

Paulin G. Djité, 1994. *From language policy to language planning. An overview of languages other than English in education.* Deakin, A.C.T.: National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia. pp ii+170.

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Australia's 250 languages divide into three groups of speakers: the multiethnic group of users of mainstream Australian English in all its manifestations; (mainly recent) migrants of non-English and English-speaking background; Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.<sup>1</sup> Mention must be made also of contact language forms for interethnic communication, such as English at the workplace, mesolectal varieties of Aboriginal English, Kriol and Torres Strait Islander creole (Leitner forthc.).

Socio-political, economic and cultural factors, mainly a result of post-war migration, made languages a political issue in the early 1970s and provided the pressure for a policy that was to look into the dynamically expanding language ecology. Based on the policies of social justice and equity, which imply language rights and absence of discrimination for language reasons, the policy was to spell out the language needs of, and provisions in, a socially just and equitable society that redefined itself as a part of the wider Asian-Pacific geo-political and economic context.

The propagation of (Australian) English as Australia's national language was the nationally cohesive starting point. But maintenance and provision of LOTEs at all levels of the education system and for *all* Australians were to be promoted. General English, selected skills or basic literacy in English, and translating and interpreting services were offered to those who were unable to participate fully in contexts, such as the law, health, social services, for lack of English competence. Primary, secondary, tertiary education, as well as the adult sector became the focus of language programs.

Social justice and equality would ideally have required the promotion of all languages that happen to be in Australia. But choices had to be made. Lo Bianco's influential *National policy on languages* (1987) (NLP) designated nine Languages Other Than English (LOTEs) as "Languages of Wider Teaching" (LWT), viz. Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Bahasa Malay, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish. The *White Paper* (1991) increased that number to fourteen. States and Territories identified eight LWC as State priority languages that the Commonwealth supported with grants. LWC were chosen on the basis of criteria to do with the status of the language(s) at national, State, or international level. International status is a compromise between several factors, such as number of speakers, use as a foreign language, use in several, rather than one country, trade relationships, etc.

To inform policy formulation and implementation, the NLLIA commissioned 'profiles' of the key languages. The profiles contained data on (i) their position in the education system, in partic. since the acceptance of Lo Bianco (1987), (ii) factors promoting or inhibiting their spread in education, (iii) their status as a community language, and (iv) their role for Australia in the world context.

<sup>1</sup> English-speaking migrants from Great Britain, New Zealand, the United States, and to a lesser extent from Ireland and Canada make up a large proportion of migrants. Their English is not part of mainstream English although, of course, they are not the target of language provisions unless they lack basic literacy.

Djité's *From language policy to language planning* (FLPLP) is a part of that context of policy monitoring. Ch. 1 retraces the major steps in the development of a language policy. The shift from social justice and cultural enrichment arguments in favour of LOTEs to economy-driven ones in the wake of the economic depression from the late 1980s to early 1990s comes out clearly. Ch. 2 complements the picture with data on State and Territory initiatives. Ch. 3 continues the theme of economic argumentation and surveys the ambiguous business reactions. That topic is narrowed down in ch. 5 to the nine LWT but the ill-placed ch. 4 on the 'theory' of policy and planning interrupts the line of presentation. Ch. 6 compares the content of the nine volumes of *Unlocking Australia's language potential* (=Profiles) and concludes with a general assessment.

There is no space to re-iterate details on LWT's status as international and community languages, nor is there space for the educational sector. It is interesting to note that some European languages, such as French and German, are strong in education while others from Asia with greater numbers of speakers fare poorly. However, as the Profiles are based on short time segments only, viz. the period from 1987 to the year of publication, one should expect the picture to change when strong primary school enrolments reach the tertiary sector. German and other languages will have to do more to remain at a high level, as Djité remarks.

Some recurrent themes should be mentioned. The economic argument has been central to the promotion LOTEs, but business has not responded well to the claim that LOTEs are economically useful. True, the customer-contact domain in the tourist industry will experience a tremendous growth by 2000, the year of the Olympics. But whether demand will stabilize at that level thereafter, remains to be seen. Djité argues that business underestimates the benefits of LOTEs, pointing to trends in trade patterns with non-English speaking Asian countries. Despite her (outdated) data, the trends have accentuated, rather than slowed down. But if Korea, Vietnam, Japan, China have turned out to be key trading partners, they have become that despite Australia's lack of language and cultural competence. Language needs are met, for instance, by employing local staff that is more deeply culturally embedded than any Australian with no native background can ever hope to be. One should not use such figures blindly to argue for language needs. It also looks unrealistic to expect middle-sized companies to cater for several Asian, or other languages. There is a point in focussing on 'secondary' benefits of LOTE learning, viz. the transfer of cultural sensitivities from one situation to another. Communicative and culturally oriented curricula enable learners to shift intellectually from one 'foreign' situation to another.

Another recurrent theme concerns the implementation of LOTE requirements. Admittedly, things are changing to the better, for instance Victoria is planning to require one LOTE until Year 12. But the high attrition of LOTEs in Years 11 and 12 and low tertiary sector figures may well have to do with the fact that LOTEs are only required for one or two years. Not much, one would guess, can be expected in such a short time, let alone an appreciation of major cultural differences or of the religious, literary or other traditions. Such topics seem to give way to short-term 'cultural' factors.

Related to this is the third theme, the provision of teachers, training and materials design. Australia has made great straits forward in explicit curriculum statements and testing methods but teacher training is one factors that tends to inhibit the success of LOTE teaching. As for materials, Djité argues that they should be locally-produced,

rather than imported from countries where languages are spoken natively. Similar points have been made in connection with SBS's reliance on 'native' products as against local ones as in much of community radio. That argument deserves careful consideration. After all, Pakistan and India increasingly insist on local materials. But for them that policy signals a shift away from exo-normativity and the acceptance of a native norm. For Australia this would amount to LOTE teaching as community languages. That sentiment is not widely shared, least of all by business and in relation to LWC. The question arises which type or argument is most beneficial: the social justice one, the cultural-enrichment one, or the economic-strategic one. Australia will have to argue the implications of these arguments. Cultural enrichment and, less obviously, social justice would promote LOTEs as *community* languages with their specific linguistic features. Economic thinking emphasizes extra-national and international status.

A few critical remarks at the end. Djité makes little attempt to update information in the Profiles, which constitute her data base. Figures on trade patterns, student enrolments and attitudes are sometimes seriously dated or incomparable. Readability would have benefitted from an index, the bibliography fails to mention Brandle/Walsh (1982). Criticisms apart, Djité's book makes interesting reading on a subject that compares well with foreign language teaching in Germany and continental Europe.

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