

The Habitat of Australia's Aboriginal Languages



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The Habitat of Australia's Aboriginal Languages

Past, Present and Future

edited by

Gerhard Leitner

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Mouton de Gruyter
Berlin · New York

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This long-standing collaboration has led us to formulate the idea of a joint edited publication on the Aboriginal language habitats. It was meant to reflect a common approach to the themes of the book and to include leading experts in the field in Western Australia and across the nation. We are grateful to those who have so enthusiastically taken up that proposal and we are particularly grateful to the many Aboriginal Australians who have given us their advice.

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September 2006

Gerhard Leitner, Berlin
Ian G. Malcolm, Perth

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Introduction

Gerhard Leitner and Ian G. Malcolm

Australia's Aborigines are a group of peoples that attract deep interest worldwide but are, despite the wealth of information available, little understood. Though a mere 2.5 per cent of Australia's current population, they are important far beyond their demographic strength. Their symbolic association with their long past history is willingly adopted by Australia and its writers to claim a history that reaches beyond colonization. Aborigines have suffered massive losses in a short period of time. Yet some of their cultures, religions and languages have survived, have been revived or re-created – in some regions more than in others – in a form that represents Australia's Aborigines of today. Despite on-going controversies, they have found a place inside the socio-cultural context in which they had been forced to exist. Research into a range of aspects of their language heritage is extensive. There are authoritative studies for many fields we are concerned with that provide great depth. But many studies are compartmental, focusing on their topic and ignoring what holds across language types or sociolinguistic issues. Many studies are not readily accessible or incompatible in content, approach or style with other publications. Many researchers, students and the public inside and outside Australia wish to have the 'broad picture', a comprehensiveness in coverage that is academically founded, yet accessible to the non-specialist. The editors thought that a volume by leading experts that would bring the overview and depth in exemplifying major themes would help overcome the shortage in accessible information on Australia's Aborigines. It should point to parallels in related disciplines and world regions and show that the language habitat of Aboriginal Australians can fruitfully be studied and taught either from an Australian angle, from that of other world regions or from a theoretical angle.

1. Background, motivation and goal

The backbone of the understanding of the current Aboriginal language habitat is, of course, the nature of contact that began with the colonization of the continent in 1788. Contact has had pervasive effects on the development of languages within their (prior) socio-cultural and historical contexts – or, in other words, their *habitat*. Over a long period of migration, colonization

brought with it a plethora of languages that had had to settle. And as English was rising to its current status as Australia's national language (see Leitner 2004a), a hierarchical texture emerged that has left little secure and enduring space to other languages, be they Indigenous or non-English migrant. There is no space here to develop that theme, which is a matter of political history and of particular disciplines (see e.g. Jupp 1988; 2001; Leitner 2006), in detail here. Yet, to the extent that the documented social history relates to language, we will mention it below and several chapters in this book cover further details.

What we do want to emphasize at the beginning of this preface is that the history of contact is neither restricted to colonization, nor is colonization confined to British colonization, nor to Australia. Contact was embedded in a long history of European exploration. Post-colonial developments cannot be isolated from the history in other world regions that were affected by colonization throughout the 19th century, nor from the development of scientific disciplines and of general social and cultural politics. The linguistic solutions found for language or communication problems always drew on similar solutions to those found in other parts of the world. In the paragraphs below we will relate some of the details of the pre-colonial period in Australia (which, incidentally, overlapped with the colonial one to the mid 1830s).

Rockpaintings in Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory depict the ships of European explorers and prove that Aborigines there had seen European ships skirting their land in search – unbeknown to them – of the *terra australis*, the mythical southland, which was 'their land', after all (see Leitner 2006; Morwood 2002). It was not the first contact Aborigines had with the outside. Macassan fisherman had come from Sulawesi, a part of Indonesia today, but their coming was more focused: they looked for the trepang, a much sought after commodity in China. Contact with them introduced an Arabic-Malay pidgin, which was used in the Asian-Arabic trading network north of the continent. When the Portuguese managed to upset that commercial network, a Portuguese-Arabic-Malay pidgin was introduced. The northern edges of Aboriginal Australia were thus in touch with the outside world. But how far their experiences and the knowledge of Asian and European explorers spread inland, and whether they reached the south-east, where the first penal colony was set up in 1788, we don't know. It is unlikely that they spread that far, but recounts did spread south-west and south-east.

European explorations led to the occasional contact that shaped our knowledge of Aboriginal Australia and co-determined the way contact was established and maintained during the early colonial period, at least. The history of pre-colonial contact is told well in, e.g., Kenny (1995), Marchant

(1998) and Dyer (2005). The Dutch Willem Jansz had discovered Cape York in 1602, and the Spaniard Luis Váez de Torres found the ‘Torres Strait’ passage in that same year. It was now clear that the land he and Jansz had found was not a part of New Guinea. The Dutch continued to be active between 1616 and 1644 and mapped (but did not explore) many coastal regions. Abel Tasman, who had discovered New Zealand, Tonga and Fiji, discovered Van Diemens Land in 1642. Several decades later, Willem de Vlamingh found the Swan River, the site of Perth, in Western Australia in 1697. The British William Dampier set foot on the continent’s west in 1688 and again in 1699. The French renewed their involvement by the middle of the 18th century. Jean-François de La Pérouse, Hyacinthe de Bougainville, Nicola Baudin are well-known names in the latter part of the 18th and the early decades of the 19th centuries. They visited Australia’s south-east at about the same time as Captain James Cook and Joseph Banks did in 1770 (see Leitner 2006).

