

Eades, Diana, ed., 1995. *Language in evidence. Issues confronting Aboriginal and multicultural Australia*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press. Pp xii+289.

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There is an interesting difference between European and American work on linguistic and communicative practices in courtroom settings. In the United States ethnicity, in particular Black Americans, has played a much greater role than in Europe. Here it was social class that was at the forefront of investigations. Australia follows the American pattern as the title of Diana Eade's collection *Language in evidence* (LiE) suggests. Given the international research background it is somewhat surprising though that the book is "the first book ... entirely devoted to the Australian setting." (p vii).

LiE is a collection of ten papers most of which derived from workshops. There are three parts. The first looks at the language of witnesses within the context of Australia's law system and international agreements that Australia has signed, but not necessarily translated into national legislation. There are four papers by Greta Bird ("International law, natural justice and the language rights in Australia"), Russel Goldflam ("Silence in court! Problems and prospects in Aboriginal legal interpreting"), Michael Cooke ("Aboriginal evidence in the cross-cultural courtroom"), and Michael Walsh ("Tainted evidence: literacy and traditional knowledge in an Aboriginal land claim"). The second part deals with the use of linguist specialists and interpreters in the court cases. Marie-Thérèse Jensen describes her role of interpreter in "Linguistic evidence accepted in the case of a non-native speaker of English". Diana Eades also looks at a particular case in "Aboriginal English on trial: the case for Stuart and Condren". John Gibbons is concerned with "What got lost? The place of electronic recording and interpreters in police interviews". He deals with situations that may lead to a criminal charge. Finally, Heather Bowe and Kate Storey discuss the role of phoneticians in identifying speakers by means of spectrograms, lexico-grammar and idiolectal style features. The paper bears the title of "Linguistic analysis as evidence of speaker identification: demand and response". The last part of LiE looks at the particularly typical Anglo-Saxon tradition, viz. that of offensive language. There are two papers, one on "Offensive language: a legal perspective" by Bill Walsh and the other by Brian Talyor on "Offensive language: a linguistic and sociolinguistic perspective".

Most papers deal with minor criminal charges. There is, however, a more serious criminal case in Bowe/Storey and an Aboriginal land claim by Walsh. The majority of papers deal with Aborigines, except Jensen, Bowe/Storey, Walsh and Taylor, the latter two covering the entire community. LiE demonstrates: (i) that legislation and legal practices continue to disadvantage members of non-mainstream communities; (ii) that different communication practices and language systems of Aborigines (Aboriginal English and traditional languages) and of NESB Australians are not taken note of as they should be if principles of equality of access were strictly adhered to; and (iii) that there are crucial differences in the degrees of disadvantages (Taylor). On the positive side one should add that the growing awareness of communicative issues in the legal community augurs well for medium-term improvements.

The papers do demonstrate a fascinating interdisciplinary awareness. One might add that the Bird's paper provides crucial legal background to an understanding of the issues and that Taylor, himself a marvellously competent speaker of broad Australian English and ocker, stands out for his acute observations on offensive language and the overall ethnographic framework. Eade's paper is an interesting case study on how Aboriginal English disadvantages defendants.

LiE is confined to oral proceedings in the courtroom or in the police interview. One will hope for studies of the written dimension, e.g. the judgement, summons, etc., which, as German research has shown, disadvantages socially underprivileged participants and no doubt members of ethnic communities. The book is excellently produced, full of data with an excellent index. Without implying any adverse criticism, one cannot fail to note that European research is entirely unknown and that there is a need for closer cooperation in the future.