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Abstract

Australia hosts a rich array of languages and a unique varieties of English, as a result of its indigenous and immigrant linguistic heritage. The official government policy of multiculturalism sees a wide range of languages taught at school, including community languages and other languages of economic importance. Many indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are today moribund or extinct, and most of the remainder are endangered as a result of shift to English, however recently there have been moves towards language revitalisation. Immigrant community languages are also showing evidence of language shift, with loss in the second and third generations, and they too are receiving support. Australian Sign Language is important for the deaf community, however in recent years it also has become endangered as a result of early diagnosis of deafness and widespread use of cochlear implants in deaf children.

Introduction

The languages spoken in Australia can be classified into the following (see also Romaine 2004 [1991]):

- indigenous languages spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

- pidgins and creoles arising from language contact, primarily spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the descendants on Pacific Islander groups

- community languages, including Australian Sign Language (Auslan) and the languages spoken by immigrant community groups and their descendants

- Aboriginal English, primarily spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

- Australian English, the official language of the country and spoken by a first language by 90% of the population, with regional and social variation

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages

When Australia was colonised by Europeans in the late 18th century it was home to approximately 250 indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages (Dixon 1980, Walsh 1997, Angelo et al 1994, Austin 1996), many of which are now either extinct, moribund or endangered. Today, only 12 indigenous languages continue to be learnt by children (McConvell and Thieberger 2001), meaning that 95% of Australia's indigenous heritage has disappeared or is highly threatened. Recently there have been moves towards revitalisation of Aboriginal languages (see below).

The languages spoken in the Torres Strait Islands fall into two groups: Meryam Mer, spoken in the eastern islands is related to Papuan languages to the north, and Kala Lagaw Ya, spoken in the western islands, is related to languages of the Australian mainland. For Tasmania, the existing sources are poor and it is difficult to say much definitively about the traditional indigenous language situation (Crowley and Dixon 1981), however much work has been done on reconstructing old sources (Crowley 1993) and the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre is promoting the revived language.

There has been growing awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages among the general Australian population, and Aboriginal language courses are now taught in secondary schools in Victoria, South Australia (Nathan 1996), and soon to be introduced in New South Wales. Bilingual education is also available in the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia, although programmes are often threatened with funding cuts and lack of staff. Over the past 20 years a number of Aboriginal run Language Centres have been established throughout the country to collect language and culture information, prepare practical materials such as dictionaries and text collections, and to support local education and cultural revival initiatives. These grass-roots organisations have been successful in mobilising scarce resources in support of the languages. National bodies such as the Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages (FATSIL) have been set up, and Aboriginal languages have an increasing presence on the internet (see David Nathan's Aboriginal Languages Virtual Library website for sources). The Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association is also involved in broadcasting and recording and distribution of Aboriginal music. Since the 1980's Aboriginal rock music bands, some of whom such as Yothu Yindi sing in indigenous languages, have become popular across Australia and internationally.

Although threatened by dominant Australian English, there are signs of indigenous language and cultural revival in South Australia (Amery 2001) and elsewhere. In 2003 the New South Wales government committed significant funds to supporting indigenous languages in that state and introducing them into the school system in the Languages Other than English (LOTE) programme.

Language relationships

The indigenous languages spoken across the southern two thirds of the Australian continent plus eastern Arnhemland belong to a single language family called Pama-Nyungan, originally proposed by Kenneth Hale and Geoffrey O'Grady in the 1960's (see map). Much descriptive and comparative work, especially in the last ten years, has provided support for this family group (see Bowern and Koch 2003 for the most recent sources, especially the extensive cognate materials given by Alpher in that volume). In the 'Top End' (the Kimberley, Daly River, western Arnhemland) there is much more linguistic diversity, with some 20 language families having been identified (although recent research has increasingly argues that higher level groupings may also exist, see Evans 2003). Whether all the languages are ultimately related as a single genetic family remains to be determined.

<Map goes here>

Linguistic characteristics

Traditionally, Aboriginal groups were multilingual, as a result of exogamous marriage patterns, and individuals spoke several languages, while claiming primary allegiance to the tongue of their descent group. Languages also showed sociolinguistic variation: geographically different dialects, and special speech styles reflecting kinship and ritual relationships (see Walsh and Yallop 1993).

Phonologically, languages generally lack fricatives and affricates, and there are contrastive stops at up to five points of articulation, with a nasal for each stop position, one or more laterals, a flap, a semi-retroflex continuant, and two glides (see Gamilaraay and Jiwarli chapters for further details). Stops and nasals contrast laminal and apical manners of articulation.