A fair amount of the fauna and flora and the topography of the land in coastal regions were known before colonization. Some experiences with Aborigines had been had and related widely in Europe. That had led to two opposing images. The French Paulmier de Gonneville, who had been believed to have found the *terra australis* on his voyage in 1503, wrote of a people with a feudal political system, an agricultural economy and village life that was ‘known’ or at least comprehensible to Europeans. They could not have been Aboriginal Australians. But de Gonneville’s picture stimulated interest in exploration and a view of Aborigines as a ‘comprehensible’ people. The Dutch were the first to actually establish contact, but their descriptions focus only on physical appearances, nutrition, weapons, etc. One gets little detail on the character of the people, let alone their language. William Dampier’s depiction of the people was more detailed – but also very unfavourable:

The Inhabitants of this Country are the miserablest People in the World. The *Hodmadods* of *Monomatapa* [South Africa, GL] though a nasty People, yet for Wealth are Gentlemen to these; who have no Houses, and skin Garments, Sheep, Poultry, and Fruits of the Earth... And setting aside their Humane Shape, they differ but little from Brutes. (fr. Kenny 1995: 107)

He went on to describe parts of their material culture and added one of the rare remarks on spiritual culture: “I did not perceive that they did worship any thing” (fr. Kenny 1995: 107). On one occasion, he and his crew wanted to carry small barrels of water to their ship. As this was a heavy job, they wanted Aborigines to do it. But, he wrote, “all the signs we could make were to no purpose, for they stood like Statues, without motion, but grinn’d like so many Monkeys, staring one upon another: For these poor Creatures seem not accus-

tomed to carry Burthens.” (fr. Kenny 1995: 109). Dampier and his crew failed, though Aborigines presumably knew what they had wanted. Interaction was not achieved. Dutch reports were similarly negative. Gonzal, who came to Cape York in 1756, described a scene of more real interaction, but progress was stopped when his crew tried to kidnap some Aborigines. So without much interaction, a view formed of Aborigines as being ‘primitive savages’, barely human. The help explorers got from was often left untold. Such views were popularized in fictionalized travel reports and other ways and influenced the public’s views. An opposing picture formed at much the same time and compared Aborigines with the peoples of the Pacific islands, who had been known earlier. They were seen as the ‘noble savages’, in other words, as a *primitive* people close to the earth, happy, unfalsified by culture. That image was transferred to Aborigines and, too, made its way into literature such as the novels of Jonathan Swift, Daniel Defoe and others; it proved to be so enduring that it is often alluded to in the popular dramatic fiction and TV films. The image is often attributed to James Cook, Joseph Banks and the French of the 18th century. Their voyages were carried out in the context of significant progress in science and the growing interest in primitive cultures worldwide. The Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge had been founded 1660. It had not given much advice to Dampier, but the scientific grid it developed was given to Cook. It was a guide for explorers so that they knew what to look out for and how to classify their observations. The goals of the Royal Society were paralleled by the short-lived Société des Observations de l’Homme (1799–1804) in France (Dyer 2005); German science took a different path and was more connected to the work of individual scholars (Veit 2004). Along the lines set out by such societies, one of du Fresne’s lieutenants, for instance, described in 1772 a scene when they were observed landing by the ‘Diemenlanders’:

M. Marion ... made two sailors undress and go ashore, unarmed, carrying with them some small presents such as mirrors, necklaces etc. The Diemenlanders, seeing them acting thus, put their spears on the ground and with several gestures which marked their joy and contentment, came leaping to meet them, singing and clapping their hands. Our sailors reached the shore; they [the Aborigines] presented them with fire and then, as if to recognize this good welcome, [the sailors] handed out the trinkets they had brought. The thing that impressed them most was the mirror... The Diemenlanders could not leave looking at them ...; often they stopped to do this and on each occasion there were new expressions of astonishment... (fr. Kenny 1995: 135)

Du Fresne's report seems as factual as Cook's had been. Accommodation, a well-known psychological concept, enabled explorers to gain acceptance and to observe the customs of Aborigines. They gained some knowledge of language; their descriptions have not been studied yet. Conflicts arose due to misunderstandings and prevented a deeper acquaintance of Aboriginal people.

Like d'Entrecasteaux, Arthur Phillip stood in the tradition of the 'noble savage'. Aborigines tended to avoid contact and Phillip doubted "whether it will be possible to get any of those people to remain with us, in order to get their language, without using force; they see no advantage that can arise from us that may make amends for the loss of that part of the harbour in which we occasionally employ the boats in fishing." (*HRA* I 1788–1796: 96). It is worth quoting the advice that Lord Morton, the President of the Royal Society, had given to James Cook and Joseph Banks, the scientific advisor. It must have influenced Phillip's behaviour and attitudes towards Aboriginal people:¹

- To exercise the utmost patience and forbearance with the Natives of the several Lands where the Ship may touch...
- They are human creatures, the work of the same omnipotent Author, equally under his care with the most polished Europeans; perhaps being less offensive, more entitled to his favor.
- They are the natural, and in the strictest sense of the word, the legal possessors of the several Regions they inhabit.
- No European Nation has the right to occupy any part of their country, or settle among them without their voluntary consent...
- But the Natives ... should be treated with distinguished humanity, and made sensible that the Crew still considers them as Lords of the Country...
- Lastly, to form a Vocabulary of the names given by the Natives, to the several things and places which come under the Inspection of the Gentlemen. (fr. Kenny 1995: 70–74)

Along these lines Joseph Banks wrote this:

Thus live these I had almost said happy people, content with little nay almost nothing. Far enough removed from the anxieties attending upon riches, or even the possessions of what we Europeans call common necessities: anxieties intended maybe by Providence to counter-balance the pleasure arising from the Possession of wished for attainments, consequently increasing with increasing wealth, and in some measure keeping up the balance of happiness between the rich and the poor. (fr. Kenny 1995: 133)

1. Banks was to be the president of the Royal Society from 1788 to his death in 1820.

Cook had written:

from what I have said of the Natives of New Holland they may appear to some to be the most wretched people upon Earth, but in reality they are far more happier than we Europeans; being wholly unacquainted not only with the superfluous but the necessary Conveniences so much sought after in Europe, they are happy in not knowing the use of them. They live in a Tranquillity which is not disturbed by the Inequality of Condition: The Earth and sea of their own accord furnishes them with all things necessary for life... (fr. Kenny 1995: 132f)

There lay a gulf between Dampier and Cook. The French representations of early contact, too, reflect the image of the *noble savage* but the French stopped their explorations in the 1830s.

