

Jean Harkins, 1994. *Bridging Two Worlds. Aboriginal English and Crosscultural Understanding*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press. xii+228 pp.

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Despite substantial work on Australian Aboriginal English (AAE) (Eagleson *et al.* 1982) there is scope for studies on whether there is one, or several forms of AAE, what their properties are, how AAE(es) relate(s) to mainstream Australian English (mAusE) on the one hand and pidgins and creoles on the other, how it (they) interact(s) with indigenous languages, and what educational implications are.

Jean Harkins' (JH) *Bridging Two Worlds* (B2W) casts new light on descriptive, sociolinguistic, and educational aspects. Based on the multilingual speech community associated with Yipirinya School (YS) in Alice Springs (AS) (Cook/Buzzacott 1994), it analyses the English of a range of speakers in a range of situations. JH's knowledge of Arrernte, an indigenous language, and of the language repertoire at large enables her to situate sociolinguistic and educational issues inside the community, in particular their desire for a 'two-way' school, a school that make it possible for children to move between indigenous languages and English.<sup>1</sup>

B2W consists of three parts. The first (ch.s 1, 2) develops the goals and methodology of the study that was carried out over a period of several years. The second (ch.s 3-6) surveys grammatical and lexical features of Yipirinya Aboriginal English (YAE). Ch. 6, the most original part, deals with semantics, pragmatics, and the relationship of language with culture. The final part (ch. 7) argues for the systemic independence of YAE and leads into educational issues. A map of the community, demographic and macro-sociolinguistic data, four samples of YAE in different speech contexts, a sizeable bibliography, and an index complement B2W.

To turn to part 1. YAE is one component of the community's speech repertoire that is characterized by a high degree of individual and societal multilingualism along kinship, family-ties, and dreaming associations. English is neither merely an out-group language nor only a *lingua franca* between members of the different language communities in the town camps. It is also that, of course, but indigenous languages can be, and are, used in these functions. English is the 'last resort' for in-group communication if no indigenous language suggests itself on kinship and/or situational terms. There are three forms of English: a pidgin that developed in the cattle stations of the late last century and is still used by some older people; YAE, an English that draws on different resources but is based on a system in its own right; and 'flash' or town English, i.e. an English closer to the local 'white' English.

YAE is the norm inside the community. It is "a single variety of English, a variety distinguished from others primarily by the nature and range of variation found in it" (p 180). It "is characterized by a wider range of syntactic and semantic possibilities than standard English" (p 180), draws on native languages, language contact from earlier periods, viz. mAusE, and pidgin/creoles. As a corollary, AAE cannot be a unified variety, there must be a range of AEes.

Part 2 deals with the structure of YAE. Systems of the NP, e.g. number in nouns, determiners and pronouns, case, possessive constructions, and prepositions are discussed in ch. 3. Ch. 4 looks at transitivity, tense and aspect, e.g. the difference between *been* and *was*, the future, contracted forms, mood, and the imperative.

<sup>1</sup> 'Two-way' schools are a much discussed concept in Aboriginal education. cf. Hartman *et al.*'s collection (1994).

Features at clause level, connectives, causal relations, and ellipsis, are dealt with in ch. 5.

Three types of arguments recur in the discussion of the data to substantiate the claim that YAE is a distinct variety of English: (i) YAE replaces redundant features in mAusE, realizing the semantic (or syntactic) contrasts in other ways; (ii) YAE draws on the indigenous language systems to re-structure English or, put differently, to create an Aboriginal system of English; and (iii) YAE continues partly the pidgin and creole traditions and the language contact features of the past. Let me turn to illustrations.

Plural marking is optional (Eagleson *et al.* 1982; Malcolm 1995):

- (1) We bin went to Hermansburg and then we saw all them *blokes* (=pl. marked) racing with *horses* (=pl. marked)  
 (2) Yesterday morning after school we went with all the white *kid* (=pl. unmarked)...