There is usually no voicing contrast for stops (ie. no contrast between *p* and *b*, for example). Most languages have just three vowels: high front *i*, high back *u*, and low *a*, with a phonemic length contrast found in about half the languages (Dixon 1980). Some Cape York Peninsula languages have undergone historical sound changes introducing fricatives, prenasalised stops and additional vowel contrasts; Arandic languages of Central Australia are argued have only two vowels and a contrast between rounded and unrounded consonants (see Breen in Simpson et al 2001).

The general phonotactic structure of word roots is CV(C)CV(C). Every word must begin with a single consonant and end in a vowel, or a restricted number of consonants. Some languages only allow vowel-final words (see Jiwarli chapter). Word-initially in general only non-apical stops and nasals, and the two glides are found. Word-medially there are limited consonant clusters, primarily homorganic nasal plus stop, and apical nasal or lateral plus peripheral stop (*p* and *k*). Vowel clusters are not found, though Vowel-Glide-Vowel sequences are possible. Word stress is generally not phonemic and predictable from the phonological shape of words (see Gamilaraay chapter for examples).

Languages of the Pama-Nyungan (PN) group are entirely suffixing in their morphology; non-Pama-Nyungan (non-PN) languages may show both suffixes and prefixes, and tend to be head-marking rather than dependent-marking. There are two major word classes: nominals and verbs, with nominals in PN languages typically showing rich systems of case-marking (in non-PN case-marking is often absent) and verbs marking tense/aspect/mood and dependent clause categories. Nominals can be subdivided into substantives (that cover both noun and adjective concepts in a language like English), pronouns, and demonstratives. Minor word classes include adverbs, particles and interjections.

Nominals in PN languages typically inflect for case, with the syntactic functions of intransitive subject (S), transitive subject (A) and transitive object (P) showing a split-ergative pattern of syncretism in the case forms determined by animacy:

- for pronouns S and A fall together as a single (unmarked) form with P different (making nominative-accusative case marking)

- for other nominals, S and P fall together as a single (unmarked) form with A different, making ergative-absolutive case marking

In some languages, some nominal categories (eg. animate nouns) show a three-way contrast distinguishing S-A-P. In non-PN languages there are typically systems of verb affixation encoding agreement with verb arguments; this agreement may also reflect gender categories of the nominals.

The following cases are also typically found in PN languages:

- *dative* marking alienable possession, and direction towards a place

- *locative* coding location in a place

- *ablative* coding direction from a place, and cause

Australian languages typically have complex systems of nominal word-building morphology that involves suffixation between the root and case inflection. Categories encoded in word-building morphology include number, having, and lacking. Some non-PN languages encode gender on nouns via affixation.

Pronouns generally distinguish three persons and singular, dual and plural number; in the first person non-singular there is an inclusive-exclusive contrast in about half the languages. Some languages also show bound pronouns, often these are reduced forms of the free pronouns and in PN languages are suffixed to particular elements of the clause (Dixon 1980).

Verbs morphologically distinguish between main verb and dependent verb inflections. Main verbs encode tense and mood categories while dependent verbs occur in hypotactically linked clauses and mark relative tense (and is some central Australian languages also switch-reference (see below)). There are typically a number of verb conjugations that are morphologically determined but may show some correlations with transitivity (Dixon 1980). Verbs show productive word-building morphology, including affixes that indicate aspectual categories or change in transitivity (detransitivising and transitivising processes). Generally passive forms are not found, though some eastern Australian languages have anti-passive derivations. Non-PN languages show agreement via affixation on the verb. The minor categories of adverb, particle and interjection show no morphological variation. All languages also have affixes that attach to words of any category, typically encoding discourse, evidentiality and other pragmatically-based meanings.

A common pattern in many Australian languages (see Jiwarli article) is for word order to be relatively free and hence to find all possible orders of Subject, Object and Verb, as well as separation of nouns and adjectives referring to a single entity (with case agreement indicating common reference). Similarly, possessors (in dative case) may precede or follow the alienable possessed noun. Free omission of nominals whose reference is clear from the context is also common. Australian languages have become famous for their 'non-configurational syntax'.

Interclausal syntax shows a degree of variation; some languages (see Gamilaraay chapter) place little restriction on linking of clauses, while others such as Dyirbal have 'ergative syntax' where the linked clauses must share coreferential absolutive (S or P) nominals. Many central Australian languages have switch-reference where cross-clausal identity or non-identity of

subjects (S or A) is encoded on the dependent verb. Non-PN languages tend to make use of parataxis in clause linkage.

