

THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY ISSUE IN AUSTRALIA

Uldis Ozolins

1984 provided a significant benchmark for language planning in Australia with the release of the *Report on a national language policy* from the Standing Committee on Education and the Arts of the Senate of the Australian Parliament. This Report, released after nearly three years of deliberation, and to some extent already overtaken at the time of its release by language initiatives at state levels, attempts to set out a comprehensive approach to analysing Australia's language needs and resources, and consider priorities for language treatment in education, services, media, and other areas of public policy.

The Senate inquiry has been one result of an intense phase of development of language programs and political activism by an ever-increasing number of language-interest groups to have language needs and issues recognised in Australia. Language issues have become salient in relation to policy towards migrants and Aboriginal groups and also, more generally, in relation to debate over national identity in Australia. The aim of this paper is to consider the origins of interest in a national language policy, to give an understanding of the range of issues it is addressing, and to socially and politically situate this interest in language policy within broader aspects of policy related to cultural and linguistic diversity in Australia. With the interest in this volume being language contact and languages other than English, aspects of the Senate inquiry and other language initiatives concerning *English* will not be discussed here in detail.

ORIGINS – THE BACKGROUND TO POLICIES FOR LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

Concern over a national language policy has come as part of heightened attention to cultural and linguistic diversity in the Australian population. This demographic development has many aspects, and only a general overview can be given here. Increased attention to the language needs of migrants and, more recently, attention to the maintenance of migrant languages, have been expressed in terms of a desire by governments to foster 'multiculturalism' in Australia. A similar degree of attention, though with different political antecedents, has also focussed on Aboriginal education and languages. From the point of view of Aboriginal and migrant groups, the push for government response is the political expression of a longstanding desire for linguistic and cultural maintenance in the Australian context, a desire not always supported or even acknowledged in

Michael Clyne, ed. *Australia, meeting place of languages*, 281-299. *Pacific Linguistics*, C-92, 1985.

© Uldis Ozolins.

much previous government policy. With the involvement of language professionals and other interest groups (e.g. language-handicapped groups), concern for a national language policy brings into being a constituency that consists of quite diverse elements in language advocacy.

Many of these developments have occurred with almost astonishing rapidity in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and to the extent that policy makers now do take seriously issues of language, this represents a clear and in some cases dramatic departure from earlier attitudes towards linguistic diversity and linguistic resources in Australia. Several authors writing recently on language and multiculturalism have commented on the significant population changes that have marked post-World War II Australia: Smolicz cites the oft-expressed view that at the end of the war Australia was 'one of the most monolingual countries in the world' (Smolicz 1984a:23), and goes on to detail the linguistic diversity that has attended the subsequent immigration of 3.5 million people. The present language situation in Australia has been analysed in detail by Clyne (1982), and an overview of the main languages spoken in Australia is given in the Senate inquiry's report in graphic form in *Figure 1*. The earlier history of languages other than English cannot detain us here; periods of linguistic diversity, and public recognition of such, alternated with periods of intense Anglo-conformism (Clyne 1982; Lyng 1935).

Responses to linguistic diversity in Australia up to 1945 were hardly recognised as constituting in any sense a 'language policy', resting squarely upon assumptions relating to 'aliens' in Australian society, and these already existing procedures for the control of 'aliens' were followed in establishing post-war policies to the language of migrants. These dispositions had resulted in the government playing a censorial role towards any institutionalisation of languages other than English (LOTEs), with considerable restrictions in:

- foreign language newspapers (as part of the War Precautions Act), strict licensing requirements demanded security clearances, and stipulated that 25% of content be in English,
- schools having LOTEs as a language of instruction (banned in most states since German bilingual schools were closed or became English monolingual schools in World War I,
- radio transmission (commercial and Australian Broadcasting Commission stations had tight restrictions on the use of LOTEs, and all amateur radio operators had to use English).

A similar suspicion of other languages also characterised official response to the Aboriginal population: state laws pursued a variety of 'assimilation' policies that sought, as rapidly as possible, to eradicate elements of Aboriginal culture and language. Only a few private, usually religious, institutions used Aboriginal languages in their own work, and only a handful of linguists recorded the hundreds of languages of what was widely believed to be a dying race. The Aboriginal population was only able to maintain their languages in areas where they were furthest from state intervention.

The movement of language policy away from this mixture of censorship and neglect occurred barely perceptibly until the mid-1960s. The early strictions on language use were only gradually withdrawn — those relating to the foreign language press in the 1950s, but radio broadcasting in LOTEs continued to be controlled until 1974. For the migrant as much as the Aboriginal population, languages

