

EDITED BY SUZANNE ROMAINE

LANGUAGE IN AUSTRALIA

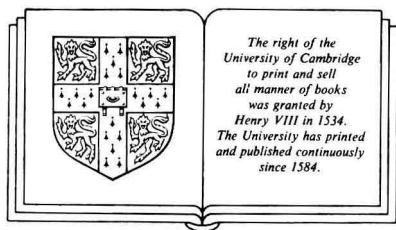


Language in Australia

edited by

SUZANNE ROMAINE

Merton College, Oxford



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Notes on contributors

EDITH BAVIN is Senior Lecturer in Linguistics at La Trobe University. Since 1982 she has been doing research on Warlpiri, in particular, children's acquisition of the language.

CAMILLA BETTONI is Senior Lecturer in Linguistics in the Department of Italian at the University of Sydney. Her book, *Italian in North Queensland* (1981), is based on her extensive research on Italian in Australia.

PAULINE BRYANT is a PhD student in Linguistics at the Australian National University. In addition to her research on regional variation, she has investigated intonation in Australian English.

MICHAEL CLYNE is Professor of Linguistics at Monash University. His books include *Australia Talks* (1976), *Multilingual Australia* (1982) and *Australia – Meeting Place of Languages* (1985).

DAVID CORSON is in the Education Faculty at Massey University in New Zealand. His books include *The Lexical Bar* (1985), *Oral Language Across the Curriculum*, *Language Policy Across the Curriculum* and he is editor of *Language and Education: An International Journal*.

JACQUES DOUCET is Adviser in Education in the Department of Defence in France and has done research on Serbo-Croatian in Queensland.

DIANA EADES is lecturing in Linguistics at the University of New England and currently carrying out research on the use of Aboriginal English in legal interviews.

ROBERT D. EAGLESON is Associate Professor of Modern English Language at the University of Sydney. He is the author of *Aboriginal English and the Child* (with Susan Kaldor and Ian G. Malcolm, 1982) and *Plain English and the Law*. He is Special Adviser on Plain English to the Australian Government.

KEVIN FORD is Principal Lecturer at the School of Australian Linguistics in Batchelor and is currently working on a dictionary of Kalaw Kawaw Ya/Kalaw Lagaw Ya.

JOHN W. HARRIS is now Director of the Zadock Institute for Christianity and Society in Canberra after having spent many years in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. His most recent book is *One Blood: Aborigines Encounter 200 Years of Christianity*.

BARBARA M. HORVATH is Senior Lecturer in Linguistics at the University of Sydney. She is the author of *Variation in Australian English: The Sociolects of Sydney* (1985).

SUSAN KALDOR has recently retired from her position as Associate Professor in Linguistics at the University of Western Australia. Her report, *Languages for Western Australia*, is a language policy document currently being implemented by the Western Australian Ministry of Education.

HAROLD KOCH is Senior Lecturer in Linguistics at the Australian National University. His major research project is a descriptive and comparative study of the Kaytej language of Central Australia.

IAN G. MALCOLM is Head of the Department of Language Studies in the Western Australian College of Advanced Education and collaborated with Susan Kaldor in a survey of Aboriginal children's English in Western Australia.

PATRICK McCONVELL is Lecturer in Anthropology at University College of the Northern Territories.

PETER MÜHLHÄUSLER is Lecturer in General Linguistics at the University of Oxford and currently working at Bond University. He is the author of *Pidgin and Creole Linguistics* (1986) and co-edited with Stephen Wurm the *Handbook of Tok Pisin* (1985).

DANA OBER works for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in Townsville and is a speaker of Kalaw Kawaw Ya.

ULDIS OZOLINS is a Lecturer in the Department of Language and Culture Studies at Victoria College in Melbourne. His research interests include language policy and education with particular reference to migrant languages in Australia.

ANNE PAUWELS is Director of the National Centre for Cross-Cultural Communication and Community Languages in the Professions at Monash University. She is the author of *Immigrant Dialects and Language Maintenance in Australia* (1986) and the editor of *Women and Language in Australian and New Zealand Society* (1987).

SUZANNE ROMAINE is Merton Professor of English Language at the University of Oxford. Her books include *The Language of Children and Adolescents* (1984), *Pidgin and Creole Languages* (1988) and *Bilingualism* (1989).

JOHN SANDEFUR is a translator with the Australian Aborigines and Islanders Branch of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, assigned since 1973 to the Kriol Bible translation project. He has published a language course on Kriol (with Joy Sandefur, 1981), a grammar of the language (1979) along with papers describing various aspects of the language.

