

Book reviews

AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL ENGLISH: CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN AN ADOPTED LANGUAGE

Malcolm, Ian G.

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Australian Aboriginal English: Change and Continuity in an Adopted Language is both a finale to a life's work and a point of transition to a new era in exploring and understanding a vibrant language variety and its social meanings. Author Ian G. Malcolm, a world-renowned figure in the study of Aboriginal English in Australia, has for 50 years stood astride the theoretical and applied worlds of the discipline; accordingly, there is value in this work for both scholars of linguistics and classroom-based education practitioners. The former will recognise the importance of Professor Malcolm's courage and tenacity in breaking what in the 1970s was new linguistic ground, while the latter will know that the very fact that there is a specialist area known as EAL/D is owed in a large part to his fearless collaboration with educational policy-makers in the 1990s and 2000s.

The trajectory of Malcolm's storied career can be tracked through the progression of the book's eight chapters. Following two globally-oriented chapters which give a geographic, historical and cultural introduction to readers who may not be familiar with the Australian context, the third and fourth chapters draw heavily on early fieldwork carried out in the 1970s and 80s with mentor and colleague, Susan Kaldor. Phonological and morpho-syntactic characteristics are observed in detail, with abundant examples from urban and remote areas around Australia. This will be of particular interest to academic linguists as well as to those EAL/D teachers who may have a fascination with descriptive linguistics and, specifically, what is underlying the L1/D1 of their students. With chapter five, which analyses lexis and discourse, the focus

shifts towards cultural linguistics, an area Malcolm became interested in in the 1990s and early 2000s, and this topic is canvassed thoroughly in chapter six: long-time readers of *TESOL in Context* will recognise this discussion of cultural conceptualisation from Sharifian, Malcolm, Rochecouste, Konigsberg & Collard's (2005) brief article about 'schemas', and will find the ideas explored in greater depth here. Chapter seven is a useful walk-through of the various language contact phenomena at play—pidginization, creolization and general substrate influences, and a quick-fire reckoning of features from other English varieties, using the innovative eWAVE tool ("The Electronic World Atlas of Varieties of English,") launched in 2011, which throws up some interesting possibilities for further investigation for academic linguists.

The final chapter, entitled 'Cross-cultural communication', expresses Malcolm's overall commitment to applying theory to practice and bringing about positive change through education policy—advocating specifically for the adoption of bidialectal teaching strategies, and more broadly for recognition and respect of Aboriginal culture. Five 'assumptions' or 'hypotheses' underlying education in SAE will be familiar to faithful TiC readers, being recast from Malcolm's article on literacy for Indigenous students (2003). Here they are modified somewhat in order and treatment: where in 2003 they were debunked as 'misconceptions' (p. 8), the Malcolm of 2018 is somewhat more equivocal. This is not the only capitulation here: there is a cryptic concession to the opposition to the use of dialect readers (p. 199) citing dated counter-arguments (Baugh, 1983, pp. 109-117) which, based on African American street English in the context of over-crowded urban schools in the US, would be easily defused. While clearly taking pride in the progress made in two-way bidialectal education—advocated in the United States since the 1970s but in 1990s Australia reaching 'its most sophisticated level of implementation' (p. 200)—Malcolm describes with some despondency pressures from a re-emerging hegemonic emphasis on SAE literacy, the advantages of which he cautions 'should not be oversold' (p. 206). There is a sense here of handing over to the next generation of scholars and educators—who, reading on, will find the richly annotated bibliography in Appendix 1 an excellent roadmap for continuing this work.

It bears mention that a work of this importance and scope would benefit from closer attention by a dedicated editor.

Occasionally the need to address both lay and specialist readers creates contradictions in register, and this is particularly noticeable in the linguistics-focused content. For example, while no trained linguist or EAL/D teacher will require an explanation of the function of a verb ('Verbs carry information about something which is done...', p. 55), the reader who will appreciate such explanations is unlikely to grasp what is then meant by 'strong and weak verbs'(p. 56) without further elaboration. Similarly, a reader not closely acquainted with phonetics and phonology might appreciate the general explanations of principles provided, but will probably not understand passing reference to 'a sandhi rule' (p. 52). An independent pair of eyes would also pick up and correct occasional misspellings and inconsistencies in format, address some irregularities in referencing, and help develop a more usefully configured index.

But minor editorial deficits aside, from any vantage point, this book is a landmark, establishing once and for all that Australian Aboriginal English, far from being some lesser form of an imagined 'mother tongue', is a fully-fledged language in its own right. Occasional personal glimpses of the author affirm the humility, dedication and kindness that earned him deep admiration and affection from the Aboriginal people he worked with. It is a testament to how linguistic scholarship can transition to real social change, influencing policy and equipping teachers with strategies to achieve the best outcomes for students—who are, in effect, decision-makers of the future.

References

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- Sharifian, F., Malcolm, I. G., Rochecouste, J., Konigsberg, P., & Collard, G. (2005). 'They were in a cave' : schemas in the recall of Aboriginal English texts. *TESOL in Context*, 15(1), 9-12.