal adult franchise (granted in 1958) and eventual independence from Britain (achieved in 1968).

In the move towards full democracy, there was a perceived need to balance competing communal/ethnic interests and to guarantee ongoing parliamentary representation of minorities. A new Constitution in 1948 recognised but also permanently enshrined four separate communal identities within the national body politic:

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7 In the era of slavery, the term ‘Creole’ was applied to anyone born on the island, in or out of slavery, but it evolved to describe the slaves’ descendants and today refers to people of primarily African or Malagasy descent or combined African and European descent.
...the population of Mauritius shall be regarded as including a Hindu community, a Muslim community and a Sino-Mauritian community; and every person who does not appear, from his way of life, to belong to one of these three communities shall be regarded as belonging to the General Population, which shall itself be regarded as a fourth community.  

As well as declaring which political party they represented, candidates for election had to state which of these four communities they belonged to.

Of the four communities recognised under the Constitution, the General Population is defined as a group by default: it includes everyone who doesn’t consider themselves Hindu, Muslim or Chinese. In fact, its unifying feature is that its members are generally those Mauritians who are both Christian (primarily Western Catholic) and European in outlook and values, namely the Franco-Mauritians and the Creole community, and anyone else of mixed race descent. There are many people of partly Indian or Chinese background in the General Population, but they no longer identify culturally with those groups and/or no longer practise their ancestral religions.

By 1972, the relative sizes of these communities in a total population of 851,000 (Republic of Mauritius 2000) was:

- Hindu – 50.34%
- Muslim – 16.12%
- Sino-Mauritian – 2.86%
- General Population – 30.68% (made up of approximately 2% Franco-Mauritian, and 28% Creole).

3.2.3 Key identities within the General Population

The General Population became the main source, particularly for Australia, of the large-scale emigration that occurred around Mauritian Independence. The main identities within the General Population are discussed below.

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8 First Schedule (s. 3, ss. 4) to Section 31(2) of the Constitution.
9 It is worth noting that the 1948 Constitution defined the various Mauritian communities on the basis of culture (‘way of life’) rather than ethnicity or ancestry as such, and that while the schema of the 1948 Constitution roots culture or ‘way of life’ in religion and/or geography, it also acknowledges the historical reality of movement by individuals across these boundaries, and allows for the possibility of elective group membership.
10 In fact, people of Indian ancestry were only counted separately as Hindu or Muslim from the 1962 census on; while people of Chinese background, in spite of being separately recognised under the Constitution, are no longer counted separately in the census, but are included in the General Population count.
11 1972 was the last time the Mauritian census counted communal membership.
3.2.3.1 Creoles

In French and British plantation colonies, the term ‘Creole’ was originally applied to children born in the colony to either European colonists or slaves, and distinguished this new naturalised population from the indigenous population. In most places, the meaning narrowed to mean only the naturalised European (white) community, but in Mauritius, where there was no indigenous population, it narrowed to mean only the naturalised mixed-race community. On Mauritius, as in many other colonies, ‘Creole’ was also the name given to the language which developed in the colony.

The Creoles of Mauritius, being descended from European colonists, from slaves brought from both India and Africa, and from the ‘free coloured’ population of the 1700s and 1800s, are necessarily people of quite diverse ancestry, whose attitude to that diversity is often ambivalent. However, the salient element in this group’s identity, particularly from the point of view of other groups, is their African/Malagasy ancestry, although French heritage is also important, particularly for middle-class Creoles. While the Creole community is well represented in the middle and professional classes, Creoles are also among the poorest and most disadvantaged members of Mauritian society (Miles 1999).

Creole identity has arguably been shaped in a negative way by the long-prevalent idea that unlike other Mauritians, Creole people have no ties (cultural or linguistic) to an ancestral ‘homeland’, and therefore no worthwhile cultural heritage and traditions to draw on (Simmons 1982, p. 5). The counter claim is that as the descendants of the very first groups to settle Mauritius, the Creoles are ‘les vrais Mauriciens’ – the ‘true Mauritians’, a self-concept boosted by the association of Creole people with cultural products and practices unique to the island: the Kreol language, the séga, a style of music and dance, and Creole food (which is nonetheless heavily influenced by Indian and Chinese dishes).

3.2.3.2 ‘Coloureds’

Some of the Australian Mauritians interviewed for this study have described themselves or their families as ‘gens de couleur’ (people of colour) as distinct from Creole, and the studies by Eriksen (1998) and Lau Thi Keng (1991) suggest the term ‘Coloured’ is still used as an identity marker in modern Mauritius. It is easier, however, to describe the subjective content of that identity than to draw any objective, historical boundaries around it.

