

Introduction

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Australia is a geographically isolated and largely English-speaking continent surrounded primarily by non-English-speaking neighbours (apart from New Zealand). The story of its languages presents an intriguing case study for sociolinguists. While most Australians today are English monolinguals, the English language is a recent arrival. The majority of the country's original inhabitants were largely multilingual and many still are. The chapters in this book give a comprehensive overview and summary of what is known about the sociolinguistic situation of Australia's major language varieties.

In my introduction I aim to provide a sociohistorical background to the evolution of the major varieties of language now found on the Australian continent. One of the most interesting developments I attempt to trace is how a new ideology of pluralism arose in the 1970s in response to social and political changes. This was in direct opposition to the earlier 'White Australia' policy, which projected an image of an ideal Australia which was monocultural, monolingual and monoracial. I also document how Australian attitudes towards language and linguistic diversity have deep historical precedents in the cultural ideology of western Europe and are paralleled in the major Anglophone nations, particularly Britain and the United States. Oppressive policies towards linguistic minorities were practised by the British for a long time 'at home' and transplanted to new colonies elsewhere. Australia has, however, recently taken steps to ensure language maintenance and to foster the development of language skills. I offer a comparative perspective on language in the United States, Britain and Australia, and consider the question of whether Australia constitutes a speech community. Finally, I make some remarks about future developments.

Languages in sociohistorical perspective

Upon its arrival in Australia as a transplanted language in the eighteenth century, English quickly assumed the status of dominant language. Of considerable interest in the Australian language community is the changing ecology of a situation in which different languages have come to coexist and influence each other. One major factor here is, of course, the continued spread of English worldwide and the rise of distinctively Australian English varieties. This has been significant in the decline in use of some native Aboriginal languages, and has resulted in the addition of new English-based varieties (i.e. pidgin, creole and Aboriginal English) to the communicative repertoires of many rural and urban Aboriginal communities (see Sandefur, Harris, Shnukal, and Mühlhäusler, chapter 10, this volume). For a time the Australian linguistic repertoire also included Melanesian and Polynesian languages, when some 60,000 Pacific Islanders were brought in to work on the plantations of Queensland. While they seem to have had little effect on the indigenous languages of Australia, the linguistic legacy of these people survived until recently in Queensland Kanaka English. This and other early non-European linguistic contacts in Australia resulting in new varieties of English are discussed by Mühlhäusler, chapter 9, this volume).

New contact situations have arisen through immigration and new language communities, such as Greek and Italian, have been established. As in both the United States and Britain, there are both 'new' and 'old' immigrant communities. Australia's Dutch connection, for instance, goes back to 1606, when William Jansz and his crew explored the waters around Cape York Peninsula. In the seventeenth century Australia was known as New Holland. This was more than 100 years before James Cook's *Endeavour* dropped anchor in Botany Bay. While Dutch exploration continued into the late eighteenth century, the Dutch never established a permanent settlement. The first Dutch to settle there were convicts transported from England (see Duyker 1987). Most Dutch immigration has been a postwar phenomenon of the 1950s and 1960s and today for various reasons, language maintenance is the weakest among this group (see Pauwels, chapter 15, and Clyne, chapter 16, this volume).

Immigration has been a consistent theme in Australian history since 1788. Historians generally recognise three major immigrant waves of 1825–60, the 1880s and 1910–30 (see, e.g. Jupp 1966). Convict settlement was planned from London and entry to Australia was controlled to a degree never true for the Americas. Australia attracted few free migrants until the 1820s. From the 1830s anyone who was British (and also white, after 1901) could enter Australia. This remained true until the 1970s. The foundations of the 'Old Australian' population were laid between the 1820s

and early 1860s. A leaflet distributed in the 1880s by the Agent-General for Queensland in order to attract English immigrants described Queensland as 'no foreign land, but only England over the water' (cited in *The Canberra Times*, 6 August 1988).

The practice of free British entry was coupled with that of virtually free travel for approved immigrants from Britain and Ireland. This gave Australia discretionary choice of immigrants and thus served to maintain the ethnic (and sex) balance. Non-Europeans were rejected regardless of their culture or education. There was also a tendency to see non-British immigrants as unskilled and potential labourers or domestics, though by the 1950s it was apparent that more immigrants from southern Europe (excluded from the United States since the early 1920s) would tip the balance in their favour.

