

# **Introduction: the future of ethnic languages in Australia**

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## **Genesis of the issue**

The idea of an issue dealing with the future of ethnic languages in Australia was conceived in the context of a one-day intensive workshop on this theme in June 1985 when Joshua Fishman was Guest Professor at Monash University (German Department and Centre for Migrant and Intercultural Studies). The workshop brought together researchers<sup>1</sup> from all over Australia to discuss their work relating to various aspects of multilingualism, language contact, and language maintenance in the Australian context. We gratefully acknowledge Professor Fishman's contribution to this workshop: he patiently listened to our exposés, provided stimulating comments about particular research questions, and made comparisons with the American situation. The papers in this issue are all based on projects discussed by participants of the workshop.

## **'Ethnic', 'migrant', 'community', languages: what's in a name?**

'Foreign', 'transported', 'migrant', 'ethnic', 'community' language or 'language other than English' (LOTE) are some of the terms that were and are used to denote those languages and/or dialects other than English which are not indigenous to Australia. In other words, these terms refer to the mother tongues of non-English-speaking immigrants to Australia. The variety of terms also reflects the changing attitudes of certain sections of the community (such as educators, policy makers, politicians etc.) toward the presence of these languages in Australia. Clyne (1982: 133) notes that 'up to 1970, languages other than English used in Australia were generally termed "foreign languages" with the implication that their use was not quite legitimate'. During the mid-1960s, when the assimilationist policy toward migrants was making way for a more integrationist one, the term 'migrant language' emerged (Clyne 1964) in relation to the introduction of the languages spoken by

immigrants into school curricula. By the 1970s there was a movement to use the terms 'migrant' and 'ethnic' interchangeably, with the latter being preferred by migrant activists. They argued that this term was more appropriate than 'migrant' as the second generation and other Australian-born users of these languages could hardly be called migrants. More recently the advocacy of multiculturalism (and multilingualism) as preferred policy vis-à-vis immigrants in Australia, seemingly concomitant with the emergence of a new national identity, has also had an impact on the terminology regarding the languages of immigrants in Australia: there has been a moving away from stressing their 'outlandish' origin to a greater emphasis on their relevance to the Australian community. Terms like LOTEs (languages other than English),<sup>2</sup> community language or CLOTEs (community languages other than English) are now widely employed throughout the community to highlight their legitimacy in the Australian environment. At present, terms like 'LOTE', 'CLOTE', 'community language', 'ethnic language', 'ethnic community language' are used synonymously in many government reports and academic writings (Clyne 1982).

Although I realize that to denote the languages of non-English-speaking immigrants as 'ethnic' is somewhat of a misnomer – after all, English as well as Aboriginal languages can be considered ethnic languages – I have chosen to use 'ethnic language' in the title because I assume the term 'ethnic' to be more familiar to readers than the terms 'LOTE' or 'community language'. Also the term 'ethnic language' has become associated with immigrant rather than Aboriginal languages in Australia. Last, the term 'ethnic language' facilitates rapport with other uses of the term as in 'ethnic identity', 'ethnic schools', 'ethnic groups', etc., notions which are relevant to an understanding of the role of language in expressing ethnic identity. Nevertheless, it should be said that the other terms mentioned will be used interchangeably with the term 'ethnic language' throughout the issue.

### **Multilingual Australia: some figures on ethnic language use**

Depending on what is considered a language or a dialect/vernacular, the number of ethnic/immigrant languages represented in Australia is considered to be between 75 and 100. The multilingual character of the Australian population (around 16 million) is reflected in some 1976 census statistics on the use of languages other than English in Australia. 12.3% of the Australian population (over the age of five) was reported to make regular use of a LOTE. Of the population born in Australia, only 4.2% indicated regular use of a LOTE. 1.4% was reported not to use English on a regular basis. In contrast to the US (Spanish), Australia does not have a clearly dominant majority

language. The languages with the greatest number of speakers in Australia are Italian (445,000 regular users), Greek (262,000), German (170,000) and Serbo-Croatian<sup>3</sup> (142,000), followed by Dutch, French, Polish, and Spanish, which all boast more than 50,000 regular speakers. Russian is estimated to have 17,710 regular users. Clyne's (1982) cross-tabulations of regular language use by birthplace yielded information on the process of language shift (henceforth LS) in the first and second generation of some immigrant groups: Greeks (3%) and Italians (6.26%) experienced the least degree of LS in the first generation. First-generation Germans underwent a 27.79% shift to English. The Dutch first generation recorded the highest rate of LS (43.55%). Language shift in the second generation was much higher than in the first generation, but the rank ordering of the groups was maintained: (for offspring of endogamous marriages) Greece: 10.08%, Italy: 18.56%, Germany: 62.28%, and The Netherlands: 80.79% (Clyne 1982).

