

Ian Malcolm, 1995. *Language and communication enhancement for two-way education. Report*. Perth: Edith Cowan University in collaboration with the Education Department of Western Australia. xvi+184 pp.

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Educational issues of Aborigines (and Torres Strait Islanders) and the role of language(s) have been discussed for many years amongst applied linguists, education departments, and the public. The problem, since it has always been conceived of as a problem, has triggered many studies (eg. Hartman/Henderson 1994) and government reports (eg. Groome/Hamilton 1995; Kerr 1992) on the respective roles of Aboriginal languages and Aboriginal English (AE) in this domain, quite apart from the descriptive work that was necessary to make recommendations.

Up until the 1960s the official educational policy and practice enforced assimilation to English and the extinction of indigenous languages. Flint (1968) is an example of how structuralist-contrastive linguistics served those goals. He firmly believed that AE was deficient, it "seriously impair[s] mutual intelligibility" (1968:14), and suggested Aboriginal communities should become diglossic, viz. accept (standard) English as the high variety. If the political goal of "social and cultural assimilation" (1968:19) succeeded, he believed, the use of the low variety, AE, would become unnecessary and it would disappear. His contrastive study was to identify major learning difficulties so that the transition to the 'high' variety would become simpler. That, of course, did not happen. And no mention is made of even the existence of indigenous languages.

Since then things have changed although the educational success of Aboriginal children is still very low indeed. Thus, the use of indigenous languages as a vehicle of learning/teaching and bilingual methods have been trialled, first in the Northern Territory, then elsewhere. AE has begun to be seen as a 'proper' way of talking for children rather than something that had to be banned. While banning it, does not seem to be done on a large scale, implicit negative teacher evaluations still do a lot of damage. It deprives children of their pride and self-confidence. From the early 70s a bicultural approach, the two-way education, has been developed in the Northern Territory and spread to other States. Two-way means that two cultures and languages are to be given equal weight and recognition and that both languages should be used and taught. The notion is not without problems and controversies.

In most cases (Hartmann/Henderson 1994) it applies to a special way of bilingual education when both indigenous languages and English are taught, whether for complementary uses according to a division of domains or for use in all domains. That holds for those parts of Australia where indigenous languages are still spoken. But it has also been applied to cases where Aborigines no longer speak indigenous languages but use AE. In the past teaching here implied the replacement of AE by mainstream Australian English, at best its acceptance for out of the school uses. English teaching was seen as a special case of second language teaching. In this context two-way education is taken to mean that AE should be accepted as what the children bring to school and standard mainstream Australian English be taught as a second, complementary dialect. In this way, the pride of students and their learning success could be enhanced.

The book under review, Malcolm (1995), adopts that approach. It starts with the assumption that non-indigenous teachers must have respect for the two cultures, be aware of the communicative strategies of indigenous children, and be able to apply this to the development of educational strategies and to curriculum design (1). AE is considered a (range of) distinct dialect(s) of English (19) that draws on a variety of resources: indigenous languages, creoles such as Kriol and Torres Strait Creole (depending on where it is used), and mainstream

Australian English both in its broad and standard versions (22f). As a range of dialects it varies according to area of use (dialectal dimension) and educational or other background of its speakers (sociolectal and stylistic dimension).

The report outlines key features of AE, its history, and uses. It describes a project that involved linguists from Edith Cowan University in Perth and teachers from Western Australian schools. Participating teachers had to investigate their Aboriginal students' forms of English, attend a series of in-service training schemes, and were invited to acquire a special certificate after an exam. The report outlines a future training course for teachers in Aboriginal communities or in schools with a heavy intake of Aboriginal students.

Malcolm (1995) is an extremely carefully devised project and project report. It is relevant to teacher training departments, anglicistics, applied linguistics, and, beyond that, to researchers with an interest in minority education and intercultural communication.

References

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