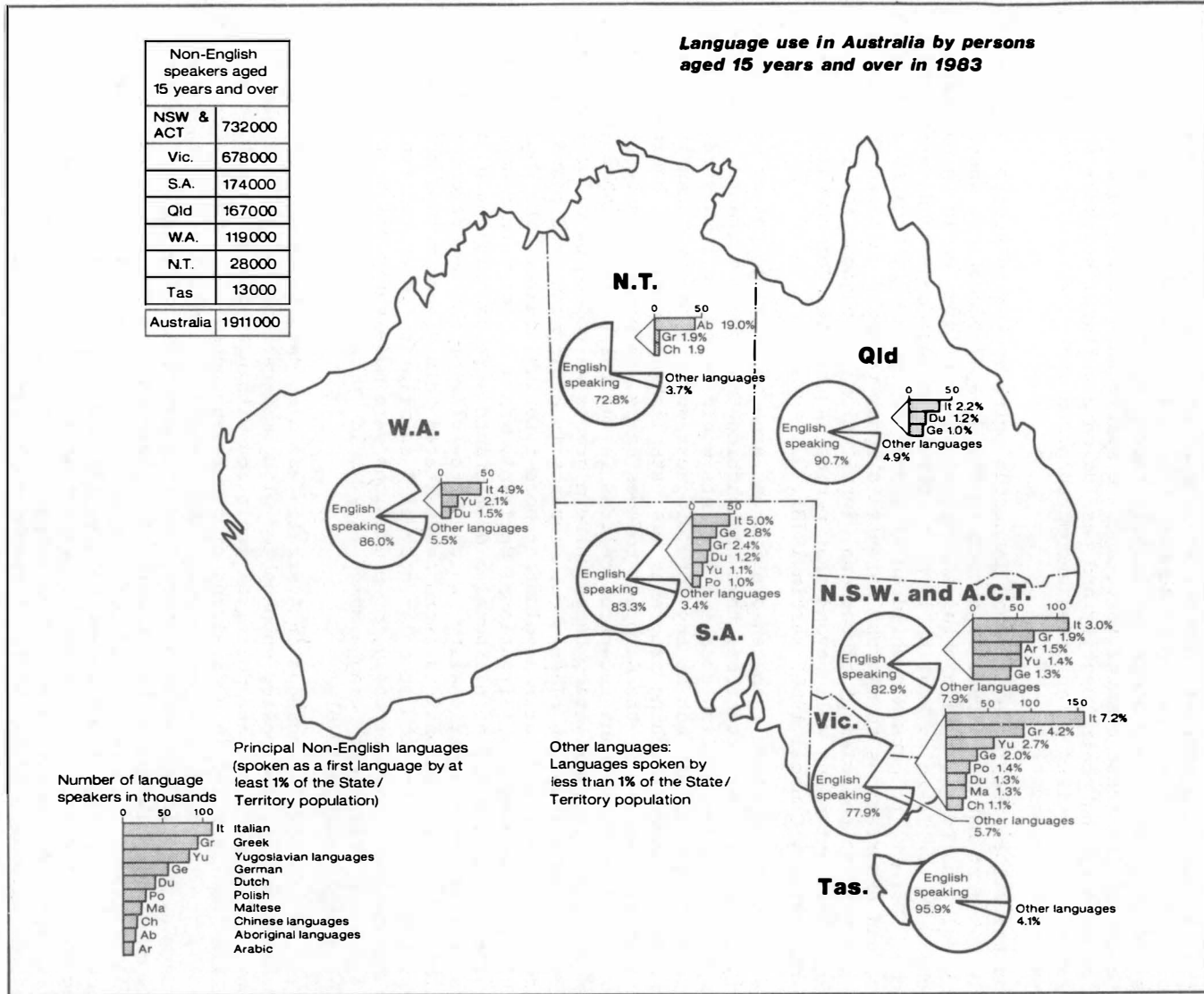


Figure 1

Source: ANLP:14

were sustained if at all only by group effort in the face of official and public mistrust. Most marked of the migrant communities' efforts were in the sustaining of their own locally-produced newspapers (characteristic of all sizable non-English-speaking migrant groups), and the establishment of an extensive if uncoordinated and poorly resourced number of 'ethnic schools', operating after hours and on weekends and concerned largely though not solely with language maintenance. For these communities, language maintenance became an essential part of maintaining their identity and passing on a cultural heritage to a generation being raised in an often uncomprehending and occasionally hostile Australian environment.

During the 1950s, the issue of other languages being spoken in Australia gained little coherent public discussion except in the area of education, where the very widely shared assumption obtained that migrant children would be hampered in school and in learning English if their first language continued to be used at home. Efforts to persuade children at school to speak only English at all times, and exhortations to migrant parents to speak to their children in English, were the abiding policies of educational institutions throughout the 1950s, and in many cases extending well beyond that period (Australia: Commonwealth Immigration Advisory Council 1960; Martin 1978).

In terms of policy other than censorship, one area of language policy *did* receive particular government attention: that of teaching English to migrants. Upon the assumption that non-English-speaking migrants would be coming to Australia as permanent settlers, and not as any form of guest-workers, a comprehensive range of English-language teaching programs was established for *adults*, beginning with initial teaching in the European refugee camps, shipboard lessons, on-arrival classes at migrant reception centres in Australia (established in country centres usually in ex-military camps where migrants waited to be allocated employment), continuation classes for migrants in employment, radio and correspondence lessons, and later a volunteer home-tutoring scheme. The English teaching course adopted, 'Situational English', was a direct-method approach to language teaching using no bilingual aid: migrants were usually taught in classes of deliberately-mixed nationality, which in the view of the Department of Immigration and its educational advisors necessitated this direct method and hastened acceptance of English: the social theory of 'assimilation' dictated the language-teaching method. Significantly, no provisions were made for similar programs for migrant *children*, it being assumed they would 'pick up' English 'naturally' in the school (Martin 1978).

The use of 'foreign' languages in Australia was also marginalised in aspects of Australian society and policy unconnected with immigration: Australia's geographical isolation and its political isolation within an English-speaking set of allies had resulted in a devaluing of other languages. In schools, for example, the teaching of other languages was generally limited to Latin, French and German, only in secondary schools, and then generally only for the academically most able: languages were a part of culture only in the most restricted social setting. This restricted learning of other languages was to continue to affect other aspects of government policy: the low level of linguistic competence among diplomatic staff, for example, meant that Australian representation in non-English speaking countries was often hampered, with particular effects upon relations with Asia (Hall 1959). Throughout the 1960s, in another instance, Asian language speakers had to be imported to staff the various programs of the short-wave radio service Radio Australia.

While isolated voices opposing assumptions of 'assimilation' and Anglo-conformism were heard very soon after the beginning of post-war immigration (Craig 1953), their effect on government policy was limited until well into the 1960s, when new definitions of the migrant experience and situation began to gain currency. Martin has characterised the immediate post-war Australian view of non-English speaking migrants as 'lucky to have found a home in Australia, coming from the tensions and economic desolation of post-war Europe: they were essential to economic growth and they were assimilable' (Martin 1978:27). Yet the actual economic and social position of migrants, as revealed by successive surveys and angry protests in the 1960s, was that of a population severely disadvantaged – economically and socially and, the area which gained perhaps most attention, educationally. The migrants, and migrant education in particular, were now beginning to be defined as a *problem*.

