

# Making language policy: Australia's experience

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**by Joseph Lo Bianco**

## **Introduction**

This paper describes the Australian experience in formulating a national language policy and analyses some of the more important features of the policy and of the process which led to its adoption. The description of the process, and any generalisable validity it may contain, may be a valuable contribution which the Australian experience can offer to language policy (theory and practice) in the world. The development and acceptance of the national policy on languages has been essentially a process of status attribution. It was the evolution of a language constituency which was sufficiently coherent and strong to find unifying common ground among widely disparate groups which, ultimately, was the determining factor in bringing about the acceptance of the policy by government.

Fishman, Das Gupta, Jernudd & Rubin (1971: 293-302) and Fishman (personal communication, 1987) have called for the documentation of language policy processes focusing, among other aspects, on the interest basis which underlies them and on how this is manifested in particular situations. This paper addresses the development of the policy as a social process - a social process viewed from the perspectives of politics, social psychology and sociolinguistics.

## ***The Status of the Policy***

Language issues have attained a prominence in Australian public life which is unprecedented. At the highest levels of government there are frequent declarations about language questions and their intersection with important economic, nation-building and equity goals.

On the 26th April 1987 the Prime Minister, the Hon R. J. Hawke, announced the Commonwealth (Federal) government's endorsement of the National Policy on Languages. He stated:

let me turn to another initiative of my government... the implementation of a national policy on languages... The Government commissioned [the preparation] of a report on a national policy on languages... the Government endorses that report... Let me take this opportunity to announce that we are committed to fund an integrated package in the August budget to implement the national policy on languages.  
(Hawke, 1987a).

The policy was released in the Senate on the 4th May 1987 (Hansard, May 1987: 2240) with Senator Susan Ryan, then Minister for Education, repeating the government's endorsement. On the 5th June the Federal Cabinet voted a budget towards the initial phases of implementation of the policy. On the 18th June 1987, launching the Immigration and Ethnic Affairs platform of the Australian Labor Party, the Prime Minister announced a 'package of measures' which were to be regarded as the concrete, implementing programs of the language policy. A press release jointly issued by the Prime Minister and Minister for Education accompanied the platform statement. Both stressed such aspects of the policy as the support for the maintenance of ethnic community

languages, Aboriginal languages and the extensions to programs for teaching English as a second language. Mention was also made of some economic aspects of the policy. At the opening of the new Parliament following the July 1987 election, on the 14th September, the Governor-General, Sir Ninian Stephen, repeated the government's commitment as part of its program for the present term of office. The commitment was officially confirmed by the Treasurer in his 1987-88 budget and in the accompanying papers.

On the 15th December 1987 the government reconfirmed its funding of the Policy and its endorsement of it, as well as announcing the composition of the Australian Advisory Council on Languages and Multicultural Education (AACLAME) which will oversee its implementation and further development.

This statement stressed the economic aspects of the policy. It focused on the labour market and the ways in which tackling adult illiteracy levels, extending English proficiency and teaching 'trade languages' would benefit Australia's economic performance. Already some ambiguity about goals and some tension about priorities is evident in the different emphases revealed in the various statements.

On the 9th and 10th March 1988 AACLAME held its inaugural meeting, the first occasion in which a constituted representative body has attended to broad issues of language policy and the implementation of explicit Commonwealth policy on language in Australia.

The content of the policy will be described after an account is given of the history of language planning in Australia. The recent history of the process which led to the adoption of the National Policy on Languages will also be discussed.

## ***Seeing Language and Acting on it***

To the dominant sections of society language is virtually invisible. 'Language' is their medium

for exercising their influence over affairs but since 'their' language - their particular dialect and the registers they command within their linguistic repertoire - is neither in a state of attrition, nor stigmatised, deficient or aberrant in any important way, it is rarely an issue. The society reinforces and reflects their language. There is no contrast, no problem which is encountered frequently and which is predictable which can, in the common-sense judgments of ordinary people on language issues, lead them to regard language as a social question requiring explicit 'treatment' or attention.

For linguists, and others who care about language (whether for aesthetic, cultural, social justice or other reasons), it seems natural to advocate deliberate planning of language development in society and in its institutions. For such people language has a natural salience. They are used to detaching language from its 'embeddedness' in social relations between groups, in ideology, text, schooling, culture and so on and making it visible.

Language professionals investigate language in systematic ways. Language artists use it to create. They are conscious of the social correlates of language such as the present and predicted sociolinguistic patterns of language in society; the trends towards attrition or the evolution of stable inter-generational maintenance of more than one language in a given speech community. They attend to issues such as the cultural impact of the loss of a minority group's language; the intellectual benefits of bilingualism; the location of language in the brain and the strategies learners employ to make meaning in a language over which they have only partial control. This constant attending to language and its correlates makes it highly visible.

For groups whose language is not society's dominant language - whether they are an immigrant minority, an indigenous minority or a group with a communication disability - the same is true. For these groups the contrast between their language and the society's dominant instrument for conferring power,

access to information and knowledge is encountered daily. Language becomes a problem in the ways it restricts access and social participation and in the ways it makes these possible. Language is seen and felt to be important.

