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○ EDITORIAL

AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGES: A CHALLENGE FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS

The maintenance and revitalization of Australian languages poses a challenge for Applied Linguistics. One obvious source of the challenge is the sheer range of Australian language situations to be addressed. Another is the wide scope of what falls under the purview of Applied Linguistics. This can be exemplified by statements from this journal:

The journal aims to promote the development of links between language related research and its application in education, professional, and other language related settings. Areas covered by the journal include [sic]:

first and second language teaching and learning

bilingualism and bilingual education

discourse analysis

translation and interpreting

language testing

language planning and policy [http://www.alaa.org.au/page/aral_journal.html]

The maintenance and revitalization of Australian languages intersects with all of these components and, in addition, language documentation plays a major role.

In this special issue of the *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics* the areas particularly addressed are: language policy (especially, Devlin and McKay); language teaching (Gale), and, language testing (Wigglesworth, Simpson and Loakes). In addition the topic of bilingual education, particularly in the Northern Territory, is canvassed in all the papers - a reflection of its topicality at the time of writing. The paper by Devlin is the one most concerned with this issue. It provides a thorough account up to the end of April 2011 and will form an important basis for future discussions concerning this evolving issue. Of special value in Devlin's account is his reliance on accounts from the media and government documents.

The contribution by McKay returns to the vexed issue of bilingual education in the Northern Territory in part to underline the 'false understanding that Indigenous language development and English literacy skills are in competition with one another rather than being mutually supportive, as the research on bilingual education would generally suggest'. A recurring theme in his overview of policy and Australian languages is the gap between rhetoric and practice. In some instances the rhetoric has promised the imminent introduction of a formal policy but has been slow to deliver as seems to be the case for the states of Victoria and Western Australia. While waiting for such explicit policies to be developed, most often there is an invisible language policy which favours Standard Australian English. Policy in this area

remains subject to the whims of political decision-making which itself can be driven by ignorance and expedience.

The paper by Gale briefly reviews the teaching of Australian languages in schools as this was the springboard for the later introduction of Australian languages into the tertiary sector. Although teaching these languages in schools had begun as early as 1827, it was not until 1968 that an Australian language was first taught at university level. Gale demonstrates how challenging it has been to mount Australian languages in the tertiary sector and how uncertain the continuity of such courses can be.

The contribution by Wigglesworth, Simpson and Loakes has language testing as a primary focus but reveals that policy decisions flow from a diagnostic tool like NAPLAN which they demonstrate is not entirely suitable for children of a non-English-speaking background. And this is no mere assertion. The paper sets out in considerable detail show questions designed for speakers of Standard Australian English [SAE] may present problems for speakers of creole varieties or Aboriginal English. The questions assume cultural knowledge, grammatical constructions and vocabulary to which the student population has not been exposed. They conclude that while the NAPLAN test may be suitable for SAE speakers, Indigenous children are likely to be disadvantaged.

It is hoped that this collection will contribute to a wider discussion of issues affecting Australian languages: a challenge for Applied Linguistics.

Michael Walsh
Guest Editor

ERRATUM

In Volume 34, Issue 2 of the *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, the editor of *The Routledge Handbook of World Englishes* was incorrectly listed as Andy Fitzpatrick. The correct editor is Andy Kirkpatrick.