The fact that some Mauritians identify or are identified as ‘coloured’ rather than Creole relates to the socio-economic spectrum covered by the Creole community today but is
also rooted in the island’s history. In the 18th and 19th century colonial slave-owning societies of France, Britain and America, the term ‘free coloured’ or ‘de couleur libre’ had a legal meaning arising from and specific to the institutions of slavery. To be a ‘free person of colour’ meant having more rights than slaves but generally fewer than the European colonists. Some coloureds were themselves slave owners, and many took active leadership roles and became influential in their communities (Allen 1999; Vaughan 2005). However, in 1829 the British removed all legal discrimination against this group and in 1830 the category disappears from official records. Although ‘free coloured’ no longer connoted a specific legal status, people who had been ‘de couleur libre’ arguably had an interest in maintaining their relative economic advantage and social prestige, and their continued self-designation as ‘coloured’ as distinct from ‘Creole’ may have been due to this, particularly as ‘Creole’ began to narrow from its original meaning of ‘island-born’ to one associated with slave-descent. Thus, while the self-identification of ‘coloured’ may be rooted in a specific family history, it appears to serve primarily to assert membership of a particular stratum of Mauritian society, one which has benefited from a higher socio-economic status and greater access to education than that of Creoles in general, and which identifies with French culture. Some people interviewed for this study have distanced themselves from the label Creole by describing ‘les Créoles’ as ‘lower-class people’ (i.e. not themselves), whereas others have used both terms to describe themselves, depending on the context.

3.2.3.3 Franco-Mauritians

The Franco-Mauritians are descended from the original French settlers and plantation owners and have had an economic and political influence disproportionate to their numbers. Today they are still represented among the wealthiest sugar industry proprietors but are also spread across the professions, industry and small business in management and clerical roles. They are not directly visible in the Mauritian census, but respondents to the census in 2000 who reported they spoke French at home and who also claimed French as their ancestral language represented about 1.5% of the population.

For example, gens de couleur had previously not been allowed to marry whites or be buried in the same cemeteries, and had been excluded from the Royal College of Mauritius, a prestigious secondary school established in 1809.
3.3 Decolonisation and mass emigration

Understanding which Mauritians came to Australia, why and when is important to understanding the Mauritian-born community in Australia today. As Mauritius approached nationhood in the postwar period, it faced a range of problems. The principal ones were that the population was rapidly outgrowing its resource base and the economy was too dependent on a single export, sugar (Mead, 1968). In the 1950s an emigration program had been mooted but not formally adopted as a policy solution.

The full democratisation of Mauritian society in 1958 transferred political control from a land-owning minority to a democratically elected majority which, given the population profile, was largely Hindu. The desirability of the next step, Independence, became a hotly contested issue, with Franco-Mauritians and Creoles being encouraged by their political leaders to fear that they would be persecuted or discriminated against as minorities in the new nation once British protection of their interests was withdrawn. Political parties increasingly called on communal allegiances, campaigning around communal rather than class-based interests and exacerbating competition and mistrust between the Hindu, Muslim, Creole and white communities (Duyker 1988; Selvon 1991).

A constitutional conference in London in 1965 formalised the move towards independence from Britain and, together with intercommunal violence and riots in 1965 and 1967, acted as a catalyst for large-scale unplanned emigration. Departure rates grew rapidly, initially peaking in 1968, the year Independence was achieved (see Figure 3.1 below).

Altogether, more than 66,400 people (at least 8% of the total population) emigrated over the 1960s and 1970s. While the emigrants included people from across Mauritian society, they primarily came from the General Population, representing between 23% and 27% of that group. The minority Franco-Mauritians and middle-class Creoles in particular feared losing economic opportunities and status under governments elected by the relatively recently enfranchised Hindu majority. Their principal destinations were South Africa, Canada, Britain, France and Australia. The Mauritian departure statistics and the statistics from the reception countries do not group those who migrated by their ethnicity but a perception in Mauritius seems to have been that

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13 The figure of 66,400 was compiled from Mauritian sources by Dinan (1985) and includes both official and unofficial emigration to all destinations over the period 1961-1982. The Mauritian Community Information Summary on the website of the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship gives an emigration figure of only 14,000 for the years 1966-1972, the period immediately associated with Independence, but this may reflect only emigrants to Australia.
particular communities favoured, or were more likely to be accepted into, particular destinations:

Angleterre a accueilli les Mauriciens de toutes origines…[ceux de] la communauté blanche ont été vers l’Afrique du Sud et la Rhodésie, la population de couleur s’est tournée vers l’Australie…la masse ouvrière a choisi la France à cause de la facilité que leur offrait la langue et le coût moins élevé du billet, les Sino-mauriciens se retrouvent au plus particulièrement au Canada (Dinan 1985, p. 24)

England accepted Mauritians of all backgrounds…the white community headed for South Africa and Rhodesia, the coloured population turned towards Australia…the mass of workers\textsuperscript{14} chose France because they found the language easier and the ticket was cheaper, the Chinese Mauritians regrouped in Canada especially [trans]

Emigration slowed straight after Independence but then picked up again and many Mauritians continued to emigrate through the early 1970s in response to industrial unrest, economic decline and rising unemployment. By the early 1980s the official emigration rate had subsided, but unofficial emigration (people leaving on tourist visas or visiting family members overseas and then not returning) continued to grow. Most unofficial emigrants went to France and the UK; emigration to Australia over these decades mirrors the official emigration rate (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2).

