

Michael Walsh und Colin Yallop. Language and Culture in Aboriginal Australia. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1993.  
Pp xviii+226.

The growing number of publications in literature, anthropology, law, history, education, Aboriginal and Australian Studies shows the intense interest in Aboriginal Australia. An understanding of language and communication is now central to multiculturalism, educational policy and methodology, law proceedings, health services, etc. And one cannot fail to notice a shift away from departmentalising issues into Aboriginal English, pidgins and creoles, and indigenous languages. A new perspective takes in the language ecology at large and its socio-historical and cultural dimensions. The body of external historical data and of white-black patterns of interaction and their history is gaining in depth too. Language and Culture in Aboriginal Australia (LCAA) is meant to be a contribution to this trend and to Aboriginal Studies in particular. LCAA consists of fifteen chapters, an outline on the phonetics of Aboriginal languages and an introduction. Maps on the location of indigenous languages and of places make it easier to find one's way in unknown territory. LCAA covers a lot of ground but, as the preface states, in an unstructured manner.

The first and last two papers can be seen as a frame. The first two look at "Languages and their status Aboriginal Australia" (Michael Walsh) and "The structure of Aboriginal Australian languages" (Colin Yallop). Walsh asks questions like: how many languages are (were) there, how did they come to Australia and develop further. He goes into precolonisation contact of Aborigines in the Northern Territory with Malay seafarers from Indonesia that gave rise to Macassan pidgin. He mentions the emergence of a pidgin in New South Wales and the linguistic consequences of contact since 1788. Yallop's paper should be seen in conjunction with the phonetic outline (pp vii-xiv) since he confines himself to their grammar, a bit on style (acute problem of information-seeking questions), and typology. The closing papers by Alan Rumsey on "Language and territoriality in Aboriginal Australia" and Paul Black on "New uses for old languages" pick up the theme of the relationship of language with people and the land and the functional expansion of indigenous languages, respectively. Rumsey shows that the land 'owns' the

language, just like the speakers 'own' it, are its guardians. Evidence for this is when Aborigines shift into another language as they move through the land. That complex and difficult relationship has important practical consequences in land claims which have to be based on the demonstration of 'local descent'. Whether language defines a tribe or the land is of paramount importance.

The other chapters present a mosaic of interrelated themes. The papers by Jakelin Troy on "Language contact in early colonial New South Wales 1788 to 1791" and Terry Crowley on "Tasmanian Aboriginal language: old and new identities" deal with the effects of language contact or the lack of it. Troy shows how early contact was marred with misconceptions that led to hostilities. Kidnapping and forcing captives to cooperate, a well-known practice from colonisation in America and Africa, was to 'alleviate' the situation. But captives regularly died and it was not until Bennelong 'cooperated', as Troy says, that things went better. Aborigines now started to visit the settlement and an incipient pidgin emerged. The colonisers' interest in Aborigines led to loans into English, like *kangaroo*, *dingo*, *woomera*, and of English loans into Dharuk, the Sydney language, or word creation, such as *garani* 'biscuit', *gunya* 'house, shatter'. Both types were found in the Sydney pidgin.

Terry Crowley looks at the "Tasmanian Aboriginal language: old and new identities". Dismissing the myth that there have been no Aborigines since Truganini died in 1876, he clarifies that today's Aborigines are descended from marriages between (mainly British) sealers and the kidnapped Aboriginal women. Aborigines soon turned hostile when whites jeopardised their food support. The reaction was equally bloody and typical of much of subsequent contacts. Governor Arthur put up signs in 1828 to 'tell' Aborigines where they had to stay, the island was to be divided into an Aboriginal and white part in 1828, etc. Two years later they were forced into the island's peninsula. No pidgin could arise under these types of 'contact'. The rise of a pidgin occurred when those few hundred of the initial 4000, who were still alive, were transported to Barren Island and then to Flinders Island where they were christianised. A pidgin also emerged as a result of the sealers' practice of kidnapping women and maintaining sometimes long-term

relationships. As sealing was done not only by convicts and settlers in Australia but also by British and American ships, it is plausible to assume an early South Sea influence and, with the sealers being away for long periods, a heavy influence from Aboriginal languages. In the 1840s Tasmanian Aborigines got into contact with mainland Aborigines and their pidgin would have been influenced more from them. It was not until this century that Tasmanians began to show pride in their ancestry and to cultivate their Aboriginality with their English showing traces of conservatism and a few remnants from indigenous languages.

The next five papers deal with indigenous languages. Margaret Sharpe's is on "Bundjalung: teaching a disappearing language", a language that is still in use across the coastal border of north New South Wales and south Queensland. Surveying features of the language, motivations to learning it, she argues that Bundjalung can never be more than an ancillary language, mainly as an identity marker and that, as much has been lost, learners must look at themselves as a new, norm-setting speech community. That is a sensible point that does away with the often traditional attitude of resurrecting pure language. Edith Bavin's "Language and culture: socialisation in a Warlpiri community" is on child language acquisition in Central Australia. Her paper shows that children have to learn cultural knowledge and terminology, such as kinship terms and marriage rules. Barry Alpher describes "Out-of-the-ordinary ways of using a language" to express, for instance, respect symbolically or, creatively, to engineer with respect rules. The respect register differs from 'ordinary' language in lexis and style, the latter being more indirect and vague. He mentions the initiation register and sign language.