For some whole societies language is a salient question. Its correlation with issues of politics, with the institutionalisation of conflict and compromise is a constant reminder of language questions. For many countries, recently independent, which are trying to reconcile public administration and education in an inherited colonial language with the revival of an indigenous language, or the selection and elaboration of one among competing varieties, language is a social problem of great magnitude. The felt need for nationalism impels them towards the propagation of indigenous norms; the felt need for access to advanced technical skills and the literature of powerful knowledge especially in new technologies impels them towards preserving the 'foreign' language. The inherited colonial language is often the means for communicating with a wider world.

Other countries become conscious of language when institutionalised arrangements for containing linguistic conflict change or break down or cannot be set in place. Among such countries are many developed nations. Others have expressly externally-oriented economic needs which dictate the ways in which language comes to be seen, resulting in language planning which is centred around economic goals.

It seems inevitable, then, that in the absence of a dominant group whose language interests correlate with a practical pressing problem societies will not regard language as an issue requiring the attention of policy makers. Language policy - and indeed the sort of explicit, deliberate, conscious attention to language which can be considered language planning - will not occur. Power-holders in developed countries invariably seem to regard language policy and planning as either a phenomenon of Third World countries or as a peripheral concern of major interest only to

domestic minorities in developed countries. It is interesting to note in this regard that one of the first and still a seminal text on language planning is subtitled *Sociolinguistic Theory and Practice for Developing Nations* (Rubin & Jernudd, 1971).

In developed countries like Australia conscious and deliberate language planning seems only to occur in response to social or economic problems which derive from language questions, or which have a strong language dimension. In addition to such 'problem-solving' language planning, there is the explicit attention to language planning and language policy development which is undertaken to facilitate the achievement of established or emerging social, political or economic objectives of given societies.

The absence of explicit policy on language issues does not mean that policies on language do not exist. Rather, such policies are implied in related actions which the society takes. Explicit treatment of language issues in policy is usually a consequence of a highly salient set of language derived problems which the society must confront. The conceptual basis of the Australian National Policy on Languages is socio-political language planning. It is largely concerned with status planning for languages in Australia, especially for language education. The more technical linguistic dimension of language planning (corpus planning) is concerned with the issues of the codification of languages (dealing usually with orthographies) and the elaboration of languages through various means. Much technical linguistic work has been undertaken on Aboriginal languages in Australia, some on Australian English and some on Australian Sign Language and some on Australian non-English community languages. Although this is technical work undertaken by linguists, it invariably also will involve some attention to status questions since the norms which are developed by linguists, no matter how rational they may be, will require propagation to ensure their acceptance both by the ordinary users of the language and, importantly, by the power holders in the language community

concerned.

At the societal level, however, the absence of any explicit, overall, guiding set of principles until recently requires that previous policy be induced from practice. Organisational theory tends to view policy as the elaboration of explicit principles to guide action. A more useful definition might be action directed by an intention to achieve a predetermined result, regardless of how unconscious this may be. Whatever problems or deficiencies the National Policy on Languages may have, at least the principles underlying the policy have been enunciated clearly and the choices which flow from these have been asserted. These can be modified and improved if and when review and evaluation of the policy find this necessary.

At some points in Australian history direct, forceful and unambiguous decisions were made about language questions. The amendments brought into the education acts of several states to repress bilingual education in the second decade of federation are the clearest examples. Despite this, and the only recently repealed regulations restricting electronic media use of languages other than English, English has had no officially sanctioned status in Australia.

Historically, then, Australia has 'planned' for English monolingualism modelled on southern British norms. This has rarely been explicitly aimed for - usually it has been implied in other actions and can only be discerned by analysing these actions. What are the main ways this has been done? First, there has been a pervasive stigmatisation of Australian English. English as it is used in Australia has often been compared negatively with southern British norms of English, characterising the Australian variety as uneducated, rough, unsophisticated and so on. These associations usually are transferred to the speakers of the language varieties with the clear message that more desirable and prestigious qualities are attainable through modifying Australian speech habits. Recent years have witnessed a major breaking down of this sort of stereotyping.

Second, there has been the active, deliberate denigration and repression of Aboriginal languages. This resulted in the extinction of most of the languages of the southeastern part of the continent by the time the colonies federated to become a nation in 1901. Of the approximately 260 Australian languages assumed to have been spoken at the time of Captain Cook's arrival in Australia only a handful may still be spoken by children in the year 2000.

Third, a wide range of forms of opposition has been directed at non-Aboriginal ethnic minority languages. Although the last decade and a half has seen a dramatic turn around in the appraisals of and intentions towards these languages, the rate of language shift away from their use and the degree of failure to acquire proficiency in their use among youth is high.

Fourth, in addition to this there has been a major neglect of second language education in schools. This has permitted a situation of serious crisis to emerge in which the numbers of students taking languages has declined dramatically at all but the primary levels, where, due to the community languages movement of the 1970s and 1980s there has been a substantial growth in language offerings, course and program types.

A fifth historical problem area has been the treatment of the language and communicative needs of the deaf. Although this factor could not obviously lead to English monolingualism, in some cases as recently as ten years ago attempts were made to stamp out the use of sign language among the deaf.

Australian language planning has been, insofar as broad generalisations are possible, firmly within the implicit and often unconscious categories of the continuum of socially directed actions on language. This has been punctuated by occasional deliberate intervention, usually for negative purposes representative of particular political positions and cultural values.