\textsuperscript{14} The distinction drawn here between ‘coloured’ people and the ‘mass of workers’ indicates class stratification within the Creole community, reinforced by the comment about language. Working class Creoles with a lower educational attainment, Kreol as their first language and little exposure to English, would find a French-speaking environment easier to adjust to than an English-speaking one.
Emigration from Mauritius 1961–1982

Source: Dinan, M. 1985, p.16. The total emigrants figure includes official and unofficial emigrants, calculated as the number by which all departures outnumbered all arrivals/returns.

Figure 3.1 Emigration from Mauritius 1961–1982

Emigration from Mauritius to key destinations 1961–1982

Source: Dinan, M. 1985, pp. 16, 117, 139, 178. The uneven year intervals were dictated by the data available for different countries.

Figure 3.2 Key emigrant destinations 1961–1982
By the mid- to late 1980s, however, the Mauritian economy had been successful diversified and unemployment dramatically reduced. The Australian figures show that by the 1990s emigration, to Australia at least, had slowed to a trickle, and only picked up again after 2000 (DIAC 2007b).

3.4 The languages of Mauritius

3.4.1 Who speaks what

The most recent Mauritian census (2000) reported nine different languages spoken in the home. Kreol (70.08%), Bhojpuri (12.08%) and French (3.39%) accounted for most of the population. English, the ‘Chinese languages’ taken as a single entity, and the individual Indian languages (Hindi, Tamil, Telegu, Marathi, Urdu in descending order) are each spoken at home by fewer than 1% of the population of nearly 1.2 million.

English and French each enjoy ‘official language’ status but they are each the first language of only very small minorities. According to Robillard (1993), French is the second language of a majority, estimated at 55–60% in 1990, and English is the third language for around half the population. As the first language of a large majority, Kreol is spoken or understood by everyone else as their second or third language. French and Kreol function as the island’s two vernaculars, their use spanning ethnic divisions and linking communities. English and French are the languages of literacy, although Kreol is increasingly appearing in the print media.

A cross-tabulation in the 2000 Mauritian census data of ‘at home’ language use with ancestral language shows that only 51% of the 70% majority of Kreol L1-speakers identify Kreol as their ancestral language. People of Bhojpuri-speaking background account for almost half of the remaining 49%, and people of other Indian background make up over one quarter. Similarly, only 45% of French L1-speakers identify French as their ancestral language, and people of Kreol-speaking background now make up 26% of the 3.4% minority of French L1-speakers. The trend for the Indian and Chinese languages is the reverse – fewer and fewer people speak them at home than claim them as ancestral languages.

The census figures clearly show that the language situation has evolved over the past fifty years, the period of Mauritian migration to Australia. In the early 1960s when migration to Australia began, 90% of the population was evenly divided between
people who spoke an Indian language as their first language and people who spoke
Kreol as their first language, with the rest being French L1-speakers, and over half the
population being French L2-speakers. By the turn of the century, however, Kreol was
becoming the L1 of a national majority.

It is outside the scope of this study to investigate whether changes to language values
and attitudes have accompanied changing language usage on Mauritius. However, it is
possible that the language values and attitudes of Australian Mauritians – which are
the subject of this study – reflect a reality that no longer pertains on the island itself.

3.4.2 Language interaction and hierarchy

The notion that ‘when the Mauritians have a community meeting, the people speak
Creole, take minutes in English and discuss the outcome with government officials in
French’ encapsulates the three-part language structure that virtually all Mauritians
have access to in the public life of the community, whether or not any one of these
languages is their mother tongue.

English has been the official language of government, the law and administration since
the transfer of the colony to the British. There have been unsuccessful attempts to
dislodge it from this position. That it persists is only partly because it is a language of
high international prestige and knowledge of it confers status and widens access to
cultural and economic opportunities; it is also because English is seen communally as a
politically neutral language, which no single ethnic bloc can claim as its own.

In theory, schooling on Mauritius is in English, but in practice this is more true of
secondary than of primary schooling. In lower primary school, in particular, language
practice in the classroom is strongly influenced by practical considerations, and code-
switching and code-mixing are the norm, especially in rural areas where Kreol and
Bhojpuri dominate as first languages, not just of the children but of many teachers as
well (Tirvassen 1999).