Marking decreases with informality, but a correlation with the presence of other "non-standard" features could not be established. More importantly, marking may be compensated for by co-textual marking:

- (3) And *them horse* [=pl.], we bin takem, right, but *that horse* [=pl. unmarked] bin turn back and *they* [=pl.] bin run back

If plurality is marked at the beginning of a discourse, it is optional from then on. Discourse marking is one option in the dominant local languages, Arrernte and Luritja, which mark number, with a range of devices (but not as noun affixes), only if the discourse requires it. Other factors too may contribute to non-marking. For instance, as fricatives are not phonemes in many indigenous languages (=negative L1-transfer) and have low audibility (=psycholinguistic feature), JH argues, number marking may disappear.<sup>2</sup> As its absence is frequent with hunting/gathering activities,

- (5) We was picking for wild onion

YAE seems to generalize a semantic-based sub-rule in mAusE, e.g. "We had chicken for dinner".

JH believes the number system may be more complex still. Drawing on Wierzbicka (1986), she argues that there may be number vagueness, semantic indeterminacy. YAE would then have a ternary number system, viz. singular, plural, and unspecified:

- (6) Brucie got a *texta* [=sg.]  
 (7) Duncan got *marbles* [=pl.]  
 (8) Kevin got car [=indet.]

Although local indigenous languages have a four-term system, viz. singular, dual, plural, indeterminate number (p 48), the dual in YAE only shows up in the pronoun system (see below). JH clearly believes YAE to be rather similar to L1s.

The system of quantifiers and determiners shows similar tendencies. For instance, *all* in (9) is used as a plural particle, indeterminate (definite) number can be seen in (10)

- (9) We picking all onion  
 (10) We got 0 (=zero determiner) cooldrink

<sup>2</sup> That argument is adduced later to explain the fact that contracted verb forms ('s, 've, 're), cf(4), are variable:

- (4a) She always speak[s] Luritja  
 (4b) All them big boy[s've] gone somewhere there  
 (4c) We[re] going back now

Somewhat counter to her own text (p 60) that indeterminate number is signalled through absence of determiner, (11) shows that *that* can mark number indeterminacy:

- (11) We told them not to take *that egg* (=def. unspecified def. number)

Duality, as just mentioned, is reflected in the pronoun system, viz. in such phrases as *we-two, us-two, you-two* or *them-two*, or also, 'me-'n'-pronoun', e.g. *me-'n'-you*. YAE also has a potential distinction between *you* (sg.) and *you-mob* (=pl.). Third person singular pronoun *ee* or *im* does not distinguish gender. Again, all of these features fall in line with Arrernte and Luritja. The pidgin-derived dual form *mintupela*, lit. 'me and you fella', though is rare, while some 'non-standard' features, such as the indefinite article form *an* instead of *a* before vowels (e.g. "a emu"), and the *alone* distinction occur frequently.

To turn to the verb phrase, YAE is quite similar to mAusE as far as tense is concerned, except for the phonologically-conditioned absence of contracted, weak forms mentioned in footnote 2. But major differences appear in the use of modality, the future, the imperative, and in transitivity. In some respects JH believes YAE to converge towards mAusE, as when the *bin* as a past tense signal recedes.

To begin with transitivity and the pidgin-derived *-em* suffix in (12)

- (12) And then after that we bin chasem horse  
 (13) If you got any questions just askem

*-Em* is on the retreat but supported by the colloquial mAusE reduction of *them* to *-em*.<sup>3</sup> *Bin*, while used infrequently, is somewhat different:

- (14) We *bin* play all the way, we was playing, ... I was chasing bull around  
 (15) We went to Alice Well, from Alice Well... to Maryvale. And we *bin* come back again  
 (16) We went to Hermansburg. We *bin* swim, inna water, and we *bin* get some fish  
 (17) We *bin* went for water and we *bin* went back home  
 (18) I *bin* to Darwin, and Adelaide

*Bin*, which is well-known from pidgins, creoles, and ethnic varieties elsewhere, like *was*, can be used for the simple past. But there is a slight aspectual difference in meaning, according to JH. *Bin* can be used with completed actions as in (18), etc. but not *was* (p 83).