A phobia about miscegenation and a desire to protect the 'white race' were involved in the debate that resulted in The Federal Immigration Restriction Act of 1901. The term 'White Australia' was used in this context and gave its name unofficially to the policy which continued into the 1960s and for which Australia became notorious. Its underlying ethos was based on the assumption that immigrants would assimilate; non-European races were undesirable because they looked different and therefore could not assimilate. Even the Aboriginal population had been divided into those of mixed descent who were expected to assimilate and 'breed out' their black traits, and tribal Aborigines who were segregated and expected to die out anyway.

'White Australia' was used to fuel national consciousness. Its aim was to produce a homogeneous English-speaking Anglo-Saxon culture. By 1945 after the three immigrant waves of 1825–60, the 1880s and 1910–30, the basic character of the Australian population was established. In 1947 Australians were 99 per cent white and 90 per cent of British origin. Virtually all spoke English, as indicated in the 1933 Census, which was the first attempt in Australian history to obtain some statistics on language use. Thus, it appeared that the social engineering of the past 100 years had succeeded. Australia had become one of a handful of homogeneous societies.

The next great wave of immigration between 1947 and 1972, the largest in all, was nevertheless unique in its acceptance of non-British settlers. The generation which introduced the postwar immigration policy had been brought up with the deeply rooted belief that the 'White Australia' policy was not only necessary, but highly desirable. It was seen as a noble ideal and a rationalisation for protecting labour conditions. White Australia was regarded as essential to nation building and was based on the assumption that the Australian 'race' consisted of peoples of European origin and was not to be mongrelised. Thus, the melting-pot metaphor of assimilation

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implied not a biological mixture of populations (or 'races'), but unity of institutions, society and culture.

After the war, however, the metaphor of 'populate or perish' was used to justify large-scale immigration. At a time of economic and industrial expansion more labour than could be drawn from the traditional pool of British migrants was required. Thus, the 'White Australia' policy was ended.

The ideology behind 'White Australia' persisted, however, in attitudes towards language. One of the strongest expectations of these postwar immigrants was that they should speak English in public and various organisations passed resolutions designed to enforce this by law if necessary. Wartime restrictions on the untranslated use of foreign languages in broadcasts or newspapers remained in force until 1956 (see Clyne, chapter 14, and also Ozolins, this volume).

Many of the attitudes are spelled out in a leaflet issued to new arrivals in 1948 by the Australian Government. It advised immigrants on how to get on with Australians and stressed assimilation. The end result was to occur on the 'day when fellow Australians stop looking at you because your manners or speech are different, you will know you have been accepted as one of the community'. It further warned that

Australians are not used to hearing foreign languages. They are inclined to stare at persons whose speech is different. Some may laugh at you or make fun of your accent. Do not let this worry or annoy you. Also try to avoid using your hands when speaking because if you do this you will be conspicuous. Australian men never wear hair nets. They regard men who do as effeminate. . . . Learn the habits and customs of the Australians and you will quickly feel at home in your new homeland.

The Canberra Times, 7 August 1988

Even as late as 1967 Bill Sneddon, then Minister for Immigration could state publicly:

We must have a single culture – if immigration implied multi-cultural activities within Australian society, then it was not the type Australia wanted. I am quite determined we should have a monoculture, with everyone living in the same way, understanding each other, and sharing the same aspirations. We don't want pluralism.

(Cited in Bullivant 1984: 44)

Only ten years later though, these statements were to appear blatantly discriminatory.

The egalitarian myth of Australia as a 'classless society' was used to justify the strong assimilationist ideology which persisted into the 1960s. The attitude was sink or swim. It was regarded as contrary to egalitarian views to provide special privileges or assistance of any kind. Few facilities

to assist the integration of migrants in the socioeconomic and education system were provided until the 1970s (see Ozolins, this volume). Bullivant (1984: 53–4) notes that the education system was unwilling to assist teachers in their attempts to cope with the problems of immigrant children. This enabled information that ran counter to conformist official policies and ideologies to be suppressed and excluded from the public agenda. The control of information about the education system's inability to cope with increasing numbers of migrant children even extended to the failure to collect adequate information about the distribution of migrant pupils, their knowledge of English and their performance and psychological difficulties. This was justified by the Director General of Education in New South Wales in terms of the egalitarianism myth. He said: 'We deliberately refrain from collecting any statistics in regard to school pupils from overseas. Once they are enrolled in school, they are, from our point of view, Australian children' (Commonwealth Department of Immigration 1963: 21).