Particles in Australian languages tend to have scope over the whole clause and encode such semantic concepts as polarity (affirmation versus negation), and mood (possibility, negative imperative etc).

Pidgins and creoles

Australia has a number of English-based pidgins and creoles as a result of language contact between the indigenous languages and the English of the colonisers, beginning in the late 18th century. A range of geographically diverse forms have been and are found, including Sydney-pidgin (extinct since the 19th century, Troy 1990), Kriol of the 'Top End', Cape York Creole (Crowley and Rigsby 1979), and Broken or Blaikman Tok of the Torres Strait islands (see Schnukal in Angelo et al 1994). Kriol is now the native language of some 30,000 speakers in northern Australia.

The various creoles show clear influence from Australian indigenous languages both lexically and structurally (eg. distinguishing singular, dual and plural pronouns, and inclusive-exclusive reference in the non-singular). They also share many characteristics with Pacific pidgins and creoles such as Tok Pisin and Bislama.

The descendants of Pacific islanders removed to Australia in the 19th century to work on sugar plantations in Queensland spoke Pacific pidgins and creoles – these are now being replaced by Aboriginal English.

Community languages

As a result of on-going immigration of non-English speakers into Australia, some 100 languages have been added to the linguistic ecology of the country (see Clyne 1991, Clyne and Kipp 1997). The distribution of these 'community languages' varies regionally, especially between the major urban centres, eg. Melbourne adolescents show dominance of Italian and Greek (reflecting immigration after the Second World War), while Sydney shows dominance of Arabic and Chinese languages (reflecting more recent immigration from the middle East and South-East Asia). All community languages are undergoing shift to English (Clyne and Kipp 1997), though to varying degrees in different communities (eg. more highly among Dutch than Poles or Maltese and Turks). Community languages are widely taught in schools (as LOTE), and bilingual education (including immersion programmes) is available in some languages. Local governments in Australia, particularly in the urban centres, pay attention to community languages and provide services and information in a range of languages. There is a system of registration for interpreters and translators, and strong infrastructure of telephone and court interpreting services for non-English speakers.

An important community language is Australian Sign Language (Auslan) which is widely used in the deaf community, and differs in significant ways from American Sign Language (ASL) and British Sign Language (BSL). After being ignored for a long time, research and publications on Auslan have appeared over the past 15 years (see Johnston 1989 for example) and an active programme of documenting Auslan is underway. Due to early diagnosis of deafness and the wide-spread use of cochlear implants in deaf children, the number of native Auslan signers has shown a dramatic decline in recent years; the language is currently endangered.

Aboriginal English

Aboriginal English is a particular form of Australian English primarily spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is spoken as a first or second language and is a continuum that ranges from varieties that resemble pidgin or creole English to those more like non-standard Australian English (Eagleson 1983, Eades 1991, Kaldor and Malcolm 1991). Aboriginal English in rural settings shows substrate influence in articulation (having apico-domal (retroflex articulations) and replacement of fricatives with stops, for example), lack of copula, lack of number marking and *bin* as a past tense marker. In urban settings, Aboriginal English shows many features found in non-standard varieties across the world, such as multiple negation, and non-standard verb agreement, however there are lexical and pragmatic features (Eades 1991) that are distinctive. Even in regions such as Sydney and Melbourne where the indigenous languages ceased to be spoken in the 19th century, Aboriginal English contains lexical items derived from the indigenous languages such as *koorie* 'Aboriginal person' and *goom* 'alcohol'.

Australian English

A distinctive Australian variety of English (AustEng) is spoken by 90% of the 20million inhabitants of the continent, with regional and social variation. AustEng has its origins in the English dialects brought by mainly English and Irish settlers in the 18th and 19th centuries, to which have been added the speech of immigrants from all over the world. Long regarded as a sub-standard form of speech and lacking prestige (Turner 1994), AustEng has become accepted over the past 20 years and has been codified in dictionaries (including the Macquarie Dictionary in various versions dating from 1981, also now with a strong web presence, and the Australian National Dictionary), is used in English language teaching in Australia, and has been popularised

in textbooks (eg. Burridge and Mulder 1998). It is now the prestige variety of English language broadcasting. Like most other varieties of English, AustEng is currently being subjected to influence from American English, especially in the lexicon, but also in pronunciation (Burridge and Mulder 1998).