ANNA SHNUKAL is Lecturer in Linguistics at the University of Queensland. Her description of Torres Strait Creole (*Broken: An Introduction to the Creole Language of the Torres Strait*) was published in 1989.

PETER SUTTON is Head of the Division of Anthropology at the South Australian Museum, in Adelaide. He has carried out extensive fieldwork in Aboriginal communities and has recently edited *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia* (1988).

TIMOTHY SHOPEN is Senior Lecturer in Linguistics at the Australian National University.

ANASTASIOS TAMIS is Lecturer in Greek Studies at the Universities of La Trobe and Melbourne. His most recent books are *Greeks in Australia* (1988), *The Immigration and Settlement of Greek Macedonians in Australia* (1989) and *Glossologia* (1989).

MICHAEL WALSH is Lecturer in Linguistics at the University of Sydney. He is currently working on a general guide to Aboriginal languages (with Paul Black) and a reference grammar of Murrinh-Patha.

Preface

The impetus for this book came from the publication of *Language in the USA* (Ferguson and Heath 1981) and *Language in the British Isles* (Trudgill 1984). This volume is a companion and complement to these two. The purpose of *Language in Australia* is to provide a comprehensive account of the present linguistic situation in Australia, primarily from a sociolinguistic perspective. There are at present no other books which offer such a broad survey of the language situation in Australia, although there are now works which cover selected aspects of it, for example, Clyne (1976), a sample of studies on Australian English, migrant and Aboriginal languages, Clyne (1982) on the position of community languages, Clyne (1985) on language contact, Blair and Collins (1989) on varieties of Australian English, and the surveys of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages by Dixon and Blake (1979), Dixon (1980), Blake (1981), and Yallop (1982). These and other publications are, however, important indications of the recent considerable interest in the languages of Australia.

This volume is divided into five parts. The first four contain chapters dealing with Australia's indigenous and non-indigenous languages and the fifth is devoted to public policy and social issues related to the languages of Australia. There are also sketches of each of the major language types in Australia. The chapters are mainly descriptive. They aim to provide a comprehensive overview and summary of what is known about Australia's languages as well as a guide to current areas of research interest.

Throughout, the contributors pay special attention to issues arising from the sociohistorical situation in which Australia's languages and language varieties coexist. As in the other major English-speaking countries, English is a relative newcomer to a linguistic scene which was already very diverse and heterogeneous. Present-day Australians speak a wide range of languages making Australia, as Clyne (1985) suggests, a meeting place of languages. While most Australians are English monolinguals, as are the majority of Britons and Americans, the continent's original inhabitants

were largely multilingual and many still are today. The languages spoken by the descendants of the original inhabitants of Australia include the following: surviving Aboriginal languages, a creole, for example, Kriol or Cape York Creole, Aboriginal English, and a variety of Australian English. There are also many other bilingual Australians who have settled more recently and still maintain knowledge of a language other than English, for example, Greek, Italian, German, Dutch, and Serbo-Croatian, to name only a few of the new 'community' languages dealt with in part III of this volume.

The editors of both *Language in the USA* and *Language in the British Isles* lament the fact that many people are relatively uninformed about the language situation in their own countries. While it may seem tedious to repeat this complaint here, it is no less true of Australia than of Britain and the United States. This volume is dedicated to the spirit of linguistic and cultural diversity and the hope that non-specialists will also find in this volume an appreciation of the rich linguistic heritage of Australia.

Acknowledgements

My biggest debt is to Bruce Rigsby for his help in the planning and undertaking of this volume. Without his support and willingness to respond to my queries, I would not have finished it as easily. I also received much useful advice and assistance from Michael Clyne during the preparation of part III on transplanted languages other than English.

I have also had a great deal of secretarial assistance from the English Faculty Office of the University of Oxford during the preparation of this book, which has made my task as editor smoother than might normally have been possible. I am very grateful to Caroline Johnston, who assisted me in the early stages, and to Sarah Barker and Jackie Wall for their help with the final stages. Sarah's willingness in particular to undertake the typing of seemingly endless revisions was responsible for seeing the project to completion sooner rather than later. I would also like to thank Penny Carter, Marion Smith and Judith Ayling at Cambridge University Press for their sustained interest in this project.

Introduction

SUZANNE ROMAINE

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.

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Introduction

SUZANNE ROMAINE

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