In the 1970s governments of both political parties in Australia moved swiftly to replace outmoded attitudes. This included 'White Australia', which was officially ended with the passing of the Racial Discrimination Act in 1975. The new Minister of Immigration under the Whitlam Government scrapped the Department of Immigration's filing system which had been based on racial classification. The preference for the British ended, and in the early 1980s the Liberals also extended the principle of refugee admission to include Asians after 1975 in the wake of the fall of Saigon. In less than ten years Australia had adopted an immigration policy no longer based on national or racial origin. This shift in policy represented the most fundamental change since 1947 (and in some respects, even the 1830s). Australia no longer sought to be 'England over the water'. It no longer expected assimilation. Welfare work shifted from the mainstream Anglo-Australian organisations to volunteers and professionals from the various ethnic communities.

The very recognition that there were ethnic communities in Australia marked a major turning point away from the search for a national identity based on cultural homogeneity. Australia had become in some respects more like Canada and the United States. Free citizens had the right to choose their language and a new society could be built on people from a variety of origins. The 1970s was the decade of multiculturalism. The official ideology is spelled out in Grassby (1973). The 1976 Census, which was the first to elicit data on the use of specific languages, reported that 12 per cent of the Australian population over the age of five claimed to use a language other than English. Among the languages spoken were some 75–100 migrant languages. The incidence of bilingualism varies from state to state as well as across ethnic groups (see Clyne, chapter 14, this volume).

Multiculturalism, language attitudes and language policy in an Aboriginal perspective

It is against this sociohistorical background that recent claims made in the 1980s to the effect that Australia had become the most multicultural country in the world have to be understood, and more importantly, that the place of the Aboriginal population in the newly formed multicultural Australian speech community needs to be evaluated. White Australia celebrated its Bicentennial in 1988, yet even in 1967 voting rights were not given by all states to Aboriginal Australians. The Aborigines were also not counted in the Australian census until 1971. Before then, the Bureau of Census and Statistics adopted a very narrow interpretation of Section 127 of the Federal Constitution, which stated: 'In reckoning the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth . . . aboriginal natives shall not be counted' (Yarwood and Knowling 1982: 258–9).

The very early dealings between the British settlers and the Aboriginal population were at worst violent, and at best, assimilative in nature. Following the first settlement by whites the Aboriginal population was reduced from an estimated total of 250,000 in 1788 to a low point of 66,099 in 1933 (Smith 1980: 2–3, 10–55). Hughes (1988: 120) describes what happened to the Aboriginal population of Tasmania, which was all but exterminated within less than 75 years of white settlement, as the only true genocide in English colonial history (see, however, my remarks on internal colonialism below). The way to survive was to become like the whites, as is made clear in an address made by the Governor of South Australia in 1835: 'Black man, we wish to make you happy. But you cannot be happy unless you imitate white men. Build huts, wear clothes and be useful . . . love God . . . love white men . . . learn to speak English' (Broome 1982: 27).

After the Second World War assimilation was adopted as the official policy towards Aborigines. This followed decades of attempted segregation in special reserves of land not required by European settlers. Here they 'were to be restrained for both their own protection and the racial purity of the broader community' (Stevens 1970: 371). The new policy of assimilation, as spelled out in 1961 at the Native Welfare Conference, was grounded in the hope of achieving a homogeneous society. Thus, Rowley (1972: 399):

The policy of assimilation means that all Aborigines and part-Aborigines are expected eventually to attain the same manner of living as other Australians and to live as members of a single Australian community enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs, as other Australians.

The Labor Government under Whitlam, elected in 1972, had also promised liberalised attitudes towards Aborigines. One of its first tasks was

to establish an advisory group on the teaching of Australian languages in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. As in the United States, however, the early programmes of bilingual education were assimilationist and taught Aboriginal languages only as an aid to the acquisition of English. Decisions regarding the teaching of Australian languages were made entirely or largely by outsiders.