Let me turn to mood and modality. JH discusses a range of phenomena, such as *gotta/do you have to, will, wanta/like to*. She notes that *shall* does not occur, that deontic modals have a doubtful status (Eades 1983), that *can/can't* and *may* are used much like in mAusE, and that *might* is used to express only unpredictability. Futurity is expressed in various ways, such as through *gotta, gonna*, and *will*, cf (19) and (20):

- (19) You *gotta* put some leaves, *arratye* [=Arr.: 'okay'], tea, when that tea boil, orright?  
 (20) We still care for it, we still got the song for it, and we not *gonna* lose it, nothing  
 (21) I'll paint it

Unlike in mAusE futurity markers do not make any implication on degrees of (assumed) likelihood (p 90). (21) does not assume that the speaker would make a particular effort or commitment. To express commitment, *wanta* is used:

- (22) I *wanna* go into town

<sup>3</sup> JH suggests that this would lead to a re-interpretation of *-em* to a reduced demonstrative.

*Like to* is less commissive in contrast.

As to mood, the imperative occurs freely without the negative, authoritarian connotations of mAusE:

- (23) Give me ruler!  
(24) Get me blanket!

This use once more follows closely local Aboriginal languages (p 102f).

Chapter 6 turns to clause level phenomena of para- and hypotaxis, in partic. causality and ellipsis. Simple coordination with *and*, as in (25), appeared to be most frequent with children's YAE:

- (25) We went to Alcoota for weekend, (i) *and* we went out to bush, (ii) *and* we got some goanna, (iii) *and* we came back to Alice Spring, (iv) we went to see the Bangtail Muster

JH notes that (iv) may actually indicate a new, viz. temporally later, activity so that the *and/zero* alternation are not accidental. Apart from *and*, *for*, *to*, and *but* are common to indicate parataxis:

- (26) Yesterday was Shane birthday. Lotta peple bin come *for* shane birthday at yesterday  
(27) We went walk, ... we went again *to* get some *langkwes* [=Arr. 'wild bananas']  
(28) We went on bush trip on Monday ... we saw emu egg ... and them boys tryin to get it, *but* we told them not to take that egg

(Note in passing that *for* in (26) does, of course, not signal subordination but a purposive adverbial noun phrase.) It seems obvious that hypotaxis is less frequent, cf (29), which is an excerpt from (5) on p 122:

- (29) We bin ride a horse, first time, *and* then we go'n ride a horse we had a good ride, *and* we bin good fun. *And then* after that we bin, we tryen to .... *And* them horse, we bin takem, right, *but* that horse ... *and* they bin run ...

Of 21 clauses 10 have *and*, 3 the phrase *and then after that*, one *and then* and *after that* respectively, 5 have no link, and one has *but*. JH comments that "[T]he temporal sequence is elegant", which it may be, but the fact remains that simple or expanded coordination is most frequent. Similar comments can be made with regard to causality, cf. (30):

- (30) (i) Aye, Duncan! (ii) That little one might get hurt! (iii) Leave that tree alone. (iv) *Arraye!* [=Arr. Hey!] (v) Sally! (vi) Duncan aye! (vii) Leave that tree alone. (viii) Kids might get hurt.... (ix) This way, look, sally, bring Duncan this way.

In this regulatory passage a mother warns her children of potential dangers. JH notes that causal links between (i) and (ii), viz. attention-getting for a reason, (vii) and (viii), etc. are unmarked lexically. In children's YAE causality is often expressed temporally, as in (29), and *because* is rarer than with adults. Relying on Dixon's (1972) explanation of a causal interpretation of two adjacent clauses as resulting from an entailment relation between them, JH argues that lack of overt marking does not signal unavailability of the notion of causality and, once again, of the proximity of YAE to Aboriginal languages.

Ellipsis, which is so strikingly frequent in classroom discourse, cf. (31), again does not signal a failure to use mAusE rules or a deficiency of YAE but rather differing cultural assumptions in context.