As the 1986 Australian Census also included some questions on home language use,<sup>4</sup> it is hoped that data from this census may reveal more recent developments in the language-use patterns of the longer-established migrant groups as well as providing a first insight into the language behavior of more recent arrivals (particularly southeast Asian refugees).

The impression gained from the 1976 census statistics is that each language group has experienced some degree of language shift but that the rate at which the shift occurs can vary greatly from group to group.

### Research on ethnic languages in Australia: a bird's-eye view

Despite the fact that the presence of ethnic languages in Australia is not a post-World War II phenomenon – immigrant languages other than English have been part of the Australian scene since the early days of white settlement – serious interest in researching these immigrant communities and their languages only started in the 1960s. Over the past two decades, however, the field has grown from a predominantly linguistics-oriented study of language contact to a large-scale interdisciplinary study of multilingualism. Due to this vast expansion of the field, surveying its research topics, interests, and questions is beyond the scope of this introduction. I would like to refer the reader to some recent and forthcoming surveys of the language situation in Australia. Clyne's *Multilingual Australia* (1982) is a most comprehensive source dealing with the immigrant language situation in Australia: research data and results from a multitude of studies as well as census data on language use (1976 Australian Census) provide the basis for a discussion of language-ecology<sup>5</sup> factors influencing maintenance and shift patterns of individual languages, and for an analysis of the structure of 'migrant' languages. There

is also an extensive treatment of language-policy matters with specific reference to ethnic languages in Australia. A more recent book edited by Clyne (1985), *Australia, Meeting Place of Languages*, focuses on language contact and language-contact research in Australia (this book is reviewed by McNamara in this issue). Shorter descriptions of more recent developments in the field can be found in Baldauf (1985) and Pauwels (1985). The book *Language in Australia* (i.p.), edited by Bruce Rigsby and Suzanne Romaine, to appear later this year, will contain a substantial section on ethnic languages in Australia.

Australian research on multilingualism and language contact has been, and still is, indebted to overseas scholarship in these fields. Weinreich's (1953), Haugen's (1953, 1956), and Hasselmo's (1961) works on languages in contact have been the major impetus to the study of language contact between English and various ethnic languages in Australia: for instance, Clyne (1977) and Pauwels (1980) for Dutch/English contact; Clyne (1967, 1972) for German/English contact; Tamis (1984) for Greek/English contact; Andreoni (1967) and Bettoni (1981) for Italian/English contact; Sussex (1982) for Polish/English contact; Kouzmin (1973) for Russian/English contact; Kaminskas (1972) for Spanish/English contact. These and similar studies not only provide linguistic descriptions of language contact in the Australian context but prove valuable for the discovery of universal features of language contact (see Clyne 1985). Works by Fishman (for example, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967), Haugen (for example, 1953, 1956, 1971), and Kloss (1966) have been central to the emergence of the study of language ecology in Australia and have provided Australian researchers with many of the key notions and concepts (such as domain, clearcut and ambivalent LM factors, language ecology) which facilitate the description and analysis of the processes of language maintenance (henceforth LM) and language shift (LS). Insights from social psychology, especially relating to the role of language in intergroup and ethnic relations (see for example Giles et al. 1977; Giles and Johnson 1981) have stimulated interdisciplinary research on attitudes toward ethnic languages and have led to language attitudes being viewed as a crucial component in the study of LM and LS processes. Models (especially Canadian ones) and theories of second-language acquisition and learning developed in connection with other contact situations have made their mark on projects and research (for example, Clyne 1986; Döpke this issue) dealing with the acquisition and learning/teaching of ethnic languages in Australia.

### **This issue**

The papers selected for this issue of the journal reflect, we hope, current research issues, trends, and developments in the study of ethnic languages and multilingualism in Australia.

The papers contributed by Bettoni and Gibbons, Clyne, Garner, Kouzmin, and Pauwels examine the vitality of a number of ethnolinguistic groups. Döpke discusses the impact of the linguistic behavior of parents in a mixed (Anglo-German) marriage on the acquisition of the ethnic language by their offspring, and the paper by Ozolins deals with the role of government initiatives in securing the multilingual character of Australian society. Though diverse in their research methods and topics, all contributors address the question of the future of ethnic languages in general or of a particular ethnic language in present-day Australian society.

The first papers (from Bettoni and Gibbons to Pauwels) approach the question by analyzing the language-use patterns and/or the language attitudes of various ethnolinguistic groups (Italian, German, Swedish, Russian, Limburgs and Swabian) and by discussing the role of language in maintaining one's identity and group membership.