## ***The Interest Bases of Advocacy on Language Policy***

By origin the Australian population comprises the following elements:

- (1) Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders; comprising approximately 1% of the total population;
- (2) Australians from the United Kingdom and Ireland of three or more generations and comprising approximately 60% of the total population;
- (3) Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds of three or more generations ago comprising approximately 5% of the total population;
- (4) Australians of first and second generation English speaking background comprising approximately 14% of the total population;
- (5) Second generation Australians of non-English speaking background comprising approximately 8% of the total population; and
- (6) First generation Australians of non-English speaking background comprising approximately 12% of the total population (CAAIP, 1987:11).

These groups approximate the broad divisions of the constituency for language issues in Australia. What are the interests which these groups perceive as their own and how do they advocate them?

In linguistic terms all these groups are varied though none so much as the first. Despite being the smallest group, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders are by far the most heterogeneous linguistically. Indigenous Australians include speakers of over 150 Australian languages,

several Papuan languages, at least two stable Creoles and some distinct varieties of English. The state of these languages can vary enormously, as do the sociocultural contexts in which the speakers reside. The attachment to the language spoken varies greatly too, influenced by both communicative and symbolic factors. A heightened attachment to the language spoken cannot always be predicted from the state of health of the language, although it seems generally to follow that the serious attrition of a language tends to produce heightened attachment to it as emblematic of the group's identity and, consequently, tends to lead to agitation for action on behalf of the language. Perception of the strength of a language sometimes leads to concerted advocacy for continued support - non-speakers of the particular language who may have lost their own ancestral language sometimes will, for symbolic reasons, advocate support for the strong languages. In all, the relationship of a group of speakers to its language(s) is highly complex and that complexity is well represented among Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

English speaking Australians are, of course, a linguistically more homogeneous group. The positions which they take on language issues are varied. The history of deprecation of Australian English has produced a continuum of opinions about it from 'whether it exists', to 'is it not ugly or intellectually impoverished', all the way to sophisticated advocacy for it in terms of the 'national character', of 'our language', to the relativist acceptance of linguistic divergence and variation. To this day it embarrasses some Australians that Australian English is used overseas. The language issues which most agitate this group, however, are not about English but about the choices made for second language teaching in schools and the policies regarding the teaching of minority languages - whether immigrant or indigenous.

Australians of non-English speaking background, particularly the more articulate English-speaking younger generation are at the forefront of advocacy for the maintenance of minority languages - immigrant and Aboriginal

- in addition to English. There are major differences between different ethnolinguistic groups. As with the Aboriginal communities it follows that the perceived state of health of the groups' language often indicates the predicted position, for example, a perceived shift away from its use by children and young adults often leads to supportive action for the language. This is not always the case since the perceived strength of the language within some groups can impel them to supportive action and among other groups the perceived weakness by the group of the language can lead them to utilitarian judgments that transference to English is desirable as well as inevitable. The next two sections deal briefly with past policies towards ethnic minority languages and Australia's indigenous languages.

## **Language Policy and Community Languages**

English monolingualism seems to be an accurate brief description of Australian educational practices in relation to immigrant and Aboriginal students until relatively recently. If these practices have changed it is only slightly. The prevailing slogan could still now be said to be English proficiency with residual family or immediate community directed skills in the mother tongue. It was as though policy makers had intuitively understood the language ecology trends revealed by sociolinguistic research in North America, that shift to English by non-English speakers, whether immigrant or Aboriginal, would occur primarily as a result of the greater prestige of English, that is, its exclusive association with social and economic mobility. In both financial terms and in terms of clear policy, the efforts made either to teach English as a second language (for many Aborigines English as a foreign language) and to support non-English languages either in education or more generally have been less than would be required if the true policy had been aiming at bilingualism.

Since the post-World War II migration program, four distinct phases have characterised language policy approaches to ethnic minority

languages. First, there was the period until 1969. This could be called the *laissez-faire* phase since there was no intervention by the Commonwealth or State/Territory authorities as far as either mother tongue development for non-English speaking children is concerned, nor was there even any systematic attempt to teach English as a second language. It was simply assumed that English would be 'picked up'. In the late 1960s and early 1970s the Commonwealth set up the Child Migrant Education Program whose purpose was (and still is) to teach ESL. This became law with the Immigration (Education) Act of 1971 in which the Commonwealth assumed the responsibility for English instruction as a consequence of its constitutional responsibility for recruiting immigrants.

From the early to mid-1970s there was the phase that can be called the 'rights-equality' phase. There was much agitation during these years. This was a part of a broader social activism which characterised urban Australia at the time and reflected somewhat the so-called 'ethnic revival' in the U.S.A. Articulate and active ethnic community groups began to agitate for public intervention on behalf of a wide range of claims including language issues: primarily interpreting/translating services and English teaching. This advocacy was fuelled by much government sponsored research which seemed to be showing that, contrary to the expectations and beliefs of the previous phase, there were persistent and predictable social inequalities correlated with non-English language ethnicity, especially in terms of occupational and educational prospects.