Australian English shows a large number of loan words from indigenous languages (the Australian National Dictionary records over 400), especially for the distinctive flora and fauna of the country, and for place names, eg. *kangaroo*, *billabong*, *waratah*, and *galah*, or *Woomooloo* and *Mordialloc* (see Dixon, Ramson and Thomas 1990 for other examples). Other sources of distinctive lexical materials include English dialects, convict slang, and rhyming slang, eg. *Joe Blake* for *snake*, as well as locally developed terms, eg. *outback*.

AustEng shows a degree of regional variation, particularly in vocabulary and pronunciation. Lexical variation has been well researched and increasingly documented in the dictionaries, while variation in pronunciation has been less studied. Among features that show geographical differences are [œ] versus [a] in *graph* or *dance*, post-vocalic vocalisation of *l* (in words like *eagle*), lowering of low front [E] (in words like *Mel*, *helicopter*) and bisyllabification of past participles (so that *grown* sounds like *grow-en*).

Social variation in Australian English has been well studied since Mitchell and Delbridge 1965 established the categories of Broad, General and Cultivated Australian. The differences are particularly clear phonetically in vowel nuclei, especially the diphthongs of *face*, *price*, *goat*, and *mouth* (see Harrington, Cox and Evans 1997). Table 1 below (from Melchers and Shaw 2003:105, based on Wells 1982) shows the variants of Australian English vowels in comparison to Received Pronunciation.

Melchers and Shaw (2003:104) list the following as especially salient features of AustEng:

- front [a:] in *palm*, and *start* (shared with New Zealand English)

- wide diphthongs in *fleece*, *face*, *price*, *goose*, *goat*, and *mouth*

- close front vowels, in *dress*

- extremely productive use of two noun suffixes –*ie* and –*o*

- use of *she* as a generic pronoun, eg. *she'll be right* 'it's fine'

- highly characteristic vocabulary, some drawn from indigenous languages, some from British dialect slang, and other elements locally developed

Note also that AustgEng differs from RP in having schwa in unstressed syllables, intervocalic voicing and flapping of *t*, and shares with it lack of post-vocalic *r* found in American and Canadian English. A distinctive high rising terminal intonation contour, noticed by Mitchell and Delbridge 1965 and investigated in depth for Sydney speech by Horvath 1985, is characteristic of female, teenage and lower working class speech.

<Table 1 goes here>

Morphologically, AustEng is characterised by a high degree of clipping, eg. *uni* for *university*, *Oz* for *Australia*, which may or may not be combined with highly productive suffixation of –*ie* or –*o*, as in *Salvos* for *Salvation Army*, *maggie* for 'magpie', *sunnies* for *sun glasses* and *lippie* for *lipstick*.

Table 1 Australian English Vowels

Broad	General	Cultivated	Key word	RP
	ê		*kit*	ê
	e		*dress*	e
	œ		*trap*	œ
	Å		*lot*	Å
	U		*strut*	U
	Ü		*foot*	Ü
	a:		*bath*	A:
	Å		*cloth*	Å
	‰:		*nurse*	‰:
´:ê	+i	êi	*fleece*	i:
U:ê - a:ê	Uê	Eê	*face*	eê
	a:		*palm*	A:
	O:		*thought*	O:
U:Ü - a:Á	UÁ	o‹Ü	*goat*	´Ü
´:Á	ÜÁ	Üu	*goose*	u:
Å:ê	Åê	aê	*price*	aê

	Oê		*choice*	Oê
E:o	œo	aÜ	*mouth*	aÜ
	ê´ - ê:´ - i:		*near*	ê´
	e´		*square*	E´
	a:		*start*	A:
	O:		*north*	O:
	O:		*force*	O:
	Ü´ - O: - u:´ - u:		*cure*	Ü´

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Australian Aboriginal languages, pidgin, creole, community language, Auslan, Australian Sign Language, Aboriginal English, Australian English

Biography

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Prof Austin has held numerous visiting appointments including the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics Nijmegen, University of Frankfurt, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, University of Hong Kong, and Stanford and Harvard Universities. He has carried out extensive fieldwork on Australian Aboriginal languages and published widely on them, including writing seven bilingual dictionaries and co-authoring the first fully hypertext bilingual dictionary on the world wide web (the Gamilaraay-English dictionary). He has published articles on computer-aided linguistic analysis and multimedia, and co-authored websites displaying multimedia materials on several languages. He is also currently working on the morpho-syntax of Sasak and

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