French is the language of culture, of public discourse, of the media, of commercial life
and the professions. It is a language of international prestige, and as the first language
of the Franco-Mauritian plantation owners who once controlled the island economy, it
represents upward social mobility for many Kreol- and Bhojpuri-speakers. Proximity
to the neighbouring island of La Réunion, a French département d’outre-mer, and
Mauritius’ membership of the global network of French-speaking nations, la
Francophonie, ensures that French-speakers are well supported by electronic and print
media and that French remains the dominant public language.
Kreol developed as a contact language between slaves, and between slaves and French settlers. It has a French lexical base, and may have been structurally influenced by the slaves’ African languages. It has also been influenced by other community languages, notably Bhojpuri and Hindi (Selvon 1991, p. 41) Although it is now written as well as spoken, the continued presence of French reinforces the twin perceptions that Kreol can only ever be an oral language and that it is not really a language as such but only ‘bad French’. This view is often perpetuated by non-linguists among the historical commentators: ‘Half of Mauritius’s population, including the Creole community, uses Creole, a patois based on French. In addition, the lingua franca among communities is Creole, but few people take pride in it’ (Simmons, 1982, p. 11).

Possibly impeded in its further development by the continued presence of French, Kreol is also stigmatised because of its origins: it is a product of the history of slavery and it continues to be associated with the relative economic and social disadvantage of the poorer strata of the Creole community. However, the growth of Kreol as a first language as shown by the 2000 Mauritian census reflects its usefulness as a language spanning a range of communities with unequal access to both English and French.

3.5 The Mauritians in Australia

3.5.1 Mauritian migration to Australia

Significant migration to Australia from Mauritius only began after the end of WWII. The number of Mauritian-born Australians has grown steadily since then (see Figure 3.3), with a temporary drop at the 2001 census reflecting reduced settler arrivals in 1996–2000 (DIAC, 2007b). By 2006 the Mauritius-born population of Australia had increased to 18,125, with a total of 21,817 Australian residents claiming Mauritian ancestry15 (ABS 1996, 2006). Over 90% of immigrants from Mauritius have taken out Australian citizenship, a much higher rate than the national average of 75.1% (DIAC, 2007a).

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15 For the 2006 Census, respondents were asked to mark at least one, but no more than two ancestries they most closely identified with and to consider their ancestry back as far as two generations (i.e. their parents and grandparents). On this basis you could expect reported Mauritian ancestry to be higher.
A number of factors have shaped Mauritian immigration to Australia, and the composition of the community itself. Firstly, as discussed earlier, the lower middle- and middle-class Creole and Franco-Mauritian communities were apprehensive about their future security and prospects in a newly independent and Hindu-dominated Mauritius, and this led to a wave of emigration from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, first peaking in 1968 with some panic-driven departures almost on the eve of Independence. Older community members still refer to this as *l’exode* (the exodus) and the term not only suggests the departure of many people, but also has connotations of group solidarity and escape from persecution.

Over the same period, the winding back of the White Australia Policy was making it easier for people of non-European background to enter Australia. (Previously under this policy, only ‘whites’ and those who could show 75% European ancestry were accepted as immigrants (Neumann, 2006)). The expatriate Mauritian community in Australia began to expand beyond its original Franco-Mauritian boundaries to include people of more diverse background drawn from the ‘General Population’ of Mauritius and Rodrigues. This in itself presented the community with a challenge and Duyker (1988, p. 108) describes how key Mauritian community members acted decisively in the


Figure 3.3 Mauritius-born population, Australia 1901–2006
early 1970s to ensure that membership of Mauritian clubs in Australia would be open to all regardless of skin colour, in contrast to the colour-based social norms of Mauritian society (see Eriksen 1998).

Another factor which shaped the composition of the immigrant community was the fact that Mauritians, unlike some other immigrant groups, did not receive ‘assisted passage’ or interim hostel accommodation from the Australian government, and families had to bear the full cost of fares and resettlement. Many families who came borrowed money to do so, or sold up everything they had and spent the proceeds on their tickets. Migrating Mauritian families were initially heavily dependent on relatives and friends for accommodation, resettlement support, and help with finding work. This contributed to the community developing into a tightly knit one, with strong extended family networks and people settling close to each other, in relatively high concentrations within particular suburbs. The need for new immigrants to rely on family networks in Australia also worked to consolidate the Franco-Mauritian/Creole profile of the community even after the removal of the White Australia policy meant that Mauritians of entirely Asian background could also migrate to Australia.