Walsh ("Classifying the world in an Aboriginal language") and Jane Simpson ("Making dictionaries") deal with words as reflections of reality and as objects of dictionaries. Walsh is interesting in relation to claims about the role of interference from indigenous language into Aboriginal English (Harkins 1994). Aboriginal languages are not all alike but all classify nouns into several semantically-based noun classes. Multiple membership occurs and nouns can be manipulated to reflect the particular angle from which some object is to be seen. Thus, if one looks at plants from the point of view of their being plants or food, the noun will

fall into a different noun class. Given this flexibility and the number of unexplained cases, he is cautious as to interpreting this in a Sapir-Whorfian framework. Simpson provides an interesting historical outline of lexicological concerns that led to early glossaries, more recently to mono- and bilingual dictionaries. She also discusses how archaic language is 'handed down' through songs, rituals and the like in an oral culture, not in need of a dictionary.

Both John Harris's paper entitled "Losing and gaining a language: the story of Kriol in the Northern Territory" and Mari Rhydwen's "Kriol: the creation of a written language and a tool of colonisation" return to the theme of language contact. Harris reiterates the major steps in the development of a contact pidgin after white settlement finally succeeded in 1870. Soon after overcoming the dangers of the land a multilingual population made up of Europeans, Chinese, and Aborigines developed in townships, cattle stations and mining camps. While the Aboriginal infrastructure was destroyed, contact was not entirely hostile (at first) so that communication needs gave rise to an incipient pidgin. When cattle farming began, Aborigines began to be killed on a large scale and the Anglican Roper Valley Mission provided an ambiguous safe haven for the remaining Aborigines to survive physically. But their social texture was finally destroyed. The pidgin became a creole around 1908 when the children, who were forced into dormitories, acquired it as their first, at least, dominant language. Harris is unconcerned with geographical variation, Rhydwen sees a major problem there. She argues that there is so much variation that speakers are undecided whether they speak the same language, Kriol, or different languages. And that translates into the problem of devising an orthography since speakers may feel that 'their' ways of speaking are not reflected in writing and that they have to adapt a foreign system.

The following two papers both deal with official communicative settings, the media and the court. Michael Christie's "The language of oppression: the Bolden Case, Victoria 1845" starts with the media coverage of the murder of several Aborigines to argue that an underlying racist discourse that compared Aborigines with dispensable animals was the cause of much of the violence in Australia. The paper fits into this collection if we read it as

dealing with a white perspective on Aboriginal Australia. Diana Eade's "Language and the law: White Australia v Nancy" also takes up a criminal case to show in detail that Aborigines follow different discourse conventions that are little understood so that Aborigines are regularly misrepresented in court situations.

Quite clearly, this collection of papers has some recurrent themes. To mention a few:

(1) the structure of indigenous languages in general or of particular ones is the main interest in the phonetic outline, Walsh's papers, Yallop, Sharpe, Bavin, Alpher, Simpson, Rumsey, and Black. Aspects of indigenous language that are relevant to language contact are mentioned in Troy, Crowley, Rhydwen, and Eades.

(2) language contact and its linguistic consequences are the primary focus of Troy, Crowley, Harris, Rhydwen, but also Eades and Black. The influence of language and cultural contact is relevant to Sharpe, and Bavin.

(3) issues of Aboriginal identity are implicit in the papers by Crowley, Sharpe, Rhydwen, Rumsey, and Black.

(4) intercultural communication with mainstream Australia is the focus in Christie and Eades but is implicit, from an historical dimension, in Crowley, and in Rhydwen and Black.

To turn to an evaluation of LCAA. The volume is meant as a popular contribution to Aboriginal Studies and, hence, as a book for undergraduates. From a German perspective, one might ask whether it is useful for linguistic courses on Aboriginal Australia, courses that, one should add, are interdisciplinary and find no easy place in a department of English.

To begin with coverage. Most papers deal with indigenous or contact languages, only Eades looks at Aboriginal English. Torres Strait Islanders and Torres Strait Creole, as well as Pacific Islanders have been excluded altogether (only Black mentions them in passing). There is nothing on the politics of language and cultural maintenance, nor on the history and typology of educational activities. These are serious gaps for undergraduates

and students of English in Europe, in particular since a lot of research is available. The quality of the papers is somewhat uneven, which may have to do with one's perception of 'popular'. Bavin, Alpher and Christie are rather basic. Rumsey and Crowley are more interesting, maybe because these topics have not been described much elsewhere. To turn to technical matters. The reviewer finds the lack of an index in a book for students a serious gap, although very few such books in Australia have one. While it is laudable to have maps with language and place locations, there is of course the problem with multiple names. For instance, Nauiyu Nambiyu used to be called Daly River, Ngukurr used to be Roper Valley, Barunga was Bamyili. Multiple naming is a particular problem in Rhydwen and Harris. Map 2 mixes old with new names and does not 'translate'. Map 7 in Sharpe indicates the area of Bundjalung but, to a foreigner, the insert is of little help.

Despite shortcomings LCAA makes for stimulating reading and provides information to the non-specialist and *anglicist* in an accessible manner and style.

#### References

Harkins, Jean, 1994. Bridging two worlds. Aboriginal English and crosscultural understanding. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press.

Gerhard Leitner (Berlin)