The third phase began towards the middle of the 1970s. It could be called the 'culturalist' or 'multicultural' phase. In part, it took off from an aspect of the previous phase involving advocacy of mother tongue teaching of ethnic minority languages, largely because it was believed this would enhance the acquisition of English. The emergent discourse renamed these languages 'community languages' largely to connote their greater immediacy in Australian schools. The main feature of this phase, which

was partially engineered by governments as an ideological corrective to the overtly political character of the rights-equality phase, was that it replaced equality as the focus of debates with culturalist explanations of the positions of migrants in Australian society. Accordingly, the purposes of the multicultural programs which were initiated by the key text of this time - the Galbally report - were to encourage social harmony, social enrichment, diversity within an adherence to certain core values in the society. The target was the whole society (Galbally, 1978).

Hence, by the early 1980s the debate on programs and policies for ethnic minorities had evolved to the present one in which there is a pattern of gravitating to one or other pole of the 'rights-equality' and 'culturalist' phases - pursuing the goals of overcoming disadvantages and therefore targeting programs at minorities on the one hand and, on the other hand, pursuing socially enriching and harmonious relations by targeting the whole community. Two other key factors had also emerged, holdovers from the mid-1970s. The first was the very pronounced economic and, in particular, trading relationship the nation now increasingly conducted with Asian non-English speaking countries. The second was the serious decline of school second language education. Both are too complex to deal with in detail here but both came to have a significant impact on the present state of conceptualising language issues in Australia.

The decline in school second language education impelled professional language people - linguists, applied linguists and language teachers - to call for national action to correct the situation. In so doing they came to examine the situation in terms of the language ecology trends of minority languages. At the same time, the economic directions brought about a coincidence of national economic goals with language goals converting some of the lobbying into a more 'hard-nosed' advocacy which was more acceptable to government.

In two states in particular - Victoria and South Australia, and to a lesser extent in New South

Wales as well - the state governments had set up community language and bilingual programs. In most primary schools this innovation was the first bilingual education since the forced closure of the Lutheran German language bilingual schools during 1916-1918. In addition Commonwealth *per capita* funding support for ethnic community schools had stimulated a growth in the language maintenance efforts of communities themselves. A decisive change occurred in 1982 when the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia convened conferences around the country on the theme of calling for a national approach to language issues. In organising these conferences, the Federation assured the participation of other groups with an interest in language questions: the deaf, language professionals of various kinds and, of course, Aboriginal groups (FECCA, 1987). It was out of this agitation and advocacy that the Senate investigations commenced.

## **Language Policy and Australian Languages**

The history of the treatment of Aboriginal languages in Australia is more longstanding and more extreme than that of the ethnic community languages. Furthermore, given that language shift away from an Australian language results in the death of the language itself the urgency of responding positively to the demands of the Aboriginal community is greater.

When the British first arrived in Australia it is calculated that there were approximately 260 languages being spoken. Estimates put dialectal variation at between 500 and 600. The results of a survey by Black in 1979 found that only 115 of these languages then remained. The majority had less than 500 speakers, and many languages stood on the verge of extinction. The rapidity and finality of the deaths of 145 languages in 186 years will be hard to match elsewhere in the world.

(Fesl, 1987: 13)

Fesl identifies the Early Period during which 'land grabs' and the introduction of diseases to which the indigenous population did not have immunity resulted in the deaths of many people

- especially children who would have been the transmitters of their languages to successive generations. The setting up of reserves for the 'protection' of Aborigines followed and many people were removed to these reserves forcibly. This continued with the forced separation of families and the distribution of children and adults to work as free menial domestics and as labourers for white families. A wide range of measures including a prohibition on the use of Aboriginal languages, the forcing together of groups which did not share a common language, the denigration and stigmatisation of Aboriginal languages contributed to the extensive death of Australian languages. By the time the colonies had federated into the Commonwealth of Australia, most of the languages of the southeastern corner of the continent were no longer used. Due both to the remoteness and sparseness of the population, and to the discouragement of the learning of English by Aboriginal people to ensure their dependence in some areas in northern Australia on the dominant English speaking white society, Australian languages survived. Fesl then describes the assimilation periods during which concerted attempts to bring Aboriginal people together in centralised reserves was extended to the northern parts of the continent. This aggregation of people was accompanied by education programs which stressed English alone. The reaction to these attempts was the outstation movement whereby Aboriginal groups moved away from reserves to attempt to re-establish traditional life. In the early 1970s the Commonwealth government set up the first bilingual schools in areas of Commonwealth jurisdiction in education. (See also Russo & Baldauf, 1986:303 310.)

Some bilingual education had existed prior to these programs being set up but these were isolated, private initiatives. By the late 1970s a few programs, especially those controlled by Aboriginal communities themselves had evolved into maintenance programs which attempted to secure and extend the proficiency of children in their non-English mother tongue as well as to impart skills in English. These are the exception since the majority of the existing programs,

although many seek to impart literacy in the Aboriginal language, are very much transitional programs reflecting a belief that this is more efficient insofar as the acquisition of English language skills are concerned.

Despite the progress which has been made many linguists and Aboriginal people can still ask rhetorically: How many Australian languages will be spoken by children at the turn of the century? If the present rate of attrition continues unabated and the new threat of satellite television, broadcast to the remotest parts of the continent, is unable to be converted to the task of using local languages, the answer may be very few indeed.