In fact, according to Neumann (2006, p. 14) the final abolition of the White Australia policy in 1972 ‘had little direct impact on the numbers of Mauritians migrating to Australia’. By the mid-1970s the political situation in Mauritius had begun to stabilise and the economy had begun to grow and diversify, moving away from its reliance on sugar exports, while Australia’s economic outlook at this time was declining, with unemployment rising and overall migrant numbers reduced.

Immigration to Australia picked up again in the 1980s, much of it facilitated this time by family reunion policies, which also worked to reinforce the existing ethnic profile of the Mauritian immigrant community. However, by 1988 the unemployment rate in Mauritius, which had been as high as 20%, had fallen to virtually zero, and by the mid-1990s, further changes to Australian immigration policies and criteria – emphasising migrants’ skills and qualifications, their investor capacity, and family reunion – had narrowed the range of migrants who would be accepted. This, combined with the cost of air travel and the need for migrants to self-fund, made migration to Australia an increasingly unlikely option for many Mauritians at that time. The first decade of this century has seen an new increase in Mauritian settlers – the published migration statistics do not correlate country of birth with Australian visa category, so it is hard to know whether these new immigrants fall into the Skilled Migration or the Family Reunion category, or both. It is worth noting that current high unemployment in Mauritius has coincided with skills shortages in Australia in specific areas.
3.5.2 Where Mauritians have settled

Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia have the largest Mauritian communities (see Table 3.1). Around half of Australia’s Mauritius-born population lives in Victoria, 98% of them in the capital city, Melbourne. Victoria has attracted around 50% annually of new Mauritian immigrants over the past decade and the Mauritian community in Victoria grew by almost 10% between the 2001 and 2006 censuses (DIAC, 2007b).

Table 3.1 Australia’s Mauritius-born population by state

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census</th>
<th>Vic.</th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>Qld</th>
<th>Other States</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>8228</td>
<td>5597</td>
<td>2067</td>
<td>888</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>17,076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>8290</td>
<td>5300</td>
<td>2110</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>16,910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>9047</td>
<td>5214</td>
<td>2393</td>
<td>1176</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>18,175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au) > Census > Census data online > Census tables

The Melbourne Mauritius-born community (from which the subjects for this research were drawn) is highly localised, with 70% of its members living in the south-eastern suburbs centred on the commercial centre of Dandenong (ABS, 2006). There are smaller communities in the northern and north-eastern suburbs (11%) and in the western suburbs (7%).

3.5.3 Religion and ancestry

A majority of Mauritian immigrants to Australia (81%) gave Western Catholicism as their religion in the Australian 2001 census, indirectly confirming that have come from Mauritius’ minority General Population rather than from the (Hindu or Muslim) Indian-descended majority (see sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3). Anglicanism (2.5%) and Hinduism (2.3%) were the other main religions reported. Compared with the Australian national total of 15.5%, only 2.4% of the Mauritius-born population stated they had no religion.

The top three ancestries reported by Mauritians in the 2001 census were Mauritian (51.9%), French (18.7%) and Chinese (4.8%). As an ancestry rather than a nationality, ‘Mauritian’ most probably indicates the person would have identified in Mauritius as a
member of the ‘General Population’ (making them most likely of French, Creole, or other mixed ancestry) but it could indicate that their actual ancestry is not known to them, or that they are choosing to move beyond the ethnic/communal identities which have been traditionally applied to people in Mauritius.

Those Australian Mauritians who claimed French ancestry in the Australian census make up a much higher percentage of the expatriate community than Franco-Mauritians are of the island population (est. at 1.5% in 1991, Selvon 1991) underlining that Franco-Mauritians were disproportionately highly represented in the ‘exodus’. However, people claiming French descent will also include many from the Creole community.

3.5.4 Mauritian identities within Australia

Beyond the inferences which can be drawn from the census counts on ‘religion’ and ‘ancestry’, Australian statistics offer no clear-cut information on the extent to which the communal divisions which operate in Mauritius have continued to exist in Australia. However, the community has chosen to be as inclusive as possible and to avoid recreating in its social and service clubs the class and colour-based stratification of whites–coloured–Creoles which had operated previously even within the General Population in Mauritius (Duyker 1988).

In Victoria, the community’s various service and social clubs are ‘Mauritian’ and seem open to all comers, rather than constituted on ethnic/communal lines. The Cultural and Historical Association of Rodrigues and Mauritius (CHARM), which organises La Faya, an annual cultural festival for Melbourne’s Mauritians and Rodriguans, emphasises and promotes the inclusive nature of the festival, avoiding describing it as a specifically Creole festival and stressing that it is open to all Mauritians. CHARM’s objectives (see section 3.5.6) presuppose the existence, or the coming-into-existence, of a unified Mauritian identity in Australia, and also point to a desire to unite the Mauritian community around cultural transmission goals.