Arthur Phillip's task of establishing friendly relations with Aboriginal people was made hard by their refusal to interact. With a sense of exasperation he wrote that

The natives still refuse to come amongst us.... I now doubt whether it will be possible to get any of those people to remain with us, in order to get their language, without using force; they see no advantage that can arise from us that may make amends for the loss of that part of the harbour in which we occasionally employ the boats in fishing. (*HRA*, vol. 1, 96)

Phillip felt compelled to turn to kidnapping. The most famous kidnappee, Bennelong, was apparently a willing learner of English and has been credited as the source of an Aboriginal English jargon to have sprung up in the early 1790s that facilitated communication during the early expansion. It spread quickly, acquired local features in various regions in the course of exploration and settlement, and eventually influenced the pidgins in Melanesia. At the end of the 19th century it creolized; it decreolized during the second half of the 20th century in parts of the north.

The 220 years which followed the beginning of colonization thus brought pervasive change to the Aboriginal cultures and societies. These changes are mentioned in the contributions to this volume whenever they are relevant to a particular issue. Generally speaking, solutions to communication problems were determined solely by the colonizers up to the mid-1960s, when Aborigines began to be active participants in the society. We have left further details of the history of these changes to individual authors, but will mention those that were crucial to linguistic developments at this point:

- the decline and loss of many traditional Aboriginal languages, while those that have been retained (at various levels of competence) have changed dramatically under the impact of contact
- the rise of a few Aboriginal language-based *lingua francas*
- the impoverishment of Aboriginal multilingualism and its reduction to a form of bilingualism that includes (varieties of) English as one of its components
- the emergence and growth of a variety of English closer to, but still distinct from, that of the settlers, i.e. Aboriginal English
- the formation of a new (post-colonial) Australian language habitat that integrates Aboriginal languages

Indigenous² languages are thus able to be seen as embedded in continuous contact from – to simplify matters somewhat – colonization till today. We want to explore how they have changed accordingly, in terms of internal structure, status, and use. We will integrate powerful theoretical linguistic studies with a perspective of contact-induced change and with the research on language shift, maintenance, recovery and documentation. A major and enduring part of the response to contact was the rise of contact languages, i.e. pidgins, creoles, *lingua francas* and ethnic varieties. Most of them were English-based; while they began as enforced and involuntary responses, and served the communicative needs with the white, European political and military power and with the settlers, they soon came to be used amongst Aborigines themselves. We are interested in tracing their origins and how they developed into adopted languages that serve to express Aboriginal identities. A particular area is the impact the Aboriginal habitat has had on English and the contemporary Australian habitat as such. The fourth area looks at the largely English-dominated public domain and how the Aboriginal habitat and its languages repertoire fares. We highlight areas that have been found to pose particular problems, such the legal domain, the education system from the primary to the tertiary sector and teacher training.

Of course, the wide scope of a book like this requires simplification and exemplification. That we have done. It also requires that the *language stories* are related to a consensual outline of history that would 'date' the developments since 1788. Though a difficult task, it is worth trying, and there are several proposals that correlate with linguistic interests, such as Jupp (1988;

2. The term *Indigenous*, usually capitalized, is sometimes used as an alternative to *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander*. In this volume the term *Aboriginal* will usually be used with the same inclusive reference.

2001), Aboriginal websites, Leitner (2004a/b; 2006; this vol.) and, from a different angle, Ramson (2002). This collection will look at the way the changes that have affected the Indigenous language habitat correlate with socio-political history. We will integrate theoretical linguistic studies and develop a perspective of contact-induced change. There is, as we have said at the beginning, a vast body of knowledge on all of the relevant areas that contributors could rely on. While research often focuses on Australia, contributors have turned to studies on analogous situations in the United States, Canada, the Pacific and elsewhere to bring out the fact that the themes of this book go beyond Australia. The American context is particularly instructive since Australia was never isolated from developments there. A case in point is Wiley's (2000) study of the history of language policies in the colonial and independent USA that compares well with what happened with regard to Aboriginal languages in Australia. Much the same is true of educational policies, the impact of Indigenous languages on English and the entire habitat, etc.

Before elaborating on the topics and the overall structure of the book, we must turn to a brief overview of past and current research. The online database edited by Gerhard Leitner, Brian Taylor and Clemens Fritz (2006) provides access to the depth and breadth of research into most themes of this book.

2. Survey of past research

We will survey past research with a bias in favour of studies relevant for this collection. Given its scope, we will look at (i) socio-political and historical studies that include the whole, pre-colonial history of Australia and studies on Aboriginal settlement and diffusion; (ii) studies of the structure and development of traditional Aboriginal languages that include changes that have occurred as a result of contact; (iii) studies on Aboriginal contact languages; and (iv) studies on language-related issues in the public arena of Australia.

To begin with the first area, there are excellent surveys of the pre-historic period, settlement and diffusion, etc. Settlement theories are crucial to the provision of the social dimension to linguistic studies that focus on the relatedness of languages. Morwood (2002) is a good and accessible book, which includes coverage of various theories of settlement. Horton (1994; 1999) relates interesting and accessible information and relate to language issues. As to the pre-colonial period of exploration, one might turn to the popular, but highly informative studies by Kenny (1995), Marchant (1998) and Dyer (2005); the latter is specifically on the explorations of the French. The period of colonization and the formation of the Commonwealth of Australia is

a matter of historical and political science, and we refrain from selecting titles (see Jupp 1998; 2001). Regarding the limited field of Aboriginal-white contact, we will mention some that have a link to language issues: Harris (1991; this vol.), Leitner (2004b; 2006; this vol.) and Koch (this vol.).

The origin, relatedness and texture of Aboriginal languages throw up central questions in linguistic typology that reach far beyond *Australian Linguistics*, as the field is called in Australia.³ The history of research is covered in many places such as Blake (1991) and recently Bower and Koch (2004), and Koch (this vol.). The comparative-historical paradigm, which maintains that (one large set of) Aboriginal languages represent a single type that descends from a single ancestor, unrelated to any other language family or type outside the continent, represents the dominant research paradigm. Bower and Koch (2004) is an authoritative collection of papers on the Pama-Nyungan languages but says nothing about the non-Pama-Nyungan languages. That gap is filled by Evans (2003). These editors maintain that this typology of languages is firmly established and finds increasing linguistic and other support. Dixon (2002), in contrast, maintains that there is no way of finding enough evidence to reconstruct a proto-Australian language that could serve as the mother from which all established languages have descended. All one can do is to establish small 'families' and typological clusters. Though he has been criticized heavily in Bower and Koch (2004), we do not think he is as negative on genetic relationships as O'Grady and Hale (2004) make him appear. Even if he were wrong, it would be incumbent on those scholars to relate their findings to a theory of settlement and dispersion across the continent along the lines of Indo-European studies. There is a large number of descriptive studies of individual languages worth pointing to. Dixon and Blake (1991) contains a range of papers as do the two studies mentioned above. More accessible to non-experts are the older monographs by Blake (1991) and the recent (and popular) one by the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia (SSABSA 1996). In-depth studies of a range of features can be found in Evans (2003), Bower and Koch (2004), Dixon (2002), Schultze-Berndt (2000) and elsewhere (see also Harris, this vol.).