Making use of the matched-guise technique, Bettoni and Gibbons examine the attitudes of Italo-Australians toward the speech varieties characteristic of their community. Their study reveals that Italians in Australia (Sydney) hold predominantly negative views of the Italian (mostly nonstandard) language varieties spoken in Australia. The authors believe the negative feelings associated with these varieties to be partly responsible for the relatively rapid language shift occurring among Italians in Australia, a community whose long history of immigration and patterns of settlement – dense concentration of population – as well as numerical strength would favor maintenance rather than shift.

Within the framework of the 'ecology of language' Garner examines the language-use patterns and attitudes of two small, not highly visible immigrant communities in Melbourne: Swedes and Russians. According to Garner, their smallness and low visibility have led to a low profile of their languages in the Australian community, which subsequently resulted in a minimum of institutional support for the maintenance of these languages. The future of Swedish and Russian thus largely depends upon the vitality of the communities themselves. Garner concludes that the 'future of Swedish in Melbourne is critically dependent on a sustained supply of new Swedish-speaking immigrants, as neither sociological nor psychological environments of the community are conducive to its retention'. Because of the emotional and symbolic value which Russian speakers attach to their language, the future of Russian seems less dependent on continued migration.

Kouzmin's paper, which also analyzes the Russian speech community, focuses on the heterogeneous nature of the speech community and its effect on LM rates. She also puts forward the argument that not actual language-use patterns but perceived ethnolinguistic vitality is *the* deciding factor in determining the future/survival of a group's language. Although the use of Russian

in various domains is still higher among third-wave immigrants – predominantly Jewish refugees from the Soviet Union arriving in Australia from 1973 onward – than among second-wave immigrants – displaced persons and immigrants from Russian colonies in Europe and China arriving in Australia after World War II – an analysis of the language attitudes of the two groups shows that Russian language loyalty has taken second place as a marker of identity/group membership for the third-wave immigrants. They have experienced a redefining of their Jewish ‘ethnicity’ in the Australian context (see also Clyne’s paper). For second-wave immigrants, on the other hand, Russian still has important symbolic functions which may lead to the maintenance of the language in ‘domains where the symbolic function is most likely to be paramount’.

Clyne comments on the difficulties in attempting to predict the maintenance patterns of a very heterogeneous speech community. Through his analysis of the German speech community in Australia, he demonstrates that various subgroups, vintages, etc., hold different views on the role of German in marking their identity (be it cultural, ethnic, or religious). He also points out that the present policy of multiculturalism may in fact resolve some identity problems related to the absence of a uniform cohesive ethnic group matching the German speech community in Australia.

The paper by Pauwels (see also Kouzmin and Clyne) again emphasizes the need for researchers and policy makers to recognize the heterogeneity of speech communities rather than to assume an isomorphism between the nation/state group and the speech community. Her comparative analysis of the language-use patterns of two diglossic communities, Limburgs and Swabian, which constitute ethnolinguistic subgroups of the Dutch and German speech communities respectively, shows that the subgroup’s perception of their relationship with the Dutch/German speech community at large has an impact on the LM patterns. In Australia Limburgers do not maintain Standard Dutch, the variety which they have in common with the wider Dutch speech community. Because Limburgers are not willing to integrate linguistically into the Dutch speech community, they have drastically reduced their chances of LM. The Swabians, on the other hand, have maintained Standard German and have integrated themselves more into the German speech community. In Australia they stress their ‘Germanness’ rather than their ‘Swabianness’, which could enhance their chances of LM.

Döpke’s paper touches upon the issue of maintaining an ethnic language (German) in an exogamous situation. Exogamy – especially an Anglo-ethnic marriage – has been identified as a factor clearly promoting LS (see Pauwels 1980). Döpke shows, however, that it is not impossible to maintain German in a German-English bilingual family and that the educational quality of the linguistic input (parental teaching techniques) provided by the German-

speaking parent to the child is an important factor in the successful acquisition of German by the child.

Finally, Ozolins takes up the question of whether official institutional support (or lack thereof) in the form of government language-policy initiatives can have an impact on determining the future of ethnic languages in Australia. Although he also stresses that the future of ethnic languages in Australia is essentially dependent on the vitality of the ethnolinguistic groups themselves, he does show that attitudes and actions of governments and mainstream organizations toward ethnic groups and their languages have affected and will continue to have some impact on their (continued) existence in Australia.