Bourke's (1980) evaluation of bilingual schools in the Northern Territory seriously questioned the rationale behind these bilingual programmes. He observed (1980: 72) that

Pre-schools are being run on European lines and the programmes appear to be based on deficit theory. Some teachers even said that the children were deprived of the experiences necessary to develop their intellect. Taking these little children away from their families where they have the security to develop their language and social mores, to place them in schools where everything is different, including values and acceptable behavior patterns, is confusing. The child's intellectual and social development may even be curtailed.

In the Northern Territory today the 17 bilingual programmes in operation all remain transitional (Fesl 1988: 154). Although Queensland is the state with the largest population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, only two bilingual programmes have been implemented.

Aboriginal awareness of the need to take steps to maintain traditional languages began to be articulated in the late 1970s (see Fesl 1988: chapter 11). Among the important trends are the establishment of independent Aboriginal schools, for example, at Yipirinya in Central Australia, the formation of a national body to campaign for Australian language rights, and the establishment of Aboriginal radio and television. In 1985 the House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education recommended government support for independent schools. It has become increasingly possible for Aboriginal people to argue their own case through agencies such as the Institute for Aboriginal Development, the National Aboriginal Education Committee, The Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies, The Aboriginal Languages Association, and community controlled language centres, for example, the Kimberley Language Centre in Broome. A National Aboriginal and Islander Broadcasting Association was also established (see Walsh, this volume).

Although Aborigines had remained separate from immigrant groups represented by the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia, it is obvious that both these groups had common linguistic and other goals to be pursued. When the Senate Standing Committee was charged in 1982 with the development and implementation of a coordinated language plan for Australia, they made 16 positive recommendations for Australian languages. Among the most important was that Aboriginal people be guaranteed the major role in decision making relating to language issues.

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However, little or no action was taken to implement these recommendations. The Lo Bianco report (1987) on the National Language Policy reaffirmed the importance of Aboriginal involvement, but without consultation with the Aboriginal community, it proposed a three-year National Aboriginal Languages Project to be managed within the Commonwealth Education portfolio.

Language and public policy in Australia

Throughout most of Australia's history language policy at government level was *ad hoc* and unofficial. It was only after the 1960s that it became official and coherent. The movement to set up a national language policy is so far unprecedented in the major Anglophone countries like Britain and the US. Thus, issues concerning language planning, public policy and education are at the moment of considerable interest and significance.

Ferguson and Heath (1981) note the paradox in prescriptive attitudes towards language in the English-speaking world and the general opposition to setting up a language academy or some other regulatory body. Most nations spell out in their constitutions which languages have official status for particular purposes. No government of the major Anglophone nations has ever felt the need to declare English as its official language because English has served effectively as a *de facto* rather than *de jure* official language. Australia is the first of the major English-speaking countries to formulate an explicit language policy.

Australia has also taken a number of important issues related to language use on board, for example, plain English (see Eagleson, this volume). While this movement has taken hold in other English-speaking countries such as Britain (where the Plain English Movement celebrated its tenth anniversary in July 1989) and the United States, and elsewhere, for example, Finland, Sweden, France, the Netherlands, it is possible that Australia is in the vanguard of new developments. Eagleson, who is the Federal government's adviser on Plain English and adviser to the Victoria Law Reform Commission, has been instrumental in this enterprise (see chapter 25, this volume). The Australian Government has now introduced a plain language policy and Victoria launched an extensive investigation into the language of legislation.

In October 1988 the Federal Government issued its *Style Manual*, the 'bible' for the public service, which contained a chapter by Anne Pauwels on non-sexist language (see also chapter 22, this volume) especially commissioned from the Office of the Status of Women. It describes four major aspects of sexism in English and advises writers to be careful in their portrayal of men and women. Corson's chapter discusses the implications

of inequality in another area of language usage, namely, social class differences in the ability to use and comprehend specialist vocabulary needed for mastery of certain school subjects.