Martin argues that there were a number of factors that had caused this change in perspective, though not all of them stemming necessarily from any direct interest in the migrant groups and their languages on the part of the host population. Martin lists: an explosion of interest in education generally in the late 1960s, and an increased political salience of this issue and heightened criticism of established educational policies; greater interest in child-centred views of education meaning that 'the education of migrant pupils was more likely to be viewed from the perspective of the children themselves, in their unique school situation' (ibid:99); and the changing composition of the migrant population, with a decrease in the proportion of Northern and Eastern European migrants and increases in Southern European, Middle Eastern and Asian migration, bringing populations with often less previous formal education. A growing call for federal government involvement came from educational bodies and, increasingly, migrant groups as well: while educational issues, and particularly the provision of Child Migrant Education were to be the spearhead, the needs of migrants were also raised in the context of social welfare and economic policy, and services, particularly translating and interpreting services.

Language maintenance issues were not the dominant issues to be addressed throughout the 1960s, but they were raised to an extent never previously seen in Australia. Despite considerable and ultimately influential language maintenance efforts on the part of migrant communities themselves, a view of language maintenance as being of benefit either to the migrant or to the host country had little acceptance, even among language teachers. A 1956 conference of Modern Language teachers in Victoria, for example, could only define the benefits of learning Italian in the most restricted terms, in discussing the suggestion

that in districts where there is a large migrant community, the language of that group could be taught in schools. For example, in an area where there are a number of Italian migrants, Italian could be taught, not of course for the benefit of the Italian children, but for that of the Australians who would have the opportunity of using a foreign language actively, of appreciating a foreign culture and thereby helping in the assimilation of the migrants into the community.

(*Babel*, no.3, 1950:33)

Yet even in the 1950s individual advocates of Italian (the largest LOTE in Australia) could begin to press for language maintenance to be an important reason for introducing Italian in schools and high education: though at first

careful to place language maintenance arguments second to issues of cultural and intellectual benefit of language study (Chisholm 1957; McCormack 1951), they increasingly stressed language maintenance aspects in the 1960s (McCormack 1964). By 1964, too, Clyne (1964) could write directly about 'Migrant languages in schools' praising McCormack for initiatives in Italian and suggesting that a number of 'migrant languages' – a novel terminology – could well be introduced into schools, a suggestion still at odds with both government indifference on the issue and the suspicion of many foreign language teachers themselves. These early calls for attention to language maintenance argued against the contemporary view that bilingualism would be harmful to children, or would serve to retard assimilation into Australian society.

These developments were, in the middle and late 1960s, to find a response in government policy and some telling changes in rhetoric. The appointment of Billy Snedden as Minister for Immigration in 1966 coincided with the growth of political pressure to recognise migrant problems, and Martin sees his active role in addressing these issues as being crucial. Snedden set about to end assumptions of 'assimilation' and talked instead of the 'integration' of the by-now highly visible migrant communities into an Australian totality. Snedden's change in rhetoric was in one sense a new theory adopted to fit obvious social facts (the structural permanence of migrant communities) that could no longer be covered by the previous social theory of 'assimilation', but Snedden was keen to press the policy implications of such changed rhetoric: as Minister for Immigration he now praised migrant community endeavours, and stressed the benefits to be gained by all from having vibrant migrant cultures in Australia. In response to migrant educational disadvantage, Snedden sought to change government perspectives from the previous view of unproblematic absorption of migrant children into Australian schools, to an interest in direct provision of Child Migrant Education. Only Victoria of all the states had by the late 1960s begun to systematically organise for the teaching of English as a Second Language to migrant children, and the federal government's Immigration (Education) Act of 1971 provided funds for the training of teachers and the organisation of ESL teaching in all areas of high migrant density (Martin 1978).

This initiative can be seen, from one perspective, as a tried and tested response (extending Adult Migrant Education) that tackled only one aspect of the migrant situation and was still based upon clearly assimilationist assumptions (the method of ESL was again the direct method, with no bilingual methodology). But as Martin points out, Child Migrant Education arrived in a context of considerable turmoil in educational practices, with language professionals beginning to have a diversity of language objectives, and the growing demand by migrant groups that Child Migrant Education serve a diversity of needs (Martin 1978), leading to an explosion of language issues being addressed within and without education.

ETHNIC ISSUES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF 'MULTICULTURALISM' IN THE 1970s

The early and mid 1970s saw a marked increase in the salience of migrant issues in mainstream politics and social movements, providing the essential preconditions for evolving coherent language policies. With the advent of the federal Labor government in 1972, ethnic issues gained in prominence through the notable activity of Al Grassby, Minister for Immigration 1972-74. If Snedden had reoriented policy towards the reality of the continuing structured existence of migrant groups and the necessity of responding to their needs, Grassby saw

the advent of a culturally diverse Australia as bringing a fundamental change to the society and to its identity. Bringing onto the political stage the notion of 'multiculturalism' (first as a description of Australia, then as a prescription for recognising and responding to cultural diversity), Grassby began a process, followed by all subsequent federal governments, of highlighting and promoting aspects of cultural diversity, and attempting to put to rest notions of assimilation or of the need for migrants alone to have to change and adapt to their new environment. Grassby argued that Australian society and mainstream institutions would also need to change.

Grassby's brief tenure as Minister for Immigration was influential not only in terms of government policy but also in terms of encouraging migrant groups to become increasingly vocal in representing their own interests. Storer's survey of such initiatives in 1973-75 lists several major conferences (e.g. Migrant Workers Conference 1973, Migrant Education Action Conference 1974) linking migrant and non-migrant activists; intense organisation on the part of ethnic groups (e.g. establishment of Ethnic Communities Councils in Victoria and N.S.W., expansion of especially Italian and Greek political and welfare groups), and some resulting significant policy moves on the part of the Labor government (Racial Discrimination Act 1975, instituting access radio station 3ZZ (with significant migrant input) in Melbourne, and soon after ethnic radio stations in Sydney and Melbourne in 1975) (Storer 1975).

Increased academic attention to migrant issues was also apparent, with Price and Martin's extensive bibliographies appearing in 1975, and academic conferences (which now included significant contributions from migrants themselves) addressing themselves systematically to migrant issues. Perhaps the most notable of these was that on 'Migrants, Migration and the National Population Inquiry' in 1975 which included perhaps the first attention to language planning in Australia, with Clyne's advocacy of a language planning commission to look inter alia at issues of language maintenance and bilingualism (Clyne 1975a).