In summary, it appears that neither the ethnic mix nor the communal divisions found in Mauritius have been replicated in Australia in the wake of Mauritian immigration, and that attempts are being made to create and express in the Australian context a unified Mauritian identity, based on shared culture, history and traditions rather than on ancestry. How important that sense of Mauritian identity is to maintenance of community languages is one of the questions investigated by this research.
Eriksen (1998) contends that given their strong communal identifications and allegiances, Maurtians have generally avoided interethnic violence by adopting a tacit policy of ‘avoidance’ (e.g. of discussion of religion and politics, ‘tabou’ topics) on the one hand, and by actively seeking shared horizons and interests, a ‘lowest common denominator’ approach on the other. This particular orientation to managing cultural difference may have made Mauritians well suited to integration into a multicultural Australian society. At the same time, it is possible that migration into a larger multi-ethnic and multicultural society has given expatriate Mauritians a chance to bring a more integrated, even unified, Mauritian identity into being across their community.

3.5.5 Languages spoken

People born in Mauritius are Australia’s largest single French-speaking community (ABS 1996), slightly outnumbering both people born in France and people born in Australia to French-speaking parents.

According to the 2001 Australian census, English was spoken at home by 27.4% of Mauritius-born Australians, 57.4% spoke French and 5.2% Kreol\(^\text{16}\) (ABS 2001; pers. comm., Census Section Dept Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 23 Oct. 2003). Given the colonial and linguistic history of Mauritius outlined earlier, people in the remaining 10% may speak one or more Indian languages (e.g. Bhojpuri or Tamil) or a Chinese language; others may speak the language of a non-Mauritian NESB spouse. A high percentage (93.9%) of the 72.6% who did not use English in the home nevertheless reported that they spoke it ‘well’ or ‘very well’.

The use of English in the home by the Mauritius-born appears to be slowly increasing, and the use of both French and Kreol decreasing (French fell from 61.4% in the 1996 census to 57.4% in 2001; and Kreol from 6% in 1996 to 5.2% in 2001).\(^\text{17}\)

Clyne’s study (1991, based on 1986 census data) of community languages in use nationally shows that French-speaking communities do not have very high maintenance levels of French in the home. The national average shift to English by first-generation immigrants born in France was 27.5%, compared with 4.4% by people born in Greece, 10.5% by people born in Italy and 13.1% by those born in Spain (Clyne

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\(^{16}\) The actual census category reported was ‘Oceanian Pidgins or Creoles, not further defined’. There is a discrete census category for Mauritian Creole, and it was suggested by ABS staff that the response ‘Creole’ to the question about home language use was sometimes miscoded, making the figure for Kreol-at-home inaccurate, and possibly lower than it should have been.

\(^{17}\) At the time of completion of this research, data from the 2006 census about language use at home had not been released so these trends could not be updated.
1991, p. 63). It is a much lower rate, however, than the 40.8% and 48.4% recorded for those born in Germany and the Netherlands respectively.

Clyne’s study also noted a slightly higher reported use of French in social and other domains than at home (1991, p. 46, 53). Clyne offers figures on the Mauritian intergenerational language maintenance in which those of ‘French ancestry’ and those of ‘Mauritian ancestry’ had comparable maintenance rates in the first and second generations but in the third generation the Mauritian had much higher maintenance levels (23.4%) than those of French ancestry (2%). Clyne does not give figures for the use of Mauritian Kreol (or other languages) by the Mauritian-born community.

In a study which considered the language use of 92 people across three generations of two extended Franco-Mauritian families, Patron (2002) also found not only that very few (6%) of her second generation (i.e. Australian-born) participants used French in the home but that French was also maintained by a relatively low percentage (25%) of the intermediate generation (those who had arrived in Australia as French-speaking children aged 14 or under). In contrast with Clyne’s census-based figures, however, all of Patron’s first-generation participants reported that they maintained French in the home. Patron’s first- and second- (Australian-born) generation participants reported no difference in their level of French use inside or outside the home, but there was a difference for the intermediate generation, many more of whom used French socially (60%) than used it at home (25%). Patron’s study focuses explicitly on the use and transmission of French and she specifically selected participants who identified themselves as Franco-Mauritian and were therefore French L1-speakers. She acknowledges in passing the use of Kreol in the Mauritian community in specific domains (e.g. at sporting events) but does not investigate its use or attitudes to it.