Contact has led to contact languages throughout the continent, as we have said above. Some of them stabilized while remaining auxiliary languages, others have become creoles; most have disappeared. There is a considerable interest in contact languages in creolistics, and numerous studies on Aboriginal pidgins and creoles address topics such as the social history of

3. Leitner's (2000; 2001a) use of this term refers to the study of all Australian languages.

contact, the rise of the Sydney pidgin, its spread across the continent and its influence on the emergence of Kriol and Torres Strait Creole. Harris's (1986) strength is social history; Troy (1990; 1993) is strong on linguistic documentation of the Sydney region. The spread across the continent as well as the role of outside contact with the South Pacific is brought out in the contributions to Wurm et al. (1996) and was further explored, for instance, by Simpson (2000) in the collection edited by Siegel (2000) and by Tryon and Charpentier (2004). A more popular account of Indigenous and contact languages is Walsh and Yallop (1993). Regarding Aboriginal English, Eagleson, Kaldor, and Malcolm (1982) is still the classic study of Aboriginal English in the east and west of the continent. Malcolm's continuing work (e.g. 1994; 1996; 1999; 2002a/b) provides enhanced understanding of Aboriginal English discourse and semantics and their educational implications.

The recent decade or so has seen convergent trends in linguistics. One is socio-cultural studies that focus on entire regions or language ecologies and propose a habitat approach to understand their dynamics and the changes that have been, or are, taking place (e.g. Mühlhäusler 1999; Wurm et al. 1996; Leitner 1998; 2004a/b). Such a perspective calls for an integrative perspective that does not isolate language(s) from the context of all the other languages used in a society. It maintains that languages must be studied within the socio-cultural, political, and economic contexts in which they are used and in which they function. The second development is what might be referred to here as socio-cognitive theory that starts with concepts like *schemata* and explores the possibility of cultural-linguistic continuity in light, or despite, of radical changes to a language habitat. One might mention Malcolm (2002a), Malcolm and Sharifian (2002) and Sharifian (2005). Both trends focus on *applied* domains such as language educational policy in the social services, the law and other domains. They also suggest that policies on language and communication must be sensitive to socio-cognitive and cultural dimensions in order to be successful. Finally, tertiary education and the input it provides into secondary and primary education support the so-called *Regional Studies* approach (Leitner 2000–2001a), which, on the language side, benefits from socio-cultural and socio-cognitive approaches. Regional Studies are compatible with socio-political, economic and cultural history and lend themselves to feeding into related areas, where English was and is a prominent player such as North America, South-East or East Asia.

The impact that Aboriginal and contact languages have had on English has been an important topic in studies on mainstream Australian English and has been pursued, for instance, in Ramson (1966; 2002), Dixon et al. (1990), Leitner (2001b/c; 2004a), and Leitner and Sieloff (1998). Australian dictionaries

such as the *Australian National Dictionary* (1988) are good sources. The reciprocal angle of contact, i.e. the impact that English has had on Indigenous languages, has been explored in Siegel (2000), Bucknall (1997), SSABSA (1996), Sharpe (1993) and Harkins (1994). These studies show that Aboriginal languages have changed more dramatically than English has – an area, incidentally, that finds its correlate in Clyne's (2003) and Clyne and Kipp's (1999) studies of language contact with migrant languages in Australia or in de Bot and Clyne's (1994) investigation of third generation migrants.

While linguistic and sociolinguistic topics have attracted much attention, the demographic, linguistic, socio- and psycho-linguistic details of language attrition and loss, the shift to English and the growth of Indigenous lingua francas have not gone unnoticed. Schmidt (1990), McKay (1996), Lo Bianco and Rhydwen (2001) have offered insightful analyses of these processes and have, at times, triggered language policy development or led to revisions.

Applied linguistic areas in education, teacher training, the legal domain or support structures for language maintenance, revitalization, recovery or mere documentation and relevant policies were first integrated into a coherent framework in Lo Bianco (1987). Many specific studies have been done independently on teacher-awareness, teacher-in-service training and other themes (Eagleson, Kaldor, and Malcolm 1982; Malcolm et al. 1999a–b, Cahill 1999). Critical analyses of the introduction of literacy into Kriol and Indigenous languages have come from Rhydwen (1996), Black (1993) and others. The classroom realities of the teaching of Indigenous languages in Aboriginal schools and the educational issues underlying school education have been at the centre of a collection edited by Hartman, and Henderson (1994). Harris (1990), Partington (1998) and Beresford and Partington (2003) are important educational studies. Fesl (1993) describes the social and political circumstances of language loss from the point of view of an Indigenous person. Those and many other studies contribute the background for the themes of this book.

Eades (1995) is a collection of papers on the problems of Aboriginal Australians in the legal domain which has contributions on interpreting, courtroom discourse, the law background, the role of non-standardism, etc. The legal domain has become aware of intercultural communication problems and Fryer-Smith (2002) is a handbook for professionals in the field in Western Australia; it is also available on the internet. Similar books have been produced by the Supreme Court of Queensland and elsewhere. Cook (2002) is a policy-oriented study on language and communication needs in interpreting.

3. Content, structure and scope of the book

There is, then, a large body of past research that a book like this can rely on. In order to establish an integrative focus, we will derive three principles of selection from past research that will help create a cohesive framework and select from past research. The first is that the book is structured around the (types of) languages used by Aboriginal Australians; the second that selections are made on the basis of, or make reference to, what has been retained in one form or another in Indigenous languages or been carried over into contact languages and Aboriginal English. Closely related are the features that have been lost. The third principle will contrast with the second in showing the influence from (varieties of) English (or, in the case of pidgins) from Macassan pidgin. A survey of Indigenous languages will thus look at the modifications that have taken place in these languages and what of them has been carried forward into pidgins, Kriol and Aboriginal English.