Against this background, several specific areas of language policy were to gain particular prominence:

(i) *The redefinition of 'migrant education'*. Unlike the long-standing adult migrant education programs, programs directed towards children very quickly underwent a period of redefinition and critique, which extended their scope in ways that tried to meet migrant community demands for more than the learning of English alone. Martin lists five issues that arose out of the Child Migrant Education Program, only the first of which was in any way anticipated:

1. Teaching English
2. Bilingual education
3. Community languages
4. Multicultural education
5. Ethnic schools. (Martin 1978:125)

Concern for bilingual education developed in the early 1970s in schools of high migrant density. With few models for guidance except distant bilingual Aboriginal programs in the Northern Territory, and the even more distant example of the Bilingual Education Act in the U.S.A., a few individual schools particularly in Melbourne attempted bilingual education to reorientate the school to take cognisance of the cultural background of its students (Rado 1973, 1975). These programs, though few and poorly resourced, provided an essential break to the equation of 'migrant education' with ESL. Meanwhile, the growth of community

language programs, also in urban schools, and attempts to bring about greater migrant parent involvement in school policy-making further contributed to the rapid diversification of CMEP concerns. The institutional reflection of this came when the CMEP as an independent program was subsumed by the Schools Commission (a body recommending the distribution of federal funds to schools) in its 'Migrant and Multi-cultural Education' program in 1976. While the bulk of finance in this area still went to ESL classes and facilities, the experimentation with other language programs and methodologies in schools has brought closer attention to the aim of language maintenance for migrant children, and also the aim of language teaching to all students. Ethnic schools, previously solely a migrant community concern, are now partly government funded, and there has been considerable consideration of the articulation of ethnic schools with other school systems.

(ii) *The institutionalisation of multiculturalism.* As previously mentioned, successive governments from the early 1970s have encouraged the development of 'multiculturalism': while often an ill-defined concept in public debate, language programs have featured prominently among the activities funded. The Galbally Report (Australia: Review of Post Arrival Programs and Services to Migrants 1978) marked the most concerted attempt to systematise and fund more adequately the range of post-arrival programs for migrants, and a monitoring body, the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs, was founded in 1979.

(iii) *Aboriginal languages.* A rise in the political salience of migrant communities and migrant language issues has been more than matched by the increased prominence of Aboriginal issues. As early as 1961 the federal government moved to establish the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, charged with pursuing 'scientific studies of the life and culture of the aboriginal race, and will endeavour to preserve and extend our knowledge of them' (Hansard, House of Representatives, vol.34, p.13, 20.2.62). From small beginnings, Aboriginal linguistics rapidly developed in the late 1960s and 1970s, and much of this study was applied to issues of Aboriginal education. Dissatisfied with State handling of Aboriginal affairs, in 1966 the federal government secured a change in the constitution to give it full powers to legislate in this area: with federal funding and the active support of linguists, the first bilingual education programs systematically established in Australia in recent times were in Aboriginal languages and English in the early 1970s. Growing political demands by Aboriginal communities since then have included demands for language rights.

MOBILISING FOR A NATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY

As mentioned earlier, the most tangible outcome at the national level of the increased concern for language policy in the late 1970s and early 1980s has been the establishment of an inquiry by the Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts into 'the development and implementation of a co-ordinated language policy for Australia'. Established in March 1982, this perhaps unusual move by a parliamentary body was the result of considerable activity on the part of language professionals, community groups and government agencies, convincing the Committee to recognise language as a legitimate and even urgent area of concern for public policy.

In translating the plethora of language issues into a specific political demand for an inquiry, three particular factors were crucial in laying the foundations for the Senate inquiry:

1. The essential involvement of a government department and bureaucracy

Moves to have language policy placed on official agendas were directed most sharply at the federal government's Department of Education, which had over the 1970s been given the responsibility of many of the educational aspects of the immigration program, and which put into effect the growing involvement of the federal government in financing school systems and beginning to influence school programs. In its own submission to the Senate inquiry, the Department could list some 22 recent major submissions and initiatives with which it had been connected in relation to language policy.

As one of its most notable initiatives, the Department had conducted a survey of the teaching of languages in schools in 1974-76, noting the paucity of opportunity for migrant children to study their first language in schools, and the general decline in language study for the whole school population. This *Report of the committee on the teaching of migrant languages in schools* (1976) provided the first comprehensive data for assessing language teaching across the Australian school system.

The interest in language education within the Department of Education continued for the next five years, with increasingly close contact between departmental officers and language professionals. Through its increasing range of duties in running language programs, the Department built up contact with all the developing language issues already surveyed.

The work of a small group within the Department resulted in a seminal document that appeared in May 1982, just after the announcement of the Senate inquiry — *Towards a national language policy*. Written to encourage interest in language policy and to test community reactions, it set out an extensive agenda of issues that closely reflect the actual terms of reference of the Senate inquiry. (See Appendix 1.)

This document argued that until recently Australia's 'predominant monolingual orientation denied a significant role to any language other than English'. Now, with over a million bilingual Australians who regularly use a language other than English, it was time to reassess and co-ordinate Australia's language policies:

Present language planning efforts represent, in many cases, ad hoc responses to needs as they become identified. Programs in this area have not therefore always been co-ordinated. For example, the development of programs for interpreters and translators has moved ahead of the complementary development of training courses; community language programs have been introduced without planned continuity within the curriculum; language assessment procedures have not kept pace with either the changing purposes for which students take language or the changing context of many courses. (Australia: Department of Education 1982:2)

The document went on to outline other language needs that have never been properly co-ordinated (ranging from adult literacy for English speakers, to ESL programs, to the language needs of the deaf), but also related these issues to the increasingly vocal concern of many communities in preserving and developing their own language, in the name of language rights. Beyond arguments of needs and rights, however, the document also stressed the urgency of considering language as a resource, to 'take cognizance of Australia's total communication needs at local, national and international levels'. (Ibid:3)

The Department of Education was clear in what kind of 'language policy' it was arguing for: it was to a large extent co-ordination and facilitation of effort and the setting of priorities rather than the advocacy of additional programs and the creation of new institutions that were the focus of its thinking. In a situation of economic recession and cutbacks in public expenditure, policies that require massive funding were unlikely to be well received, even if a rationale for them could be accepted. What was also sought however was the heuristic and persuasive power of a policy that could be taken to other forums – schools, government departments, private sector organisations – and be used to rationalise moves for changes in aspects of language treatment. For example, curriculum in schools is no longer centrally determined by educational authorities, but is much more likely to be school-based and to evolve from negotiation. The place of language teaching is thus the result of thousands of individual settlements, but it can be severely affected by more general trends in educational ideologies and policies. A well-articulated policy at higher levels could help practitioners in influencing local decisions.