By the early 1980s Aboriginal language activists, linguists and community representatives had evolved an alliance of interests with ethnic communities in lobbying for a national approach to language policy which supported the maintenance and development of Australia's non-English languages. The social process whereby this, and other alliances, produced a constituency for language issues in Australia is described in the next section.

### ***The Principles and Programs of the National Policy on Languages***

Following the very strong advocacy by professional groups and ethnic and Aboriginal groups, the Senate decided in May 1982 to refer the question of language policy to its Standing Committee on Education and the Arts. Their investigation produced the report entitled 'A National Language Policy' in October 1984. The first recommendation of the Senate's report was that:

language policies should be developed and coordinated at the national level on the basis of four guiding principles, namely:

- (1) competence in English
- (2) maintenance and development of languages other than English

(3) provision of services in languages other than English

(4) opportunities for learning second languages.

(Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts, 1984)

Almost two years after the Senate's report was published, no decisions had been taken on it. The 114 recommendations made - including the first, that there be nationally developed policies on language - had represented major problems for government. Internal attempts within the Commonwealth Education Department and cross-departmental committees had been unable to draw from the Senate's report a policy and a coherent set of programs acceptable to government.

I was engaged as a consultant from July 1986 to draft a policy for the government in response to the Senate's investigations. At its simplest, this whole process consisted of converting the best principles which have underpinned language planning in the past into explicit statements of desired objectives and into the establishment of programs to take these towards realisation. To do this involved describing the context for language policy at the national level and the factors which shape it. Four which were important in developing the policy are dealt with briefly here.

The first crucial factor which constrains national policy development on language is the Federal nature of Australia. Schooling, for example, remains primarily the responsibility of the states and territories. The Commonwealth is responsible for setting broad policies which act as the parameters for education as well as for resourcing schools and higher education. The policy on languages had to take this into account and it had to attempt to establish a consensus on the principles underlying the policy, and on the jurisdiction and roles of the different bodies. This consensus seeks to evolve a partnership between a wide range of virtually autonomous bodies on issues of language. The task is especially complex in cases involving

English as a second language programs and in Aboriginal education. In such instances there is an explicit constitutional responsibility of the Commonwealth or a responsibility conferred on it by virtue of referendum. The neglect of such shared responsibilities - shared because both educational domains are also state and territory responsibilities - and the inadequate appreciation of the importance of evolving a partnership of shared goals have resulted in past language policy failures.

A second crucial factor is Australia's geographical proximity to a large number of culturally very different non-English speaking countries. Whatever other justifications exist for language teaching and learning in Australia, the proximity of large and small non-English speaking neighbours is significant. Australia's role as an English language centre for the purposes of providing aid and for economic purposes, as well as the widespread teaching and promotion of Asian and Pacific languages, are among the implications which flow from this consideration. The motivations thus tend to be instrumental and utilitarian. It should be noted that community based advocacy of language policy in the past has neglected, naively, to acknowledge the pragmatic (economically and politically derived) perspective which in Australia has proved to be a critical factor in attaining government support for a national policy on language.

A third crucial factor is the great diversity of Australia's linguistic demography. Given the dominance of English in Australian society and the presence of a significant number of non-English speaking groups including speakers of various Aboriginal languages, the questions of bilingualism, bilingual education, language ecology, interpretation/translation, and the media are central considerations. The political strength of a broadly based constituency of groups interested in language issues was the single biggest factor in the successful campaign for language policies to be acknowledged as a legitimate function of the Commonwealth government.

Less obvious than the previous three, the fourth factor concerns the impact of modern technologies. Technological innovations will have a dramatic impact on the prospects for the survival of Aboriginal languages, on the prospects for the maintenance of other community languages, and on recreational and employment opportunities in language related areas. The displacement of workers from the jobs traditionally held by non-English speakers by the application of advanced technologies to manufacturing creates increased demand for English courses specifically designed for industrial retraining. Further to this, the growth of information and communications technologies will have major ramifications for the place and development of literacy and oracy in schooling, especially with such developments as voice instruction modes on computers. Yet, the learning of second languages can be diversified and enriched by the application of advanced technologies and the maintenance of community languages can be enhanced by increased access to the language variety and vocabulary of their native-speaking peers. Children prefer to model their language on their peers and contact with such varieties can be highly motivating. The imminent expansion of satellite based transmission of television to remote areas of Australia carries with it both potentially positive and potentially destructive prospects for the survival of Aboriginal languages. All these factors were able to sustain a rhetoric associated with the advocacy of the language policy which assisted in its being perceived as 'modern' and 'contemporary' and not 'backward-looking' or 'nostalgic'. This perception, furthermore, positively assisted the claims made before political bodies.

The policy is related to broad social goals summarised under the headings of *Equality*, *Economics*, *Enrichment* and *External*. These capture four key themes and were crucial in the development of a set of arguments to justify Commonwealth government involvement in language policy making, for each of these themes intersects with areas of distinctive Commonwealth responsibilities.

*Equality* refers to the correlations between social and economic inequalities and language. The obvious issues are communication disabilities such as deafness, lack of proficiency with standard Australian English because the speakers use either a dialectal form of English or another language and, also, negative attitudes to varieties of language which are different from the socially prestigious ones. Since clear patterns and relationships between such language issues and social or economic inequalities are manifest in indicators like unemployment rates and inadequate standards of English, poor success in schooling, and Aboriginality the involvement of the Commonwealth is justified in language policy making. For some individual members of Parliament, for some Ministers in Cabinet and for some factional groupings in the political parties it was this broader social goal, this dimension of the policy, which formed the basis for discussions and which engaged their interest and support.