A shift towards use of English and away from French (and Kreol) in the home was also found by Adler et al. (2003) in our questionnaire-based study of the language use in a group of first-generation Mauritans in Melbourne (48 respondents). Although the participant group was not representative enough to be generalised from, the results are of interest, as they raise the possibility that the use of Kreol in the home may be under-reported in the national censuses, and they clearly show that Mauritans value, as well as use, French and Kreol differently. They also reinforce the notion that while the ABS’ current recording of ‘language(s) used in the home’ may be a useful measure of language shift because home use relates to intergenerational transmission, it does not accurately reflect the way language(s) are used in a community, a point also made by Patron and Clyne. The Mauritans in the 2003 study not only maintained French and Kreol at higher rates in their social networks than in the home, but they favoured
monolingual behaviour in the home on the one hand and exploited multilingual proficiencies in the community on the other. Multilingualism was explicitly presented to the researchers as a cultural asset and a marker of (ethnic or national) Mauritian identity.

3.5.6 Cultural and language maintenance resources of the Melbourne community

Melbourne’s Mauritian community appears well supported socially and culturally with over 12 sporting, social and service clubs, numerous cultural dance and singing groups, and with community infrastructure projects such as the establishment of a retirement home in the south-eastern suburbs for older Mauritians. There are dedicated Mauritian radio programs on SBS radio, on 3ZZZ (‘Ethnic Community Radio’) and on 3SER, the community station servicing the south-eastern municipality of Casey where a large number of Mauritians have settled. These community institutions also support the use of French and Kreol.

Adler et al. (2003) found that the community appeared to make sustained use of French-language cultural resources in general (French books, films on video and SBS TV, French language radio and newspapers) as well as specifically Mauritian resources such as Mauritian newspapers and internet sites concerning Mauritius.

Recently attention has turned towards a more self-conscious promotion and celebration of Mauritian heritage, with an annual public festival, ‘La Faya’, held to commemorate Mauritian Independence Day (12th March), and the establishment in 2003 of the Cultural and Historical Association of Rodrigues and Mauritius (CHARM). The Association’s aims include the preservation and transmission of Mauritian culture to future generations, the consolidation of cultural and social ties across Mauritian groups, and the strengthening of Mauritian identity and place in the mainstream Australian context (CHARM press release, 2004).

3.6 Conclusion

The background research shows that Mauritian immigrants to Australia have come from a society in which identity and status are shaped by ancestral background as well as class, and where language may index both background and social status. The specific history of the Creoles as an ethnic group, and in particular of the coloured/Creole middle class from which immigrants to Australia have largely been drawn, explains their language loyalty to French. But the large gap apparent from
Australian census data between (reported) home use of French and (reported) home use of Kreol seems nonetheless surprising in view of the established and increasingly dominant position of Kreol as the first language of Mauritians in Mauritius. This study will explore why that gap exists and what it might mean.
CHAPTER 4

Methodology

4.1 Overview
This chapter outlines the methodology used in this project, including the collection of data in two stages. This allowed the research method to be reviewed and strengthened, and for validity issues to emerge and be addressed before the second round of data collection.

4.2 The research method

4.2.1 Use of structured and semi-structured interviews
The research data were collected from 2005 to 2007 through a total of 17 face-to-face interviews with 15 Mauritian-born and two Rodriguan-born Australians living in Melbourne. The interviews were biographical in orientation and explored the interviewees’ experiences and beliefs in relation to specific issues.

The interviews were collected in two stages. In the first stage, eight participants (Group 1) were interviewed about language maintenance and ethnic identity using a structured questionnaire, with a checklist of anticipated answers (Appendix 1). One purpose of these first eight interviews was to test and refine the interview questions. This testing led to the structured questionnaire being replaced with a less structured format for the subsequent interviews in the project. (The methodological and validity issues which emerged from the first eight interviews are discussed in more detail in sections 4.4.3 and 4.6 below.)

The remaining interviews in the project (Group 2) were conducted as semi-structured, in-depth interviews guided by, but not limited to, an interview schedule (Appendix 2). This second set of interviews explored with nine other participants the specific question of migration motivation and experiences as well as issues of language maintenance and ethnic identity.
4.2.2 Languages used in interviews

In order not to disadvantage or deter Kreol-speakers whose French may be limited, or who may object to using French, interviews were offered in English, although they could be conducted in French if the participant preferred it. No interviews were offered in Kreol, as I do not speak it. Of the 17 interviews conducted by January 2007, two were in French, the rest in English.

4.2.3 Use of qualitative data analysis software

All interviews were voice-recorded, archived to CD and then transcribed. NVivo qualitative data analysis software, which allows selected text to be assigned to one or more themes while keeping the source document together, was used to navigate the data and to sort participants’ statements and responses according to themes. This allowed for quick retrieval of data on specific themes during the analysis process and helped with making comparisons across participants of like and unlike responses. The software was not used, however, to automate the actual process of data analysis by, for example, generating matrices and modelling connections between the codes themselves.