The Department of Education's work for a language policy was also supported by other departments, particularly the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs through its Secretary, John Menadue. With a personal background in diplomacy and oriental studies, Menadue was prominent at conferences and in language publications supporting a language policy, combining specific migrant needs and concerns with a broader perspective of Australia's language needs in relation to external affairs, trade and relations with Asia (Menadue 1981).

2. The activities of the language professionals as an organised group

The role of language professionals has been crucial in securing many of the recent initiatives in policies related to languages. In the case of some language professional groups, such as in linguistics, there has been marked development of the profession from miniscule beginnings: the Linguistic Society of Australia was formed as a very small body in 1967, but the 1970s saw tremendous growth in this previously neglected academic discipline. In 1974 a group within the LSA, the Society for Linguistics and Education, was formed to focus on the application of linguistics within education, with considerable interest in issues of bilingual education, ESL and language maintenance. The rapid growth of interest in these and other aspects of applied work led to the formation of the Applied Linguistics Association of Australia in 1976, which devoted considerable time to examining policy issues, operating as a forum for language activists and slowly opening up contacts with government departments and politicians.

In some contrast to the growing activism of the linguists, within groups of modern language teachers there had been a growing sense of crisis in the face of a steady decline of some traditional areas of language study, particularly French. A prevailing mood of defensiveness and lack of morale only changed in the late 1970s, through a process of politicisation and demands that the profession, in order to survive, address itself to wider issues of language policy. The process of politicisation, through contact with the wider field of linguistics and its policy-orientation, was reflected very clearly in the Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations of Australia journal *Babel* in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This publication, previously largely concerned with in-house issues of language teaching methodology, with occasional articles on wider issues, changed remarkably abruptly in 1977 with the appointment of Terry Quinn, a modern language academic and Director of the Language

Centre at the University of Melbourne, to the editorship. His very first edition contained an urgently-written article by Ingram 'Language teaching in the pluralist society - the challenge for teacher educators' which detailed the immense shortcomings that language teachers had demonstrated in coming to grips with multilingualism in Australia, and pointed to the 'need for language teachers to be reoriented toward the pluralist society and Australia's geographical, political and economic location', arguing that the teachers should be re-educated 'for new languages, new subjects and new community-based methods'. (*Babel*, vol.3, no.1, 1977:11). This same edition contained an article promoting Asian languages in Australian schools, and reported a Modern Language Teachers Association of Queensland initiative in making a detailed submission to its state government on language needs in schools, with emphasis on migrant and Asian languages.

For the next three years Quinn geared *Babel* to create awareness of policy within the profession. His 1978 editorial 'A national language policy', warned the profession that it had a low profile in the community and could not expect to exert influence unless it developed its political muscle and took seriously the need to convince the community of the importance of language learning (*Babel*, vol.4, no.1, 1978). His following editorial 'Of language teachers and government reports' argued that modern language teachers had totally failed to respond to the 1976 Report on *Teaching of migrant languages in schools* (there had been, for example, no mention at all of this Report in the *Babels* of the day): 'In the aftermath of the 1976 Report, some observers bitterly accused our profession, rightly or wrongly, of being an irrelevant and elitist group of conservative French and German teachers, wedded to old ways and unwilling to face contemporary linguistic issues in a changing Australian society' (*Babel*, vol.14, no.2, 1978:2). He pointed to the recent publication of the Galbally Report (1978) as an important opportunity to make the profession's views felt on cultural and linguistic pluralism.

The policy orientation of *Babel* continued apace, with the previous in-house type articles occupying only a fraction of their former space: other articles in 1978 included several on problems of bilingual teacher-training programs, and there were detailed reports of conferences with a stress on language policy and political action. In 1979 came Ingram's flagship 'The case for a national language policy in Australia', Brandle's 'The diversification of language education', and in the final issue of 1979 a reprint, occupying almost the entire edition, of the Department of Education's *Education in a multicultural Australia*.

Quinn pursued his aggressive editorials: in 'The unity of a language profession' he urged closer co-operation with other professional language groups and talked of them forming 'an effective pressure group', arguing that the most successful of these were 'the broadly-based ones representing loose coalitions of many groups with some sense of common purpose' (*Babel*, vol.15, no.2, 1979:3). This emphasis continued in 1980 with a long theoretical look at the Galbally Report by Lewins, several considerations of language in core curriculum proposals, and two editorials, one by Ingram as guest editor 'On multiculturalism and multilingualism', and finally one by Quinn 'Language programs and national needs' praising Menadue's promotion of Asian languages.

With political links between professional associations increasingly assured, the issue of a national language policy could now be addressed by a broadly-based coalition. The role played by the language professionals in moving other institutions towards a consideration of language policy - and the Senate inquiry in particular - was to be critical.

Three factors here deserve particular attention. Firstly, the language groups formally organised themselves in August 1981 as the Professional Language Associations for a National Language Policy (PLANLangPol) Committee, comprising the Applied Linguistics Association of Australia, Australian Linguistic Society, Aboriginal Languages Association, Australian Association for the Teaching of English, Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers' Associations, and the Australian Universities Language and Literatures Association. Co-convenors were Professor Ross Steele (French, Sydney University) and Professor Roland Sussex (Russian, University of Melbourne).