*Economics* refers to the promotion of bilingualism for economic purposes, to the promotion of the vocational implications of second language learning, and to the economic value of Australia's expertise in teaching English to speakers of other languages. It has become widely accepted that it is in the national interest to address language questions seriously because of the relationship between the broad economic, specifically trading, directions of Australia and the nation's available language resources. At a critical time in the debate on language policies in Australia, this pragmatic, nationally self-interested dimension came to be shared by many powerful political and economic figures, and hence, the prospects of successful advocacy improved greatly.

*Enrichment* consists of the advocacy of second language learning for all on the basis of the traditional arguments for second language teaching: the cultural and intellectual benefits of such learning, and the maintenance of languages other than English in Australia.

*External* concerns Australia's role in its region and in the world. This deals with foreign aid

and technology transfer and the facilitation of bilateral and multilateral relationships between Australia and other countries.

The principles on which the policy and related programs of action are based are as follows. The first section of the policy (Lo Bianco, 1987) consists of a series of normative statements about the status of language in Australia. These begin with a recognition of Australian English as the national, convenient and shared language of Australia and its major official institutions. This is followed by a recognition of the rights to use community languages other than English; including the languages and language systems of the deaf and a recognition of the indigenous and unique status of Aboriginal languages, Torres Strait Islander languages and Australian Creoles. Nonetheless, these statements do not carry the force of law, nor could they. In the Australian legal system, class action is either completely absent or exists in only a restricted way in some states. This, combined with the absence of any legal position for English and the absence of a Bill of Rights, greatly minimises the prospects that language questions could be taken into the legal arena as in the U.S.A.

The main section of the policy deals with education. Three principles underlie this: 'English for All', 'Support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages' and 'A Language Other than English for All'. 'English for All' contains specifications for English mother tongue education for English-speaking Australians, English as a Second Language teaching and English as a Second Dialect education where this is required, and internal and external provisions of English as a Foreign Language teaching where this is required.

'Support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages'<sup>1</sup> entails elements of bilingual and bicultural education for native speakers in all cases where this is possible. It further involves language awareness programs and language learning programs for non-speakers of Aboriginal languages and the expansion of descriptive linguistic work (e.g. recording and restoring).

'A Language Other than English for All' entails the teaching of community languages as part of a larger aim of mother tongue maintenance for children of non-English speaking background, the teaching of community languages as second languages to others for intercultural reasons and academic development, the teaching of languages of geo-political and economic importance to the nation, and the continued teaching of 'enrichment' second languages for general cultural and intellectual enrichment purposes.

In addition to language education policy the national policy on languages deals with non-educational language issues such as the provision of language services on an equitable and widespread basis. Specifically, these services include library provisions for ESL/ESD; LOTE teaching for recreation/information and services for the communication disabled. Interpreting/translating services (e.g. domestic provisions for the deaf, for immigrants and Aborigines) and external provisions for interpreting and translating in trade and diplomacy. A further language service is the use of the media to support the maintenance, learning and diffusion of languages. Of particular importance are the needs of the communication disabled, and speakers of small or widely dispersed community languages. A final language service is that of language testing. This calls for the establishment of a service for providing adequate, appropriate, fair and simple testing of languages for educational, vocational and other purposes.

The policy, completed at the end of November 1986, was distributed by the Commonwealth Minister responsible for co-ordinating the government response to the Senate's enquiry. Since the Australian states and territories have jurisdiction over education, their co-operation is crucial for a truly national approach to language planning. Most welcomed the policy and stated that they would co-operate in its implementation. This could be said to represent a national consensus on languages issues. Nonetheless, opposition to some of its goals, especially the support for ethnic minority

languages and Aboriginal languages, from some sections of the broader community should not be underestimated.

The Commonwealth government has made financial allocations of \$15.1m in 1987-88; \$28m in 1988-89; \$27.3m in 1989-90 and \$23m in 1990-91 towards the implementation of the policy. In addition, an advisory council charged with a monitoring and evaluating role has now been set up to provide for the further development and modification of the policy. Generally speaking, federal financing is intended to supplement existing state effort in the languages area or existing Commonwealth allocations to language programs. The next section describes the programs which have been funded by the Commonwealth.

Some programs are ongoing programs; others are to be reviewed prior to decisions about their life expectancy being made. All programs are meant to operate on the basis of co-operation between state, territory and non-government systems with the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth funds are intended to be matched, though not dollar for dollar, by the implementing authority. The matching can be of 'effort', and not necessarily a financial contribution. Given the severe financial stringency which has been in place at the Commonwealth level, the allocated amounts represent significant breakthroughs in many language policy areas - particularly at a time when the financial stringency coincides with a devolution of responsibilities away from the Commonwealth in many areas of activity, particularly in education.

#### **Expansion of the new arrivals component of the English as a second language program**

The English as a second language program has been expanded so that eligible students are able to participate for up to twelve months in intensive English courses both in language centres prior to schooling, and in schools. The largest component, the 'general support' element of the ESL program which provides ongoing support for students in schools, has not

been expanded. The net additional cost is \$13.2m in 1988.

