

Australia's Many Voices: Ethnic Englishes, Indigenous and Migrant Languages. Policy and Education

GERHARD LEITNER, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2004, 341 pp.

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As the title of Gerhard Leitner's two volume series on language in Australia suggests, while mainstream Australian English (mAusE) is the dominant language of power and access, there are many other languages that play a crucial sociocultural role in Australian society. The Australian language habitat is thus not a monolingual one, but rather is a multilingual tapestry interwoven with a constantly evolving mixture of indigenous languages, contact languages and migrant languages that overlays the prevailing mAusE paradigm. The way in which mAusE evolved, and its relationship to other forms of Australian English (AusE), such as ethnic Englishes, was addressed in the first volume, *Australian English*/A National Language* (Leitner 2004). The second volume, *Ethnic Englishes, Indigenous and Migrant Languages. Policy and Education*, thus addresses the other strands of the Australian language habitat that lend it much of its colour and character.

This volume is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is a very brief outline of the main focus of the first volume (Leitner 2004), and an overview of the remaining four chapters in the book. The second chapter goes on to discuss indigenous languages, the third chapter addresses migrant languages, and the fourth chapter considers the development of language policy in the Australian context. The final chapter explores the relationship between language habitat change and the development of the Australian nation. The theoretical stance underpinning the discussion in each chapter is the same as outlined in the first volume (Leitner 2004).

Chapter 2 focuses on the language habitats of indigenous Australians, and it is here that the complexity of the Australian language situation starts to become apparent. As is already well-known, many of the indigenous languages that existed before European settlement were lost in the

dramatic upheaval in indigenous societies that ensued from contact with settlers. The poignancy of Leitner's notion of 'invasion' of language habitats and the subsequent change that can be wrought to a pre-existing habitat is made clear in this chapter. However, he does not dwell on loss, but rather attempts to dissect the linguistic responses in the indigenous language habitat to this invasion and analyse how this has given rise to the modern language habitat of indigenous Australians today based on his model of language contact (p. 76). He shows that in addition to the maintenance and loss, and sometimes revival, modification of indigenous languages has also occurred, often due to the geographical dislocation of indigenous societies. Contact languages that have arisen in indigenous societies are also discussed, and although many of these were only transient in nature, a number have survived and continue to be used today. The formative influence of English English (EngE) rather than AusE on contact languages such as Cape Barren English, Kriol and Torres Strait Creole is highlighted, once again illustrating the complexity of the Australian language habitat. The formation of Aboriginal English (AborE), a range of English dialects spoken by Aborigines that are strongly influenced by indigenous language pragmatics and genres (p. 132), is then discussed, including its emerging role as a national ethnolect. This then leads into an overview of the modern language habitat of indigenous Australians. Leitner concludes that while mAusE is the language of power and economics, AborE, creoles and indigenous languages are the languages of social interaction and identity (p. 151).

In Chapter 3, the continually evolving language habitat of migrant Australians is analysed. As Leitner points out, this habitat is inherently unstable as languages other than English (LOTEs) spoken by migrants have generally 'entered Australia, enriched the habitat, gained some space of their own, and yet disappeared eventually. There is, and has been, a cycle of maintenance, shift and loss' (p. 161). Yet in spite of this constant change, LOTEs are now an integral part of the Australian language habitat as more than three million Australians use a LOTE, primarily in the home and in ethnic communities, according to data from the 2001 census (p. 164). There is not sufficient room, unfortunately, to analyse in detail why some LOTEs are maintained in ethnic communities longer

than others, a question that surely needs investigation if we are to fully appreciate the role LOTEs play in Australian society. There is also some discussion of contact languages that have arisen from migrant groups with a non-English speaking background, although these have generally been transient in nature, and few have survived. The importance of pragmatic factors in analysing a language habitat is once again highlighted when Leitner points out that migrant forms of English, while often characterized as phonologically or grammatically different from mAusE, often deviate more significantly at the pragmatic level (p. 214).

Chapter 4 gives a succinct overview of language politics and education in Australia since the first European settlers arrived. Leitner traces the development of a more coherent national language policy from the laissez-faire situation prior to the 1870s through to contemporary tension between community-oriented policies that emphasize plurilingualism, and economically-oriented policies that emphasize English literacy and the importance of Asian languages (p. 227). The teaching of English, indigenous languages and migrant LOTEs is also discussed, although Leitner neglects considering the English teaching industry and its role in the Australian language habitat. In addition, while Leitner views AusE as a valuable 'export' arising from Australia's role as a hub of higher education, particularly in South East Asia, the underlying tension between the more globally 'prestigious' forms of English, BrE and AmE, and AusE in the English teaching industry is something that also needs to be considered in light of any such claim. Leitner also laments the declining political interest in language policy in recent times in contrast to the high profile it enjoyed in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and warns that Asian languages still maintain only a weak position in the Australian language habitat (see also Leitner 2005), an issue that has become increasingly topical in recent times. It appears that economically-oriented policies will continue to dominate the current fairly low-key governmental approach to languages, as the establishment of the National Centre for Language Training, a consortium of tertiary institutions that provides language resources for Australian businesses involved in international trade, at the beginning of 2005 illustrates.

The final chapter emphasizes the underlying thesis of Leitner's two-volume work, *Australia's Many Voices*, that, rather than looking at languages in isolation, it is more productive to shift the focus to 'contact and interaction in the dynamically changing habitat in which languages function' (pp. 273/274, original emphasis). The figures summarizing changes in the language habitats of Australia over time epitomize this approach (pp. 283/284). There is also an attempt to correlate developments in the Australian language habitat with socio-political history, although Leitner warns that his analysis is only preliminary and requires further interdisciplinary work. The chapter concludes with an overview of 'Australian' features of the Australian language habitat, such as the High Rise Tone (HRT) found in all sub-varieties of AusE and the use of typical Australianisms, although this summary seems somewhat speculative in nature with further work required to better understand, for example, what might be considered 'typical Australianisms'.

This book continues the work started in the first volume in giving a succinct overview of the Australian language habitat that nevertheless does not neglect its diversity and complexity. It demonstrates that to fully understand the place of English, or indeed any language in Australian society, one cannot ignore the influence of other languages which exist together with it in the same language habitat. This volume will be particularly useful to researchers working on language policy and planning, but it will be of interest to anyone who wishes to better understand the state of languages in Australia today and how this habitat has arisen.

References

- Leitner G 2004 *Australia's Many Voices. Australian English*/A National Language* Mouton de Gruyter Berlin.
- Leitner G 2005 'Australia's "Asia competence" and the uneasy balance between Asian languages and English' *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication* 15(2).