Secondly, PLANLangPol did much to create the preconditions for the Senate inquiry by running series of workshops and meetings on language policy in joint activities and representations in late 1981, when together with the Department of Education they sensed the possibility of having language policy addressed in a national forum. It was the representations of the PLANLangPol Committee and the considerable support it had engendered within the Department of Education that ensured the Senate Committee's choice of language policy as its next area of investigation. PLANLangPol also maintained strong contacts with the Ethnic Communities Councils who actively mobilised ethnic support for a national language policy.

Thirdly, PLANLangPol created a forum for its own deliberations and the basis of its own submission by organising a series of meetings where those writing sections of the submission could present their formulations for discussion. The completed submission provided the Senate Committee with one of its major documents. Further contact with the Senate Committee was maintained by inviting its members to speak at professional language conferences.

While some issues raised in the submission (e.g. research concerns, the possibility of a National Language Institute to do basic data collection on languages) relate very specifically to the needs of language professionals, the broadness of issues addressed in PLANLangPol's submission is demonstrated in its table of contents:

Section I English

- 1.1 English as a Mother Tongue: Teaching.
- 1.2 English as a Mother Tongue: Other Aspects.
- 1.3 Standardization of Australian English.
- 1.4 English as a National Language.
- 1.5 English as a Second Language.
- 1.6 English as a Foreign Language.

Section II Languages other than English

- 2.1 Aboriginal Languages
- 2.2 Non-Aboriginal Community Languages other than English.
- 2.3 Second Language Teaching in Primary Schools, Secondary Schools and Higher and Further Education.

Section III General Considerations

- 3.1 The Role of Linguistic Theory in a National Language Policy.
- 3.2 Translating and Interpreting.
- 3.3 Research and Information.
- 3.4 "National Languages Institute".

3. The acceptance that a language policy should encompass all languages

One obvious way in which the Senate inquiry differed from several other attempts to formulate language policy (e.g. the U.S.A.'s Presidential Commission) is the central place of a focus on *English* in any language policy. It is useful to consider the implications of such an all encompassing approach to language: most clearly this is an attempt to define language policy as being *not* exclusively a migrant or ethnic issue, and thus appealing to a broader constituency than the migrant and Aboriginal constituencies alone. Also, such a broader definition, while obviously relating to the interests of language professionals, does not limit itself to the province of any one specialty, e.g. teaching ESL or teaching foreign languages. The stress on English opens up a spectrum of issues which can be of wider concern.

The Senate inquiry looked *inter alia* at the status of English in Australia, illiteracy in English and the teaching of English as a mother tongue, as well as English as a second and foreign language. Many of these areas had witnessed considerable development and professional involvement in the 1970s.

THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO A NATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY

The Senate Committee inquiry begun in 1982 published its Report in October 1984 (Australia: Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts *A national language policy* (henceforth *ANLP*), 1984). The submissions and evidence to the Committee (there were over 230 submissions) constitute an invaluable archive and source of insight into the thinking of official bodies and professional and community groups over a range of language issues, and the function of the inquiry in bringing to light these manifold concerns and giving them impetus has transcended perhaps the actual recommendations of the inquiry itself, which battled to try to encompass the enormous range of issues in a comprehensive manner.

The recommendations of the Committee were generally mild, and cautious in some areas where there were intense differences of opinion among witnesses and submissions (e.g. bilingual education for other than Aboriginal children). The Committee sought first of all to establish overall principles of government action:

Recommendation 1: Language policies should be developed and co-ordinated at the national level on the basis of four guiding principles, namely:

- *competence in English;
- *maintenance and development of languages other than English;
- *provision of services in languages other than English;
- *opportunities for learning second languages

and the Committee sought to partly institutionalise its own work by recommending a 'national advisory council on language policy...with advisory, co-ordinating and policy research functions' (*ANLP: Recommendation 2*). Several areas were of particular concern to the Senate Committee:

1. Aboriginal languages

Despite almost universal ignorance among other Australians of these languages, the Committee estimated there were some 50,000 speakers. Many of the hundreds of Aboriginal languages are in great danger of extinction (many have died out

already), while some 50 are in a relatively healthy condition with in some cases numbers of their speakers growing. For many of the languages in greatest danger, essential work of systematically recording the language needs to be undertaken to preserve these languages for posterity. For the groups whose languages are stronger, questions of language maintenance, bilingualism, education and media arise in the same way as for migrant languages. Bilingual education has been undertaken for over a decade in some parts of northern Australia, but in many state education systems Aboriginal languages have been totally ignored.

The many groups representing Aboriginal interests who appeared before the Committee all stressed the urgency of the situation of these languages and, equally strongly, urged that the principle of community consultation must underlie language policy in this area.

Aboriginal issues are ones in which the federal government does have considerable scope, with constitutional as well as financial powers. This is the issue which clearly made the greatest impact on the Committee, and it recommended the urgent increase of resources for the study of Aboriginal languages and the training of Aboriginal linguists, for a detailed census of surviving Aboriginal languages, for the expansion of maintenance bilingual programs, and for the wider teaching of these languages to the non-Aboriginal population. It finally urged that 'Aboriginal people must be guaranteed the major role in decision-making relating to all Aboriginal language issues' (ANLP: Recommendation 56).

2. Bilingual education (other than Aboriginal)

While the issue of bilingual education has been constantly addressed in many other countries and in some cases has a legislative mandate, the Senate inquiry revealed that there is very divided opinion over the desirability and feasibility of bilingual programs in Australian schools. The Department of Education argued that although the number of bilingual programs has recently increased in Australia, they are

often considered to be temporary, their dominant purpose being to enable children to maintain or develop their academic knowledge while they are still learning English. Once enough English has been acquired, usually towards the end of primary school, education usually proceeds in English alone.

Such an approach to bilingual education, however, may not be meeting the demand for language maintenance programs for children from non-English speaking homes to fully develop their skills in their mother tongue as well as English.