#### **Australian second language learning program**

This new program provides funding to State, Territory and non-government school authorities for innovative and high quality projects of national relevance in languages other than English, reflecting a balance between all languages. These include community languages (e.g. Greek, Turkish or Vietnamese), languages of economic and geo-political importance (e.g. Arabic, Mandarin or Japanese), languages taught as part of mother tongue maintenance programs for non-English speaking background children, and those taught as second languages. The net additional cost is \$7.44m for each of three years, as both a supplement for existing programs and for new programs. A national component for this program has also been funded.

#### **The adult literacy action campaign**

This consists of the implementation through the Commonwealth authorities of a two-year campaign to improve levels of adult literacy. This will include publicity on the need for literacy and existing tutoring and courses, curriculum and materials development, research and, of course, program provision and teaching. The total program cost is \$3.93m but other funds of approximately \$2m may be diverted to this activity.

#### **Initiatives in Asian studies**

This is the first Commonwealth program of this type. Its aim is to boost Asian studies in Australia, including, for example, initiatives to develop curriculum materials for school teaching and establish centres in tertiary institutions for research and teaching. The program will make available funding to promote the learning of Asian languages of economic and geo-political importance to Australia such as Indonesian, Japanese and Korean. The net additional cost will be \$1.95m per annum.

## Cross-cultural training programs

This program is intended to boost multicultural and intercultural studies in tertiary education institutions and post-school accredited educational authorities. Funds will be offered to initiate or extend existing courses in cross-cultural attitudinal training and community languages, to develop curriculum materials for teaching such courses, and to include cross-cultural awareness content in a wide range of professional and para-professional courses. The program will target professional and para-professional training to enhance the quality of service delivery to Aboriginal and ethnic community populations. The net additional cost will be \$1.5m.

## The National Aboriginal Languages Program

This is the first Commonwealth program whose express goal is to assist in the maintenance of Aboriginal languages since the Commonwealth ceded jurisdiction on education to the Northern Territory government. It will provide supplementary funding to State, Territory and non-government authorities for initiatives in Aboriginal languages, including bilingual education programs, literature production, language maintenance and language awareness programs. The net additional full-year program cost is \$0.5m in the first year and \$1.0m in the following years.

## Language testing unit

Although it had been decided to set up such a unit, this is now to be reviewed. The unit was to attend to the co-ordination and development of Australian tests of English for academic, occupational and other purposes and to review the language testing done by a wide range of official bodies in both English and languages other than English. It was intended to rationalise the existing language testing functions of various departments, including the Council on Overseas Professional Qualifications. Funding beyond 1988-89 was to be conditional on the Unit's full or partial recovery of its operating costs. The net

additional full-year program cost which was allocated was \$0.25m per annum. The current review of this item will delay any implementation for the time being.

## Australian Advisory Council on Languages and Multicultural Education

The purpose of AACLAME is to monitor the development and implementation of the National Policy on Languages, to develop it further, and to address language and multicultural education issues generally.

## **The Process and Stages**

Australia seems to have arrived at a delicate truce - a consensual stage - in resolving the interest-laden bases of language advocacy. The process of arriving at this position was complex and intriguing. It appears to have taken only about a decade and a half. Within the present consensus, however, is at least one issue which threatens to render it asunder. Prior to describing this situation I will describe the process of evolution and behaviour of the language constituency in social psychological and socio-political terms. This is an attempt to abstract from the practice of contested language policy making in Australia during the late 1970s and early to mid-1980s. What follows derives from my participation in and observation of the process. My position is influenced by the theories on intergroup relations (Tajfel, 1982; Taylor & Moghaddam, 1987). It is expressed in general theoretical terms in an attempt to find some generalisable validity in Australia's experience during this time. The following four stages were traversed.

- (1) *Consciousness of group identity as language-determined or language-specific deriving from felt language 'problems'.* This process involved the gradual internal definition by ethnic, Aboriginal and other groups (e.g. the deaf) of language as a salient, if not the exclusive, defining characteristic of the group. This, like most group identity formation, emerges from a process of

examination by the group of its boundaries with 'outgroups', particularly with those which are relevant and dominant. The contrast which emerged from this comparison was one which gave prominence to linguistic characteristics as the 'content' of the ingroup; different languages were seen as representative of the boundaries between different groups. This self-understanding emerged in many groups, especially ethnic and Aboriginal ones, at approximately the same time. Individually it impelled each to identify self-interested advocacy of redress through various activities. This in turn involved the transfer of private language based problems to public issues which were claimed to require servicing.

This transference is never fully resolved within the group, because advocacy of an internal issue for public responsibility usually generates an opposite reaction from within the group for 'authenticity', for the group to retain 'ownership' of the language issue. The critical factors which move most groups to agitation for public intervention are:

- (a) the perception of the attrition of the language, and/or
- (b) the correlation between group membership status and socio-economic disadvantage which derives from a linguistic mismatch between the group and its language, on the one hand, and the dominant language code of the larger society on the other.

This must initially be accompanied by at least partial exclusion by the powerful outgroup which makes wholesale assimilation undesirable or, at least, temporarily difficult.

