

Hartman, Deborah, John Henderson, eds., 1994. *Aboriginal languages in education*. Alice Springs, N.T.: Institute of Aboriginal Development. Pp x+389.

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Indigenous Australian language maintenance has been on the political agenda since the Northern Territory started its bilingual education programs in 1972. Lo Bianco's *A national policy on languages* (1987) and the *White Paper on Australia's language*. *The Australian language and literacy policy* (1991) gave it a boost and committees at Commonwealth and State levels looked into needs, made suggestions, implemented programs or supported community initiatives. The Institute of Aboriginal Development is one institution that carries out applied educational research, assists in training and materials design, production and distribution.

Aboriginal languages in education (ALiE) surveys programs (part 1) and issues (part 2) up to 1991-3. Two appendixes, maps, illustrations, and an index facilitate cross-checks. Answers to a program checklist (Appendix 1) from ten schools in Central Australia (East Western Australia (WA), central Northern Territory (NT)), north WA, Queensland (Qld), New South Wales (NSW), and South Australia (SA) (map, p 22) are the backbone of part 1. Seventeen papers on issues like goals of language maintenance; roles of the school, staff, and parents/community; teacher training; case studies; teacher training; assessment; materials design; role of language centres; etc. make up part 2. I will focus on some recurrent themes.

The programs in part 1 are not the only ones, of course. In fact, as one reads Amery's "Heritage and second language programs" (pp 159-161), Hoogenraad's "Grassroots Aboriginal language and culture programs in schools in the Barkly and Sandover regions of the Northern Territory" (pp 190-1), Gale's "Bilingual education programs in Aboriginal Schools", an impressive picture of activities emerges that attempt to respond to the state of the language(s), local community attitudes and needs, etc. There are some general factors that affect the success or failure of such programs (leaving aside funding and staff turnover).

- (i) The level of language maintenance correlates closely with living conditions in either an urban or rural environment. In The Kimberley's and north Qld many communities still live on traditional land and according to traditional customs. Others, who had been forced off their land, were brought together in missions, which created a new social and language texture. Children of diverse language backgrounds were housed in dormitories, given into the care of foster parents and were forbidden to 'use languages'. Cattle stations, farms, etc. made Aborigines seek employment away from their communities. The war and post-war mobility, the media, etc. have further weakened the traditional networks and increased mixed urbanised communities. Such reasons explain the loss and poor maintenance of languages (Hoogenraad, p 173). They are rarely viable as full languages and even where they are maintained well, they tend to be used as expressions of identity and of traditional cultural values rather than for daily communicative purposes.

Programs must be sensitive to the language situation. Where languages have been lost, as in most urban areas and the south-east of Australia, *retrieval* is the primary task. That leads to *awareness or heritage* programs which aim to familiarise children with what little can be known (e.g. Donaldson "Alphabet books. New South Wales"). Where they have been maintained better *revival and renewal* programs may be the answer. In the rarer cases in The Kimberley's or north Qld *maintenance* programs are called for that use languages even as media of instruction (e.g. Gale, Amery, Baardy "The impact of the bilingual program at Yuenmumu, 1974-1993").

(ii) The wider community is crucial for the success of programs. While the school can assist in revival, maintenance, etc., it cannot guarantee success, as many papers argue. Programs depend, therefore, strongly on the community. Hoogenraad presents a list of supporting factors (pp 180-1). He also describes the frequent suspicion that maintenance ideas "have been planted by outsiders" (p 180). Harris's "Teaching Aboriginal languages in Aboriginal schools: some issues" argues for a higher degree of honesty in who wants what and who is prepared to help to whatever level. In supportive communities, teachers will have to act as models of language, but, following traditional customs, elders should assume decision-taking roles. But even in such environments there may be one inhibiting factor, *viz.* the prescriptivist attitudes by the elders on the ways adolescents and young people 'use languages'. Harris rightly raises the point of the status of languages amongst the young (p 133).

(iii) Much of the conflicting views has to do with the "gulf between the teacher and the school, on the one hand, and the Aboriginal community on the other" (Hoogenraad, p 179). Amery is one of many who raise the issue of 'ownership'. "Aboriginal languages are," he says, "fundamentally different to other languages spoken in Australia in that they are considered to be the property of the speakers or their descendants in the same way that land, songs, ceremonies, designs, etc. are owned. It is vitally important that Aboriginal groups maintain ownership and control and are consulted at every level." (p 149).

While many programs were initiated and run by white staff, the roles of Aboriginal Education Workers (AEW) and/or part-time, voluntary language teachers, etc. are no longer enough. Aboriginalisation of the system is seen as an unavoidable move. The widely discussed Yipirinya school in Alice Springs (e.g. Cook/Buzzacott "Yipirinya School"), Gwen and John Bucknall's paper on Aboriginal Independent Schools in WA, and Crowe's "Aboriginal languages in teacher training at Batchelor college" are cases in point. Yipirinya school is a highly successful independent school, as are the WA ones. Batchelor college near Darwin offers teacher training and linguistics courses for Aboriginal education.

(iv) While most programs cannot hope for more than reinforce cultural awareness, more is possible when languages have been maintained so that there is hope for their use as true communicative vehicles. In such situations the question of their future status and use has to be raised. Harris argues for domain differentiation, and believes there are two domains, the 'Aboriginal domain', which is not limited to 'traditional things', and the 'white' one. English and indigenous languages should be assigned complementary roles, he argues. But programs should not start with domain differentiation but with the definition of the contexts in which indigenous languages should be used. McConvell's paper "Two-way exchange and language maintenance in Aboriginal schools", in contrast, advocates one interpretation of the principle two-way education. Rather than going for a kind of diglossia, which ultimately weakens indigenous languages, he believes in their use for all purposes.

These two concepts currently characterise educational debates. There is a lot to Harris's concept as it makes lesser demands on language elaboration and standardisation, McConvell's version of two-way education appeals more to schools like Yipirinya Schools (Harkins 1994). It will ultimately be the responsibility of the communities concerned to decide but they will also have to meet certain outcome standards as defined in the Aboriginal Languages Framework, etc.

According to the editors ALiE is intended for those involved in language programs, such as teachers, schools, and education departments (p ix).¹ But the list of readers is much larger than that and includes Australianists, specialists on bilingual programs in minority situations, language planners, educationalists, etc. The book is excellently produced, well illustrated and easy to access. The index could have been more comprehensive. Thus, there are no entries on language names, AAE and Kriol or *lingua franca*, which would have mentioned Walmajarri (cf p 46). The quality of individual papers, of course, varies. But one must not forget that writers project their enthusiasm and frustrations. Even academic contributions reveal a sense of urgency, controversies between white and black Australians. ALiE is a fascinating account of Aboriginal Australia.

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¹ Other important issues raised are, for instance, the relationship of such programs with LOTE (McConvell, Hoogenraad, Nicholls), curriculum development (Hartman), testing (McConvell, Goddard), teacher training (Sharp/Injje, Crowe, Tindale), the role of language centres (Marmion).