(Australia: Department of Education 1982:7)

The Schools Commission submitted that these kinds of *transitional* bilingual programs were the only ones feasible, and that 'a policy of bilingualism for individuals is not likely given likely resource levels'. In their appearance before the Committee the Schools Commission representatives argued that transitional bilingual programs began by accepting the child's first language but that

the aim is really to ensure that they are competent in English in the long run so that you start from the known and work to the unknown — the old pedagogic thing.

The other view of bilingual education is, in fact, that you teach the subject matter in two languages...The best example of that...would be the Canadian approach. The Commission view is that it does not see Australia developing along the Canadian model. As mentioned earlier, as far as it can see it sees there being one official language. It agrees that the transitional bilingual approach is very useful and should be supported, especially for older students who come in as new arrivals, but also for Aboriginal children. Its view is, though, that anything more than a transitional bilingual approach, from what it sees, is unlikely to happen in Australia. (Evidence to Committee, Hansard:248)

This issue was joined in several other submissions and testimonies, where it was argued that bilingual programs should not be of the transitional kind alone but should also be concerned with language *maintenance*. This was argued by the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils and by organisations representing attempts at fully bilingual schooling, for example the French-Australian School in Canberra which runs an integrated curriculum in the two languages; by representatives of the Victorian Advisory Committee on Migrant and Multicultural Education – ironically, the body recommending on how to spend Victoria's share of Schools Commission multicultural education money; and by Michael Clyne (PLANLangPol) who reported on the success of bilingual German-English programs on an immersion model in some Melbourne primary schools.

With a number of other organisations weighing in on both sides of the debate, the Committee was cautious in its ultimate recommendations. As compared with its emphatic support for maintenance programs for Aboriginal languages, in relation to migrant languages it pointed to the disagreements voiced and felt constrained to urge slow development: it recognised the 'widely acknowledged effectiveness of the bilingual approach for first language maintenance and second-language learning' (ANLP 11.40) and praised the few maintenance bilingual programs in Australian schools, but was daunted above all by the problem of the diversity of languages in the school context, and warned that 'there are substantial organisational problems to be overcome and that in many cases the bilingual approach may be impracticable in financial terms' (ANLP 11.40). Without attempting to resolve the disparate views it recommended only in the most general terms that 'Education authorities should establish more bilingual programs, and evaluate their outcomes as a guide to possible further expansion. Provisions need to be made for teacher education for bilingual programs'. (ANLP: Recommendation 76).

3. The study of languages other than English

While second language study (particularly French) has dramatically declined in recent decades, an area of considerable recent expansion has been that of second language teaching in primary schools, where until the advent of community language studies there had been a general tradition of not teaching languages. The Committee looked with considerable favour upon this development, and recommended that such programs be 'substantially increased to give more children the opportunity to maintain their home language or to acquire other languages' (ANLP: Recommendation 78).

At the secondary level, the old question of compulsory language prerequisites for tertiary education was raised (such prerequisites being almost universally abandoned in Australia), but the Committee was very much more interested in

alternative suggestions that fell short of compulsion. Noting the decline in the proportion of secondary students studying any language at all for any period of time (slightly over 60% in year seven, reducing to 12% in year 12), the Committee argued that this problem needed to be tackled in the initial years of secondary education rather than at its end with the manipulation of prerequisites: it recommended that 'all secondary students should experience language learning for a minimum period of one year, at levels suitable to their abilities' (*ANLP: Recommendation 80*). The Committee stated that it would 'be hesitant to go beyond this position, at least in the context of the present state of development of language teaching techniques' (*ANLP 11.62*). Recognising that most language programs were developed for teaching the academically most able students, and that making such programs compulsory would, in the words of the PLANLangPol submission 'impose the cruel inevitability of failure on some percentage of students', the Committee recommended that 'secondary students of lesser academic ability should not be required to continue language learning for periods longer than a year until language programs suitable for students of all ability levels have been fully developed and shown to be operating successfully' (*ANLP: Recommendation 81, 11.62*).

One concern of the Committee in relation to LOTEs in schools was the tendency to categorise languages taught in schools into invidious categories — 'Asian', 'migrant', 'traditional foreign languages', etc. — which in the Committee's view had obscured rational debate on language learning and 'inhibited attempts to devise policies which apply in a consistent and coherent way across the whole field of languages other than English' (*ANLP 11.6*). Given the degree of entrenchment of these categories in professional groups and educational programs, the Committee's comments are perhaps a timely warning. However, even ignoring such categorisation the question of priorities in selecting languages for teaching purposes from all possible contenders remained an intractable one. The Committee applauded the diversification of language offerings that had occurred at primary, secondary and tertiary levels in the last decade, but argued that for the newer language offerings to be properly staffed and resourced, priorities must be established that can guide more long-term planning. In the end, however, apart from recommending local decision-making and community involvement, it found the problem of priorities too difficult and recommended, rather unhelpfully, that 'education authorities should identify those languages of major relevance to the majority of schools. Funds available for the teaching of languages should be directed mainly to such languages although a substantial proportion should be reserved for other languages' (*ANLP: Recommendation 87*).

4. Teacher training

The Committee was very concerned with the present composition and quality of the teaching force in regard to the range of language issues facing schools. There was careful scrutiny of the adequacy of recruitment and training of second language and ESL teachers, and recognition of a set of problems faced by many such teachers: career structures, and the problem of organisationally fitting teachers, careers and programs into schools. The quality of teacher-training programs was of particular concern, as was the almost total lack of language awareness in the training of teachers who did not have specific expertise in teaching ESL or foreign languages.

The Committee's recommendations suggested incentives for language teachers (e.g. tax deductions and scholarships/fellowships for living and studying in an overseas country where their language is spoken), and several suggestions

for education systems to undertake longer-term planning to ensure adequate numbers of language teachers, ensuring that only qualified teachers were used to teach languages, and for responding to linguistic diversity, urging teacher training institutions to 'broaden the range of options in languages and language teaching methodologies which are provided' (ANLP: Recommendation 86).