In highlighting continuity, modification, loss and adaptation at the levels of linguistic organization and use, we can avoid the perception that language(s) or types of languages had just co-existed more or less independently of one another and, at best, show up as belonging together at the level of *parole*. The underlying theme, *viz.* that they symbolize a language habitat will thus come out more strongly.

The papers by Harold Koch, Michael Christie, and Michael Walsh provide the background to traditional Aboriginal languages, showing what is known about their origin(s), diffusion and convergence in the pre-colonial period and the changes that have taken place since. Harold Koch and Michael Christie also survey the debates about a proto-Aboriginal language, and the various conceptions of the origin of these languages and the hypotheses about the social history of settlement, diffusion, etc. In the coverage of the levels of linguistic organization these papers and John Harris are to be selective and consider those features that re-appear in the guise of contact languages, mentioning significant features that have been, or are being, lost in the processes of language attrition and loss. Farzad Sharifian and Ian Malcolm and Ellen Grote look in detail at the conceptual cognitive structures activated in discourse and text in Aboriginal languages and grounded in the texture of languages. They are focused on cognitive lexical structures that have been investigated from that angle. Graham McKay discusses the loss, maintenance, recovery or documentation of Indigenous languages from national or state language policy perspectives and the efforts being undertaken (or not) by communities themselves. That is to include demographic data and socio-

psychological or cultural dimensions. While it includes issues common to all Indigenous languages, it is placed best in the context of traditional languages.

John Harris, Farzad Sharifian, and Ian Malcolm and Ellen Grote also look at contact languages – mainly those based on or including English, but making reference to the few Indigenous ones that emerged in the 19th century and to the impact of the Macassans during the Dutch-dominated south-east Asian region of the 18th and 19th centuries. Like the authors referred to in the preceding paragraph John Harris will survey the field, including social history and connections with the wider South Pacific and Atlantic pidgins. To that end, the contribution will look at evidence, linguistic and otherwise, in support of the Australian-origin hypothesis and the outreach to the South Pacific. It will cover the time to the mid-20th century, which will be dealt with more fully in other contributions in this section. Ian Malcolm and Ellen Grote will focus on Aboriginal English, the central variety in much of the continent, discuss its origin, structure, regional, social and stylistic stratification, and provide background to current educational and other domains of planning. From a linguistic angle, these papers will focus on its distinctness from other language types; they will also show what affiliates it with mAusE on the one hand and Kriol (and its precursors) on the other. Farzad Sharifian will continue the theme of linguistic and cultural continuity by developing the concept of Indigenous schemata. His treatment will expand it, in not being limited to Aboriginal English but in discussing those schemata in traditional languages and Kriol. Gerhard Leitner will turn to the other side of the contact coin and look at the influence Aboriginal languages have had on mainstream Australian English. While influences have largely been lexical, it will re-iterate periods of influence and the shift from traditional and (early) pidgins as donor languages to the more persistent role today of Aboriginal English and the fact that there is a limited amount of code-switching even amongst non-Aboriginal speakers.

Having dealt with traditional and contact languages throughout Australia's history, the papers by Gary Partington and Ann Galloway, Ian Malcolm and Patricia Königsberg, Diana Eades, and Rob Amery will come to language policy and planning, predominantly a research area of the last forty years – if policy is conceived of as conscious political attempts to influence behaviour. Gary Partington and Ann Galloway will begin with language and education and include a discussion of underlying and changing philosophies about curricular objectives, didactics and methodologies. The emphasis will be on current issues in light of the language diversity of Aboriginal Australians, the choices that have been made, the problems in implementation and in developing Aboriginal participation and control. They will include a brief history

of Aboriginal education. Ian Malcolm and Patricia Königsberg will move forward and address specifically linguistic aspects of curriculum design and methodology and will take account of the co-presence of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous elements in the Australian language habitat. In light of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the acute problems that Aborigines face in the legal domain (court room, etc.) Diana Eades will show how Aboriginal cultural and other beliefs and practices affect that domain, and what has been and needs to be done to provide equality. She will include the Aboriginal practices of dispute settling and other legal issues. Rob Amery will return to the Introduction and outline the relevance of this book to tertiary and secondary education. He will include a discussion of teaching materials in use, internet resources and review the international context that deals with native, minority groups.

The editors are aware that a book like this must include the perspectives of the people whose language habitats it describes. While that will be taken note of in all sections, Terry Ngarritjin-Kessar and Linda Ford, two Aboriginal academics with experience in diverse language habitats, will bring out what Aboriginal Australians think of the ways their language habitat has changed as a result of the practices and policies of the past 40 or so years, and what challenges there are for the future. These authors will express their views and comment from their own perspective and as members of Indigenous speech communities which are still more often perceived as the subject of research than as the source of researchers and research agendas. The last word in this collection, which will be in response to the contributions of the other authors, will belong to them. They have been encouraged to write in their own style rather than conforming to non-Indigenous discourse conventions.

There is, the editors would stress at this point, nothing that is uncontroversial in relation to the Indigenous language habitats and the changes that have occurred since colonization and the policies that have been set in place over the past several decades to promote the maintenance and partial reconstruction of Aboriginal languages. Even the views on the pre-colonial past cannot escape controversy. A situation like this is, of course, not confined to Australia and similar controversies can be seen in the context of America's ancestral languages and the language and educational policies in the USA and Canada. In light of these controversies, the editors have taken care to commission papers from experts that can cover the respective fields and bring out dominant views; they have left it to them to focus on what they think is right and a way forward. We are aware, in particular, that the emerging general emphasis of the authors of this volume on the valuing of contact languages alongside Indigenous languages in Australia, and on the incorp-

oration of these languages into literacy and education, is not universally shared. As Rhydwen (1996: 50, 123) has reported, there are non-Aboriginal people working in remote areas who dismiss Kriol as “shit language” or “bastard language,” while some Aboriginal people themselves, especially those fluent in other languages, see some forms of Kriol and Aboriginal English as “*yalabala tok*, ‘speech of Aboriginal people of mixed descent’” (1996: 101) and reject the maintenance of a language which “doesn’t lead anywhere” (1996: 124). While allowing for the fact that Indigenous language policies and practices need to be responsive to community views, and, in particular, Indigenous community views, and will therefore differ from situation to situation, we have attempted here to regard the Aboriginal habitat as one which will continue to change, and we consider that the input of research which is inclusive of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal inputs can contribute positively to the management of such change.