- (31) Teacher: D'you wanna say something about your picture?  
Child: Yep. Cake.  
Teacher: Whose cake is it?  
Child: Shane

However, YAE does differ somewhat from mAusE in that it allows ellipsis in cases where mAusE does not, viz. of subjects even if con-textual retrieval is not possible:

- (32) (i) We went with Christine, (ii) with bus, (iii) to get alla wild bananas, (iv) and come back Trucking Yard, (v) drop us off, (vi) then eat them wild bananas

There is a subject switch from (iv) to (v) and (vi), which must be recovered by co-textual, situational knowledge. That reflects "an Aboriginal economy of information" (p 138). YAE speakers assume that "unless one is party to this body of [contextual, G.L.] knowledge, one has no "right" to understand a discourse that relies on it" (p 138).

Ch.s 3-5 indicate considerable differences between YAE and mAusE that can be related to YAE's tendency to draw on indigenous language systems, older pidgins and on non-standard mAusE. Ch. 6 continues with lexico-semantic and pragmatic matters, relating them to Aboriginal culture and arguing that YAE expresses a different semantic system from mAusE.

Words that classify the surrounding world tend to correspond more or less exactly to Aboriginal words, cf. table:

English word	referential scope in YAE	expressions in
<i>fire</i>	firewood, firesticks, matches, heaters	(i) Arrernte, (ii) Luritja (i) ure; (ii) waru
<i>rock</i>	covers stones and pebles, also hills (=roc formations)	(i) pwerte; (ii) puli
<i>grass</i>	soft-stemmed plants, includ. herbs, wildflowers	(i) therrke; (ii) ukiri
<i>tree</i>	includ. shrubs, bushes	(i) pwene; (ii) punu
<i>bird</i>	includ. bats, large, flying insects	(i) thipe; (ii) tjulpu

Environmental features frequently express a relationship with people. Thus, *meat* includes *live game*; one 'hunts for meat'. *Bush meat* applies to dead and living animals, *bush tucker* to naturally occurring sweet substances.

The verb *kill*, like Arrernte *tweme* and Luritja *punganyi*, applies to any kind of forceful impact whether or not death results,

- (33) gotta *kill* them kid, hittem to school

Compounding and change of lexico-semantic class are often resorted to to create new meanings. Thus, *flood-water* is water coming down from a river in contrast to *rain-water*. *Longtime* means 'a long time before now' and not 'for a long time from now', *always* means 'frequently'. *Families* is used to designate individual members rather than more than one family.

There are significant differences in other fields, such as body parts, culture, business and ceremony, and emotions. To turn to the latter.

The notion of *shame* is a key Aboriginal feature. JH mentions expressions like *getting shame*, *being ashamed*, *get (real) shame*, but says that expressions like



*ashamed of oneself, ashamed for someone else* are unknown. Shame is connected with reactions like wanting to run away, hiding one's face, wanting to opt out of a situation, etc. because one does not know 'how to do the right thing'. This is in sharp contrast, of course, with mAusE where wrong-doing is the key element that causes shame. In German, there would be a near cognate concept, viz. *schüchtern*.

The notion of *sorry* is associated with 'death', and so there is *sorry business* for 'funeral', one may be *too sorry to work*, one may *cry for* a deceased, even a place. *Worrying for one's relatives or country* may make people unable to work. If someone is described as *sulky* one may expect a fight to break out.

Semantic conflation may be triggered by phonological processes that lead to homonymy. The words *sacred/secret* are pronounced alike as [tikrit], *buy/pay* as [pai], *angry/hungry* as [a gri], etc. While homonymy is, of course, well-known, semantic conflation involves more than that, viz. the reanalysis of the words' concepts because of their semantic proximity (ch. 6.5). Thus, *sacred things* are normally also *secret*, *buying and paying* designate an action of transfer, *hunger causes anger*, etc. The conflation of *way/why/where*, which JH transcribes as *waye*, deserves mention as it has been causing problems in court cases (162f). Sentences such as

- (34) Somewaye [=way or where] over there  
 (35) That's waye [=the way or where] they come through the range, there  
 (36) That's waye [=why or where] we stated this school; teach these kids

are often multiply ambiguous.