While the majority of the Committee's recommendations concerned educational matters, non-educational matters were also dealt with. The Committee noted the significant developments that had occurred in several areas to meet language needs, demonstrating the impact that a multilingual population was having on a variety of institutions. There had been, for instance, a rapid reorientation of libraries in Australia towards their multilingual clientele, with large holdings of books and non-book materials in LOTEs, and active programs for the development of these library services. There had also been attention to the provision of library services to those with communication handicaps.

Finally, the Committee looked at the multilingual impact on the media. The establishment of a multicultural TV service in 1980 serving capital cities was a means of exposing a significant proportion of the Australian population (of whatever background) to different cultures and languages. There has also been a significant expansion of radio services for and by migrant and Aboriginal communities, and this was seen to have considerable positive impact upon language maintenance. The Committee recommended that the introduction of future communications technologies (e.g. satellites) should consider language needs and language demands from the populations affected.

STATE INITIATIVES

The particular forces that shaped the National Language Policy also were apparent at the State level where initiatives had in some cases overtaken the Senate inquiry, particularly in relation to the detailed formulation of language objectives in school systems. In Victoria in 1983, the State government on the recommendation of its Advisory Committee on Multicultural and Migrant Education initiated plans to introduce supernumerary community language teachers into primary schools, to accelerate the teaching of languages to lower age groups than had been the norm. In 1985 there will be 130 such teachers.

A discussion paper in 1984 recommended the expansion of the program and addressed the implications of this in terms of staffing (including teacher training) support and resource materials. It especially pointed to successful maintenance bilingual programs that had been developed in several schools and urged adoption of such programs by an increasing number of schools. Perhaps most significantly, it quantified its recommendations, asking for

a gradual increase in the number of community language and bilingual education programs in primary schools, a proposed target increase of an average of 60 programs/year over the next five years and an average of 100 programs/year over the following ten years.

(Victoria: State Board of Education and MACMME 1984:4.12).

The initiative of the community language teacher program came in the context not only of language maintenance for migrant children but also as a desire to expose all students in Victorian schools to second language learning. In a Ministerial Paper issued in 1984 on curriculum development, curricular objectives

for schools were given in broad terms of a 'comprehensive range of studies and activities' needing to be undertaken by all students. One of the specified objectives was 'to acquire proficiency in another language used in the Australian community', and the Paper directed that school councils (who design in detail each school's curriculum) ensure that students are enabled to progressively attain these objectives. (Victoria, Minister of Education 1984:17).

At some odds with the Senate inquiry's worries over the rigid categorisation of language programs, the Victorian initiatives did not shy from justifying their programs specifically as *community language* programs.

In South Australia, a wide-ranging report 'Education for a cultural democracy' (South Australia: Task force to investigate multiculturalism and education 1984) devised an ambitious set of language objectives for all school systems, government and non-government. It points to the tardiness of the education system in responding to the advent of a 'multicultural society', and looked not only at language education programs but also at broader aspects of hiring policies, teacher training, departmental staffing and resource issues. In specifically educational terms, it recommended a very definite target to be reached: 'that English plus one other language be part of the education for all students' (ibid:xxiii), with a firm schedule for implementation of 10% per year until its achievement in 1995. In this, the South Australian recommendation went well beyond the recommendation of the Senate Committee, that all secondary students should have a minimum of one year's language learning. The Report also recommended particular attention to language maintenance measures and the closer integration of ethnic schools with day school systems, the introduction of additional community languages at the tertiary education level, and the intensification of effort and resources in the area of ESL teaching to migrants.

REFLECTING ON LANGUAGE POLICY

The hectic and in some cases breathless pursuit of a national language policy in the last few years has wrought important changes both to the language professions and to the political visibility of language issues in the wider society.

The experience of participating in the formulation of a language policy has been a fascinating and engaging one for Australian language professionals, with the necessity of examining assumptions normally taken for granted about their field, and of sharing the frustration of detailing the proper implementation of cherished but sometimes very lofty hopes for language programs.

Looking more broadly, the placing of language into a policy context, so novel and received so often with puzzlement at the time, now gives some means of co-ordinating an unintegrated set of practices, policies and intentions in the area of 'multiculturalism': to consider these matters in terms of language policy may give a focus to a range of issues that otherwise prove exasperatingly diffuse to grapple with. There may well be practical, and theoretical, sense in turning policy discourse to 'multilingualism' from the less precise 'multiculturalism'.

Finally, in talking of a national policy on languages, in no sense does even the Senate Report provide a thorough and detailed policy to be handed down from above by fiat: even with its mass of recommendations on a spectrum of language issues, the detailed implementation – and the sorting out of priorities in areas

inadequately dealt with by the Senate inquiry — lies clearly in the hands of language professionals, of their clients, and of the community groups for whom the value of language is central to their identity and their discourse with others. The ultimate value of a national language policy may well be in the overarching support, political and symbolic as much as material, that it gives to their own endeavours.

APPENDIX I

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE ARTS: TERMS OF REFERENCE

The development and implementation of a co-ordinated language policy in Australia

In conducting this inquiry, the Committee will consider the following:

- (a) All aspects of, including guidelines for, a national language policy;
- (b) the role of English as a first and second language and its relationship to other languages in Australia;
- (c) the present use of languages in Australia including use in the community, in the media — including newspapers, ethnic radio and multicultural television — and in the arts and to extend equality of access to services and to the institutions of Australian society;
- (d) the particular requirements arising from the community and educational use of Aboriginal languages;
- (e) the current state of, and trends in, language teaching and learning in primary and secondary schools, tertiary education and other formal and informal programs in the community;
- (f) the extent to which existing policies, practices, attitudes, resource allocations and programs are adequate to provide for the appropriate development of Australia's language resources;
- (g) the language requirements in Australia necessary for trade diplomacy, defence, tourism and cultural exchange especially taking into account Australia's regional and other international relationships;
- (h) the special language needs of the deaf and other persons with disabilities;
- (i) the ways and means of stimulating continuing public awareness of and interest in the development of Australia's language resources;
- (j) arrangements for the on-going implementation of a national language policy including the identification of priorities and the allocation of resources;
- (k) the provision of, and training for, translating and interpreting services;
- (l) the extent of adult illiteracy in English and the need for remedial programs.