4.2.4 Preparation for assembling a sample and interviewing

In late 2004 I joined CHARM18, a cultural group within the Mauritian community, so that I could make a contribution to the community by offering pro bono professional support to one of the group’s projects, a proposed exhibition at the Immigration Museum (IM) in Melbourne in late 2006. As well as being of assistance to the community, my aim was

a) to become familiar with community networks and get to know individual community members to assist with assembling a sample of interviewees;

b) to observe informally the use of English, French and Kreol by community members in the context of group activities and community events.

As a member of the IM exhibition project group over a two-year period, I was able to:

• attend formal committee meetings;

• participate in briefing the community on the IM project at a public meeting;

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• meet with other members of the project group to discuss, write and prepare exhibition material;

• socialise with committee and community members after meetings.

I also served on the CHARM information stall at the community’s second annual La Faya festival in 2006. In addition, I attended a number of meetings of a large Mauritian social club in order to set up and conduct several interviews. In this setting I was also able to observe informal social interactions and language use.

The active nature of my involvement precluded the use of formal observation schedules, but enabled me to observe how much group members used French and Kreol; when and with whom; to hear statements of beliefs, attitudes or values about Mauritian identity and history, or about the use of French and Kreol. Overall, this experience was useful in ensuring the research questions were valid, in generating valid, meaningful interview questions, and in understanding participants’ responses.

4.3 The sample

4.3.1 Sampling method and sample size

The sample was constructed incrementally using the ‘snowball’ method – that is, by harnessing Mauritian community networks and using each contact to lead to another. In the time available I was able to collect 17 interviews which met the inclusion criteria (see below) and allowed for a meaningful study given the range of variables being explored in relation to the constructs in the research questions.

4.3.2 Criteria for inclusion in the sample

To be included in the project, participants must have been born in Mauritius or Rodrigues and, because the study considers migration motivation, they must have migrated as independent adults.  

So that links could be explored between different first languages on the one hand and post-migration language use and attitudes on the other, the study clearly needed to include people from each of the following categories:

• people who have been French/Kreol bilinguals from infancy

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19 The sample included three women who had accompanied their parents as teenagers or young adults. I included them because, although they had not migrated independently, they were old enough at the time to have chosen to remain behind in Mauritius.
• French L1-speakers,
• Kreol L1-speakers from Mauritius, and
• Kreol L1-speakers from Rodrigues.\textsuperscript{20}

However, asking participants to self-nominate on this basis was not necessarily a reliable way of ensuring this. Contact with the community and the first set of interviews confirmed that initial L1 self-categorisation could be different to the language acquisition history that emerged during interview, for reasons that the study explores. Instead, I categorised participants into these groups after interview, based on their interview responses and using the criteria developed following the first set of interviews and set out below at section 4.6.1.2, and I kept building the sample until all four L1 categories were represented.

The incremental building of the sample relied on individual and community goodwill, and on convincing potential interviewees that participation would not be onerous. This meant taking up interviews whenever they were offered or agreed to, without doing any pre-interview interviews to check family history or circumstances, other than establishing that the person was Mauritian/Rodriguan and had migrated as an adult. For the purpose of investigating language transmission, I needed a majority of participants in the study to have children who had been born in Australia or had accompanied their parents to Australia at quite a young age. However, the inclusion in the sample of some people without children or whose children were grown up, or mostly grown up, before migration, also provided a way of looking at language use at the community level, and allowed me to compare the impact on identity of having (Australian) children and not having them.

\textit{4.3.3 Description of the sample}

The final sample consisted of completed interviews with six men and 11 women who, in addition to meeting the inclusion criteria discussed above, were distributed across each of three decades of arrival in Australia (1960s, 1970s and 1980s). All 17 participants were trilingual in French, Kreol and English, but were assigned to language profiles using the criteria set out in 4.6.1.2 as follows: five were categorised as French L1, five as Kreol L1 (three born on Mauritius, two on Rodrigues) and seven as bilingual. In terms of ethnicity, all were from the Mauritian General Population (described in sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3), with three specifying they were of European or

\textsuperscript{20} For historical reasons outlined in Ch 3, people who grew up on the island of Rodrigues rather than on the main island, Mauritius, are more likely to speak Kreol as their first language.
French background, and a number of others describing themselves as Creole. All 17 participants had completed secondary school, and ten had also done tertiary or further study. Characteristics of the sample in terms of gender, age, birthplace, migration vintage, parenthood and their assigned language profiles are mapped in Table 4.1. All but three participants had migrated as independent adults – two had accompanied their parents while in their final year of school, while another had migrated with her parents and siblings as a young, single adult. Five had lived and worked or studied outside Mauritius before coming to Australia, either for further education/training in the UK or in France, or to accompany a working/studying spouse in the UK. A sixth had migrated to France with his wife and lived there for 16 years before they decided to migrate to Australia. At least five had migrated to Australia in the context of a broader family migration, coming here either to join adult children or siblings and extended family.
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2007

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