As the outline of the goals, content and scope and of the wider research context suggests, this collection of commissioned papers will be of interest to a wide range of readers. We might mention general and typological linguists with an interest in the effects of language contact on smaller and endangered languages, students of English and *Anglicists* who take an interest in the effects of contact with Indigenous peoples, the rise of contact languages such as pidgins and creoles or ethnolects, and the internal pluricentricity of English. We are thinking of applied linguists, and especially of those working in the domain of language planning, education, and the law; they will find ample material that compares well with analogous situations elsewhere in the world. Scholars in Australian Studies will find what is needed to cast a language angle on the Indigenous and white dimension. Last, but not least, this collection will benefit scholars working in related fields where a traditional language habitat has been upset by colonization (or in other ways) and where endangered languages co-exist alongside contact and dominant languages; where grass-roots and high-level political attempts are being made to bring about change that guarantees the survival of languages in a new habitat. Australia is but one of many cases. And that property will benefit those that teach in the key areas of this collection of papers.

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An overview of Australian traditional languages

Harold Koch

1. Introduction

Some 250 languages¹ are thought to have been spoken in Australia at the time that the continent began to be settled by the British in 1788 (Dixon 2002: 2). It is these languages that I am calling the *traditional* languages of Australia, as opposed to new forms that have developed since 1788 through the changed linguistic ecology that was introduced by the coming of European people with their language(s). By the present time all surviving Australian languages have been affected by the presence of English and the cultural changes that came in the wake of colonization.

In this paper I give an outline of the history of the documentation of these traditional languages (in section 2), describe what has been considered to be their historical relationships (in section 3), and present their salient typological features (in section 4). In section 5 I use the point of view of placenames to highlight their changing linguistic habitat.

2. History of research

This section gives a short history of research on Australian languages. Other overviews are Capell (1971), Wurm (1972: ch. 2), and Dixon (1980: 8–17).²

The Australian languages first came to the attention of European scholars, ironically, when their habitat was contacted by the intrusion of outsiders who

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1. The term *language* is used here in the linguists sense of a lect or set of lects that are considered not to be mutually intelligible with other lects (in contrast to *dialects* of a language, which are mutually intelligible). Aboriginal people (and in fact non-linguists in general) typically do not conceptualize language in the same way (see Dixon 1980: 33; 2002: 4–5 for traditional languages and Rhydwen (1996) with respect to creole languages).
 2. McGregor (forthc.) has called attention to the fact that much of the work that has been done on past investigators is from the perspective of the relevance of their results to present-day concerns, rather than with a view to understanding their work on its own terms and in the context of their social and intellectual climate. McGregor (ed., forthc.) aims to redress this deficiency.

brought with them an alien language. Wordlists were collected in 1770 by members of Captain James Cook's expedition to the South Pacific. While repairing their ship, the *Endeavour*, Cook's crew was in contact with Aboriginal people of the group who spoke the Guugu Yimidhirr language. One word popularized from this source and adopted into European languages was *kangaroo*, which was the name of a species of marsupial (Haviland 1974; 1979).

When a British penal colony was established at Port Jackson (Sydney) in 1788, wordlists of the Sydney language were collected by a number of officials and naval officers. One of these, Colonel William Dawes, began a systematic study of the grammar, but his results remained largely unknown until relatively recently (Troy 1992; 1993). Meanwhile, Aboriginal people of the Eora tribe began learning English and a pidgin language developed, with input from English, Pacific jargon, and the Sydney language. This NSW Pidgin was widely used as the European frontier moved beyond the Sydney region from 1813, and it absorbed vocabulary from other New South Wales languages such as Wiradhuri (Troy 1994; Amery and Mühlhäusler 1996).

The documentation of Aboriginal languages was largely confined to wordlists, "spelled in the normal 'English' fashion which has bedevilled practically all recording of Aboriginal languages until the twentieth century" (Capell 1971: 662). The collection of wordlists continued for the first century of European settlement. The largest published collection was in Edward M. Curr's (1886–87) *The Australian race*, which includes three volumes of lists of up to 120 words for a great many localities of Australia. Many of these were supplied by settlers, policemen, missionaries, etc. For some languages this is the only documentation available.

Attempts to describe the grammar (as opposed to the vocabulary) of Aboriginal languages began with missionary Lancelot Threlkeld's work on the language of the Awabakal people of Lake Macquarie near Newcastle NSW (Threlkeld 1834). Further grammars were written by missionaries on such languages as Kamilaroi of New South Wales (Ridley 1875), the Kaurna language of South Australia (Teichelmann and Schürmann 1840) and the language of Encounter Bay, South Australia (Meyer 1843). In the first decade of the 20th century a large number of sketches, mostly of languages of south-eastern Australia, were published by the surveyor R. H. Mathews.³ About the same time Walter E. Roth, a doctor and Aboriginal protector, started to write descriptions of several Queensland languages.

These early grammatical descriptions – in fact most grammars written up until about 1950 – were generally written in the framework of Traditional

3. See Koch (forthc.) for an analysis of Mathews' system of grammatical description.

Grammar, which developed in Western Europe out of the work of Greek, Roman, and medieval grammarians. This framework was familiar to any educated person who studied the grammar of English or the classical or foreign languages that were taught in the schools of Europe or colonial Australia. These grammars fail to give a realistic picture of the grammar of the languages – although it must be admitted that their writers, some of whom had experience of languages from other parts of the Pacific, did recognize the presence of some categories that were unfamiliar to European languages – such as the dual number, inclusive and exclusive distinctions in personal pronouns, and a separate (ergative) case to mark the subject of transitive verbs.