The Minister for Employment, Education and Training, John Dawkins, also announced in June 1989 the Federal Government's plans for the formation of the Languages Institute of Australia (LIA) to see through the full implementation of the National Policy on Languages. Over one million dollars has been allocated to the institute in the first year. The LIA will have a central secretariate based in Melbourne and bases initially in tertiary institutions in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney, but would eventually have teaching and curriculum centres in all major Australian cities. The LIA's aims are to improve the skills of school and tertiary students as well as the wider community. The activities of the institute will be wide ranging, and include, for example three research and development programmes. One of these will be a language testing unit through the University of Melbourne and the Brisbane College of Advanced Education to assess levels of language skills. This will be used for testing standards of English among migrants seeking a particular occupation. Monash University (also in Melbourne) will be the site of a study of language and society to assess language problems of groups such as migrants and the deaf. At the University of Sydney there will be a second language acquisition programme. In addition, Queensland University in Brisbane will have a national data base of language skill information and will look at computer assisted teaching methods. The Australian Advisory Council on Languages and Multicultural Education (AACLAME) has been asked by the Minister to coordinate a review of language in higher education. This review will now become a project of the new LIA.

The Bicentennial Year, 1988, also saw the publication of the *Australian National Dictionary*, the result of ten-years labour by Ransom. Its appearance nearly a century after the first Australian dictionary (Morris 1898) constitutes a landmark in Australian lexicography. Until recently Australian lexis had been represented only in British and American International Dictionaries. The first Australian dictionary to present a comprehensive word list in which all the pronunciations, spellings and definitions are taken from Australian English usage is *The Macquarie Dictionary* (Delbridge *et al* 1981). *A Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms* by Wilkes (1978) covers the more colloquial element in Australian English which was not extensively treated in *The Macquarie Dictionary*.

As Delbridge (1990: 69) points out, Morris revealed a colonial attitude when he declared that 'Australian English meant all new words and new uses of words that have been added to the English language by reason of the fact that those who speak English have taken up their abode in Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand'. In contrasting this venture with that of

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Noah Webster's in the United States, Delbridge (1990: 69) quotes the following from Webster's *Dissertations on the English Language* (1789):

As an independent nation our honour requires us to have a system of our own, in language as well as government. Great Britain, whose children we are, and whose language we speak, should no longer be our standard. For the taste of her writers is already corrupted, and her language is on the decline. But if it were not so, she is at too great a distance to be our model and to instruct us in the principles of our language.

This linguistic declaration of independence is unparalleled in Australia until the appearance of Baker's (1945) *The Australian Language*, whose title confidently asserted the autonomy of Australian English in the same way that Mencken's (1919) *The American Language* had attempted to do for American English. Baker (1945: 11) wrote:

we need some better starting point than Murray's *Dictionary*. We have to work out the problem from the viewpoint of Australia, not from the viewpoint of England and of the judgements she passed upon our language because she did not know it as well as we do.

The 1940s also saw the initiation of Mitchell's studies of the Australian English accent in sociohistorical perspective. While Mitchell (1946) declared that there was nothing 'wrong' with Australian speech, his comparison of the Australian accent with that of educated southern British English was for some an unpleasant reminder of the extent to which Australian English deviated from RP (received pronunciation), as described by Jones and other English phoneticians. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation, created in 1932, subsequently recommended Jones' (1917) norms. However, in 1941 its chairman revealed that only two out of 450 applicants for the position of announcer could be selected. Most of those recognised as suitable were Englishmen. Due to Mitchell's influence so-called 'educated Australian speech' (which Mitchell later termed 'cultivated') was subsequently adopted as the style for national broadcasting. This variety of Australian speech, while distinctively Australian, was still close to RP, and quite different from the variety which Mitchell termed 'Broad Australian'. A cultivated accent is no longer essential for the ABC. Since 1983 it has required only 'acceptable styles of educated speech' (see Leitner 1984), and now all questions concerning pronunciation, style and usage are referred to an Australian Dictionary, not a British one.

The Australian National Dictionary confines itself to the meanings which words have in the Australian context, for example, *boring* refers to drilling for water. Australian English is a variety of English in which government servants are public rather than civil, where Moscow is a pawn shop and you can have one moral at a time rather than a whole set of them. All in all Ransom and his compilers list 10,000 distinctive contributions to the