### **Future prospects: monolingual or multilingual Australia?**

As we hope the research reported on in this issue has illustrated, factors influencing language maintenance and shift patterns in various migrant communities are multivariate and of a complex nature. Theories and models (such as core values theory, ethnolinguistic vitality) currently used to make predictions about the continued existence of ethnic languages in Australia either have been discredited because of their limited predictive powers or have not yet been backed up by sufficient research evidence. The core values theory developed by Smolicz (1980, 1981) as part of a humanistic sociological approach posits that each group/culture has a set of specific values which are seen as crucial to its existence and identity. Refusing to accept (any of) these values may lead to being excluded from the group. For some groups and cultures (such as Greeks and Poles, according to Smolicz) language is considered of central importance to their value system (that is, a core value), whereas the role of language may be more peripheral to the value system of others (for example, Dutch). Recently (see Clyne; Kouzmin this issue) the explanatory and predictive powers of this theory have been challenged. The main criticism is directed at this theory's assumption that each language matches up with a uniform, cohesive ethnic/cultural group. This may be the case for Polish and Greek but is not valid for the majority of languages represented in Australia, as the papers by Bettoni and Gibbons, Clyne, Kouzmin, and Pauwels demonstrate.

The notions of objective and perceived ethnolinguistic vitality propagated by social psychologists (such as Giles et al. 1977; Giles and Johnson 1981) are receiving increasing attention as possible predictors of future developments of ethnic languages in Australia. So far, however, there have only been a handful of researchers<sup>6</sup> using this model to analyze the language situation in Australia. Also, the notion of ethnolinguistic vitality itself has become the

subject of criticism (see for example Husband and Saifullah Khan 1982; Edwards 1985): the dimensions (status, demography, and institutional support) of objective vitality are seen as too crude, not independent of one another, and not differentiated enough with regard to their overall weighting. Furthermore, some of the factors (such as the presence of ethnic religious denominations) seen as contributing to the vitality of a group have been analyzed as ambivalent factors, that is, as likely to promote LM as LS (Clyne 1982).

With this in mind, it seems almost impossible to make reliable predictions about the future of ethnic languages in Australia at present. I am therefore inclined to agree with Fishman's statements relating to the future of ethnic languages in America, 'to predict the future course of sidestream language and ethnicity in the United States would require us to do the impossible: to predict America's future. That is clearly a task beyond anyone's capacity' (Fishman et al. 1985: 515). Nevertheless, the history of how ethnic languages have fared in Australia does hold some information about major factors determining the multilingual character of Australia.

If policies regarding the intake of migrants do not restrict the latter to those from English-speaking areas or backgrounds, then a continuing flow of migrants will automatically ensure the presence of various LOTEs in Australia. Whether the languages of these newly arrived as well as of established migrant groups will survive appears to be predominantly determined by a communicative or symbolic need for them. The maintenance of an ethnic language in its communicative function appears to be largely dependent on the number of speakers in that community who cannot rely adequately on English for their communicative needs (such as recent migrants, elderly migrants). If the migrant intake is completely halted, and with the passing of the elderly, communities whose LM relies heavily on the presence of these factors would almost certainly experience massive LS. Communities which attach (a) symbolic function(s) to their language may have a greater chance to preserve their language in one form or another (such as formal language for religious purposes) and may be more likely to experience a language revival at some point in the future (see Fishman et al. 1985). Furthermore, the role of government policies and official attitudes toward the presence of ethnic languages should not be underestimated. Clyne and Ozolins (this issue, for example, point out that the assimilationist policies of the 1950s have caused rapid language shift in many instances. Present policies supportive of multilingualism and multiculturalism may not only contribute to a greater visibility (and, it is to be hoped, acceptability) of the multilingual, multiethnic, and multiracial character of Australian society but may also help to ensure the continued communicative use of LOTEs in Australia by viewing them as a resource rather than an expenditure. These observations lead me to conclude

that a future multilingual Australia is more likely to be a reality than is a monolingual one.

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## Notes

1. Workshop participants included T. Ammerlaan, C. Bettoni, M. Bodi, C. Candlin, M. Clyne, S. Döpke, M. Garner, J. Hoeks, M. Klarberg, L. Kouzmin, J. Lo Bianco, T. McNamara, H. Nicholas, U. Ozolins, A. Pauwels, M. Rado, G. Saunders, J. Smolicz, R. Sussex, A. Tamis.
2. The term 'LOTEs' refers to immigrant *and* Aboriginal languages.
3. Serbo-Croatian stands here for Serbian, Croatian and 'Yugoslav'. Speakers of these languages have designated their language in different ways, which has led to some confusion in tabulating the number of speakers per language in the 1976 census. The figures are estimates.
4. The language questions in the 1986 Australian Census were formulated as follows:  
Does the person speak a language other than English at home?  
How well does the person speak English?
5. See Haugen (1971: 19): 'Language ecology may be defined as the study of interactions between any given language and its environment.'
6. See for example Ball (1983); Callan and Gallois (1982); Callan et al. (1983); Giles et al. (1985). Tim McNamara is using this framework to examine the language behavior of Israelis in Australia.

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