A renewed interest in the documentation of Australian languages and an increase in the professional quality of linguistic descriptions followed from the research and teaching of Arthur Capell in the Department of Anthropology at Sydney University from the 1930s, from the involvement of missionary linguists of the Summer Institute of Linguistics from the 1950s, from the establishment of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (AIAS, later AIATSIS) in Canberra in the early 1960s, and from the founding of linguistics departments in Australian universities in the late 1960s, and the 1970s. Grammatical descriptions were published through Sydney University's *Oceania* and *Oceanic Linguistics* monograph series (Strehlow 1942–1944; Smythe 1952; Douglas 1964; O'Grady 1964); Monash University's *Linguistic Communications* series (Blake and Breen 1971; Breen 1973); AIAS in Canberra (Holmer 1966; Glass and Hackett 1970; Osborne 1974; Chadwick 1975; Yallop 1977; Crowley 1978; Hudson 1978; Hansen and Hansen 1978; Heath 1978; Heath 1984); Pacific Linguistics in Canberra's Australian National University (Blake 1979; Heath 1980a; Williams 1980; Tsunoda 1981; Hercus 1982; Rumsey 1982; Wordick 1982; Merlan 1983; Oates 1988; Hercus 1994; Hosokawa 1991; Dench 1995; Nordlinger 1998; Patz 2002; Evans 2003; Pensalfini 2003; Sharp 2004; Kite and Wurm 2004; Breen 2004); Dixon and Blake's (1979; 1981; 1983; 1991; 2000) *Handbook of Australian Languages*; and from the 1970s by international publishers such as Cambridge University Press (Dixon 1972; 1977; Donaldson 1980; Austin 1981), Mouton de Gruyter (Capell and Hinch 1970; McGregor 1990; Merlan 1994; Evans 1995; Harvey 2002), and Lincom Europa (McGregor 1996; Dench 1998; Terrill 1998).

3. Historical relations among the Australian languages

In this section I summarize the changing understanding of the historical relations among the Australian languages. For the history of historical

classifications, see Koch (2004a), on which the following is largely based. For details of recent approaches see Evans (2003) and Bowerman and Koch (2004a).

Relatively early in the history of Australia observers noted the resemblances among the Australian languages that were known from the more settled parts of the country (i.e. the eastern and southern parts), and proposed that this was evidence of common origin (Grey 1841, cf. Dixon 1980: 11–12). Speculation then proceeded on the presumed origin and direction of the prehistoric spread of Aboriginal people, with language playing a role in the debates. Authors such as Curr (1886–87) and John Mathew (1899) argued on the basis of linguistic resemblances for an African vs. South Asian origin. These debates are of historic interest only, since they were not based on sound methodology.

The first large-scale classification of Australian languages was undertaken by the Vienna-based scholar Father Wilhelm Schmidt in the first decade of the 20th century, published in Schmidt (1919). His aim was to establish, on the basis of an exhaustive compilation of available material, an internal classification of all the Australian languages, which he considered to be a necessary prerequisite for any claims about relationships with languages outside the continent. His main conclusion for the highest level of classification was that

the Australia languages do not, as had always been believed, represent an essentially homogeneous group of languages. On the contrary, although by far the largest part of Australia is filled with languages which despite many differences are nonetheless connected by strong common elements, nevertheless the whole of the north of Australia contains languages which do not present any lexical relationship and only very few grammatical relationships with that larger group or even with each other. (Schmidt 1972: 4)

Schmidt's large genetic grouping was labelled the "South Australian languages"; it consisted of all the languages of the southern half of the mainland, except for Aranda in the central area, and included eastern languages as far north as the base of Cape York Peninsula.⁴

The first academic linguist based in Australia, Arthur Capell, after surveying many of the languages of northern Australia, reasserted the case for the genealogical unity of all the languages of the Australian continent.

There can, however, be no doubt that the languages of Australia, even including those of the Northern Kimberleys, belong to one family. What Professor Radcliffe-Brown said of Australian social organization may be said

4. For a critique of Schmidt's methodology see Koch (2004a).

also of Australian languages: “In spite of the diversity of the various systems a careful comparison reveals them as being variations of a single type.” (Capell 1937: 58)

They differ as widely, both in structure and in vocabulary, among themselves, as do their speakers in physical features, yet there remains a basic similarity in certain structural elements and a small but obstinate basic vocabulary... It is therefore safe to assert that the Australian languages are in the ultimate at least as much a unity as the Australian people... (Capell 1956: 2–3)

Capell identified a small but recurrent set of some 50 vocabulary items plus a few grammatical forms that he labelled “Common Australian”; he posited a historical relationship between Australian languages but claimed it was not possible to reconstruct an ancestral “Original Australian” language in any great detail (Capell 1956: 3).

The next major classification resulted from an initiative of Carl Voegelin of Indiana University, survey work in the years 1959–1961 by Kenneth Hale, Geoffrey O’Grady, and Stephen Wurm, and collaboration into the mid-1960s by these three researchers plus Carl and Florence Voegelin. The classification was based primarily on the comparison of vocabulary:

Virtually all attention is focused on cognate densities derived from comparison of the hundred items of a Swadesh-type lexical list in pairs of named communalects. (O’Grady, Voegelin and Voegelin 1966: 23)

However, the researchers’ familiarity with the grammatical forms and structures also informed their classification. Languages and groupings of languages were named after local words for “person” or “man”, following the practice of Schmidt, with the inclusion of a suffix *-ic* or *-an* for larger groups. A hierarchy of linguistic classes (dialect, language, subgroup, group, family, phylum) was established on the basis of percentage of vocabulary shared on the test list. It was provisionally assumed that these groups reflected historical relations, although the scholars who established the classification advocated that the history needed to be confirmed by the kind of evidence used in what is called “the comparative method”.