B2W, thus, abounds in data that support her claim that YAE expresses a new semantic system, a system of meaning akin to Aboriginal culture and needs. She concludes:

"This variety of Aboriginal English is different from both standard and non-standard non-Aboriginal English... it enables its speakers to express anything that can be expressed in standard English... Its speakers also use it to express ideas that are not often expressed in standard English." (p 179).

She vigorously defends YAE against any implication that it might be a restricted code, emphasizing that "by virtue of the fact that its speakers can call upon all of the linguistic resources at their disposal..." (p 190). To speak in Kachru's terms, YAE is a 'new English', and, consequently, AAE is not a unified phenomenon either. Since these Englishes co-exist within the larger Australian speech community with mAusE, they must lead to intercultural mis-understandings, in particular in politically and socially sensitive areas.

B2W's does raise some critical points.

To begin with data analysis. With regard to number and contracted forms JH draws on a multiplicity of factors, such as L1-transfer, interlanguage, and psycholinguistic causes. Their interaction is not discussed and the claim that YAE has an L1-based system is arguable. Moreover, the claim that AAE's number system includes indeterminate number seems to be based, or derived, solely from Wierzbicka (1983), it does not emerge from the data. Elsewhere, she argues that deontic modality does not exist but surely the free use of imperatives does express deonticity.

The second point concerns the use and debate of theoretical models. JH adopts an approach to AAE that emphasizes the semantic and pragmatic aspects and the notion of 'code'. While she gives due consideration to form, viz. in her discussion of nominal,

verbal systems, and regarding ellipsis, she favours an underlying, Aboriginal-language-based semantic system. This preference comes out even more strongly in her analysis of cohesion, modality, and lexico-semantics. She endorses Wierzbicka's natural semantics model, speech act theory, etc., which allow her to align herself with a Kachruan-type of interpretation, viz. that YAE is a self-contained system. Granting that, JH argues that mAusE systems prevail in general. It remains unclear whether AAE users work within *one* system of English or switch between *two*.

The third point concerns her criticism of Hallidayan systemic grammar, the theory endorsed in much current work on AAE. According to her, that theory is culture-biased, circular, and betrays those it alleges to support (in partic. ch. 5.1). She argues that it starts out with pre-conceived, unempirical notions that are then applied to a language variety. If they are found to exist, then the underlying meanings are available in that variety, if not, the meanings are said to be absent. This appears to be the major line of argumentation in Walker (1982) but it would seem that this is not a necessary feature of the model.<sup>4</sup>

The fourth point is about educational implications already foreshadowed in these points. If YAE and, by implication AAEs are self-contained varieties, then the question arises what the target for school language use should be. This issue is even more urgent as the YS community desires a 'two-way' English, i.e. an English that allows people to express themselves and to access to the outside world. While self-expression might conceivably be limited to YAE, accessing the world surely relies on mAusE. Learning to use English as an outgroup language may necessitate a different attitude to 'flash' urban English by educators (Malcolm 1995).

To conclude. The independence hypothesis leads to the inference that AAE is not homogenous linguistically, that there is no one such ethnic variety (and how could there be since Aborigines never formed *one* ethnic entity). The question arises whether AAE spoken in active multilingual areas such as the YA community in Central Australia differs from AAE in mainly monolingual urban ones? Would her arguments in favour of L1-transfer also apply to urban AAE?

B2W gives rise to important questions for sociolinguistics, viz. on what model speakers operate when they draw on a mixed variety, educational linguistics, viz. what should be the target norm, and theoretical linguistics, viz. how can data be incorporated into some model and what are the educational, applied consequences of theories. Such questions can be formulated more clearly than with research based on the simplistic 'how different is AAE'-approach. And B2W does away with the implication that one strategy would do for all Aborigines.

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<sup>4</sup> Her criticism should not be dismissed easily since functional grammar appears to be the most dominant linguistic school in educational linguistics at large. It certainly should be criticised in depth (Threadgold xxx).

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