[O’Grady, Voegelin and Voegelin 1966] contains a preliminary classification of Australian languages based on cognate densities calculated by Hale, O’Grady and Wurm, in which the authors make a plea for the future consideration of types of evidence additional to that of lexicostatistics, in order that a balanced perspective of Australian historical linguistics might be achieved. (O’Grady 1966: 71)

This classification scheme, as revised in (Wurm 1972), posits that all the Indigenous languages of Australia are related in one macrophylum (or superfamily) – with the exception of the languages formerly spoken in Tasmania⁵ and the Miriam language of the eastern Torres Strait Islands, which is known to be related to Papuan languages of the Kiwai family on the adjacent region of Papua New Guinea. This agrees with Capell's assumption of the unity of the mainland languages. The scheme includes 28 language families, with the greatest diversity being found in north-western and north-central Australia. But they also recognize one very wide-spread language family, which they named "Pama-Nyungan"⁶, which includes all of Schmidt's "South Australian languages", plus the Arandic subgroup in central Australia, languages of northwest Queensland, an enclave of "Yolngu" languages in northeast Arnhem Land in the north-central region, and, significantly, all the languages of Cape York Peninsula – Hale had shown that the seemingly aberrant languages in this area had merely undergone drastic sound changes which made them look (or rather sound) different from their unaltered relatives (Hale 1964; 1966b; see also papers in Sutton 1976).

The classification has undergone some alterations since the 1960s, with some languages being reclassified from Pama-Nyungan to non-Pama-Nyungan or the reverse, other families or subgroups being united or further differentiated, etc. as languages have become better described and as the comparative method has been applied to more languages. The Pama-Nyungan family has been further supported by reconstruction of features of its protolanguage (Alpher 2004; Koch 2003; and its status has been accepted by most comparative Australianists – a notable exception being R.M.W. Dixon (1980; 2002). The genetic unity of all mainland languages is widely assumed, on the basis of cognate verb roots (Dixon 1980) and pronominal forms (Blake 1988), although this has not been conclusively demonstrated as yet.⁷ The classification of non-Pama-Nyungan languages in northern Australia has

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5. The speakers of languages once spoken in Tasmania were separated from the mainland thousands of years ago by the rise of sea levels which created Bass Strait. For an assessment of the Tasmanian linguistic situation see Crowley and Dixon (1981).
 6. This name derives from the names of the component linguistic groups of the far north-eastern and south-western areas – Paman and Nyungan respectively – on the pattern of language family names such as Malayo-Polynesian or Indo-European.
 7. One of the aims of Dixon (1980) was "to provide the beginnings of a proof that all the languages of Australia [with a few possible exceptions] are genetically related" (1980: xiv). The position taken in Dixon (2002), on the other hand, is agnostic about this genetic unity and sceptical about the possibility of ever establishing the wider genealogical (vs. areal-typological) relations among Australian languages.

changed considerably, but there are still some 20 separate families recognized whose relation to one another has still not been established authoritatively (see Evans, ed., 2003; Evans 2005).

We are not yet in a position to answer the old question of the external relations of Australian languages. Given the former existence of land bridges connecting northern Australia to the island of New Guinea up until some 10,000 years ago, it is very likely that a deep historical relation existed between Australian and Papuan languages. The comparative linguistics of Papuan languages is still in its early stages (Pawley 2006). It is to be hoped that continuing progress in comparative research on both sides of the divide may eventually provide some confirmation of this expectation. It should be borne in mind, however, that the comparative method is usually thought to be incapable of reconstructing beyond a time depth of some 5–10,000 years. Given that Sahul (the New Guinea plus Australian land mass) has been populated by humans for at least 50,000 years, we cannot expect to ever recover anything like a complete picture of its linguistic prehistory.

4. Typology of Australian languages

In this section I give an overview of the structural features of Australian languages. Further discussion can be found in Dixon (1980; 2002), Yallop (1982), Blake (1987), and McGregor (2004).

4.1. Phonology

It has long been clear to many investigators that the Australian languages are much more similar to one another than any of them are to European languages. The details of their phonological systems, however, did not become clear until the second half of the twentieth century, well after the development of phonemic theory in the first half of the century. It is now clear, as shown in Dixon (1980) and Yallop (1982), that most languages share a common phonemic inventory, with some variation between languages. The vowel system usually includes three vowels, *i*, *a*, *u*, with or without a length contrast. Some languages have in addition *e* or *o*. The consonant system usually lacks a voicing contrast, lacks fricative phonemes, includes two rhotics – a tap/trill and an approximant – and a set of at least four nasals, and distinguishes apical (tongue-tip) and laminal (tongue-blade) articulation in coronal consonants. This last feature noticeably involves a difference in the active articulator, the tongue, which has a concave shape for apicals and a convex

shape for laminals. Languages differ in whether or not they have a second set of apical consonants – post-alveolar or retroflex consonants – that contrast with alveolars, and whether or not they have contrasting dental and prepalatal articulations among the laminal consonants. The typical consonantal system is shown in Table 1, where parentheses are put around the place of articulation features that are absent in some languages. The typical orthography is used.

Table 1. Typical consonantal system of Australian languages

	Bilabial	(Lamino-dental)	Apico-alveolar	(Apico-postalveolar)	Lamino-(pre)palatal	Dorso-velar
Stop	p	th	t	rt	ty	k
Nasal	m	nh	n	rn	ny	ng
Lateral		lh	l	rl	ly	
Trill/tap			rr			
Approximant	w		r		y	

This is the majority pattern. There are some Australian languages that have in addition: sets of stop consonants that contrast in voicing or length, fricatives, prestopped nasals (*pm*, *tn*, etc.), prestopped laterals (*dl*), glottal stop, or rounded consonants.

The phonotactic patterns are also widely shared. Words tend to be at least two syllables (or morae) long, have primary stress on the first syllable, require words to begin with consonants, disallow word-initial consonant clusters, have restrictions on the class of consonant (if any) that can occur finally, limit word-internal consonant clusters to two consonants, allow heterorganic clusters such as *nk*, *np* and even *rnk*, *rnp* and *nyk*, *nyp*.

4.2. Grammar

Grammatical features vary more widely, but still show many commonalities. With respect to parts of speech, languages largely lack articles, prepositions, conjunctions, numerals, and a clearly distinct class of adjectives. They express a lot of grammatical information within words rather than by means of separate grammatical words such as articles, prepositions, auxiliary verbs. The word-internal device is usually suffixation. Nouns typically inflect for a large number of cases. Where case and number (dual or plural) are both expressed by means of suffixes, there is separate expression of each; i.e. the word structure is agglutinative, like that of Turkish *el-ler-de* ‘hand-Plural-Locative’) rather than fusional like Latin (*amic-ōrum* ‘friend-Genitive:Plural’).