Initially, the group targets itself. For instance, teachers advocate that the members need to be more vigilant in preserving the language or enhancing its status; newspapers carry letters

from vigilant members of the community that the children are abandoning the language; parents admonish the children for replying to them only in English. Ultimately this leads to external advocacy, for example, the demand for interpreting/translating services, governmental and public recognition and legitimacy, and forms of bilingual education or other teaching of the language.

There are usually two dimensions involved in describing the way groups advocate their claims - those of power and morality - though these are never far apart. The first involves generating a sufficiently strong internal group coherence with strongly marked boundaries between the group and outgroups recognised as such by the power-holding group. The group's perceived strength derives either from its size, or the positions and resources it holds and can mobilise from its strategic locations. Having established power, it is in a position to bargain. The second involves appealing to the moral sympathy of members of the dominant group. This requires a perception from the ingroup that the outgroup is predisposed to responding to such appeals; hence, evidence is presented to evoke sympathy (e.g. problems, family breakdown, disadvantage, irreparable cultural damage). Both strategies require recognition by the dominant outgroup, but often internally as well. To achieve this the group usually evolves a rhetoric of 'rights' based either on inherent rights which transcend considerations of polity (i.e. human rights) or 'earned' rights, those which derive from the contribution the group's members have made to the well-being of the society.

Both strategies tend to be determined by leaders from the ingroup; those who mediate between their own group and the powerholding group and tend to define the relationships between them. In both cases a range of possible responses exist by the powerholders, from 'pork barrelling', co-option of leaders, rejection and polarization, to the creation of 'alliances' based on 'clientelism' and mutual dependence. More positive responses are possible but these seem to require a judgement from the powerholding outgroup of the validity of the claims, and the

perception that it can benefit by conceding, at least partially, to the claims.

- (2) *These processes and behaviours require the identification and demonstrable existence of language 'problems'*. The second phase in the Australian experience emerged from the generalisation of these problems beyond single self-interested groups to 'issues' sufficiently well focused to allow the specific groups to perceive individual benefit in adhering to a broader constituency - but sufficiently broad issues to constitute a claim that could be put to the powerholding authorities uniting otherwise disparate separatist claims. This process was complex and difficult. It required the abandonment of many of the separatist claims in exchange for the achievement of a broader alliance built on the issues which all groups could deduce as flowing logically from their private claims. The prerequisites involved at least a perception of the commonness of the claims; a small or negligible degree of success as individual groups acting on their own: the perception of themselves as unlikely on their own to modify their relatively powerless position or to extract sufficient sympathy from powerholders; a minimisation of the compradour tendencies of any or each group or at least the key ones (i.e. 'holding the ranks').

Invariably the evolution of a broader constituency requires the creation of a new public, political discourse to describe the new, larger, united ingroup. First, it directs this new self-description to itself to enable a new self-description to be accepted by all the members and second, this new self-description is presented to the outgroup. This discourse seemed to require a rhetoric of 'national interest' and good citizenship. This seeks to reassure the powerful outgroup that the lobby is 'responsible', that it is concerned for the well-

being and cohesion of the polity and that its advocacy and claims are consistent with the well-being of the polity. At the same time, the expanded ingroup will, very clearly, demonstrate its size, power and cohesion as an indicator both to itself and the powerholders of the relative strengths involved and to calculate the relative power distribution in the relationship.

In addition to its power it will publicly and obviously 'carry' the least powerful groups. The purpose of this appears to be to demonstrate the moral basis of the claims it is making. This involves carrying whole groups while protesting not to speak 'for' any single group (avoiding paternalism) but, to some extent, doing so nevertheless (claiming moral virtue). Sometimes this means 'presenting' evidence of disadvantage (family distress, discrimination, suffering). The other crucial feature is the early evolution of a composite log of claims. This is a vital process for bolstering internal cohesion and reinforcing to each constituent group the value of belonging (democratic decision making, 'getting somewhere'). It is also very important externally in that it unites the many problems into 'a case' which authorities/bureaucracies can deal with efficiently. This log usually is both specific and general. It will contain the discourse of the 'overall good', the 'national interest', and it will minimise the appearance of 'self-seekingness'. In addition the log will probably include the principles which underlie the separatist claims, extracting these from their specific manifestation as claims on the public purse and seeking that these be adopted as a guiding set of principles by the authorities.

- (3) *Contact between representatives of both groups*. A third phase involves contact between the leaders or representatives of the lobby and the powerholding outgroup. This is a crucial stage since the lobby must delegate authority, always previously affirmed to rest indissolubly in the ordinary, 'voiceless' members. It is likely that attempts at co-option, defusing the growth of the movement, will occur at this time. Further, the system may wish to

establish a compradour class among the lobbyists. Matters become more public - the authorities are asked by the media to 'respond', to 'react'. At this stage, the initiative is held by the constituency, which now strives to perfect a series of key words or themes in the evolving political discourse. These will stress language issues, not individual *languages*; the group will parade 'cases' of individual absurdity: of trade deals lost due to poor linguistic preparation by the nation, of intellectual and cultural benefits forgone. This will all be specific, of course, to the nation's self-perception. If it perceives itself as successful and modern, then the discourse will argue that language policy change is a correlate of this. If its great traditions are salient in the national self-consciousness, then heritage and connection with the great ideas of the past will be stressed. If it is seeking to develop, to become a successful modern society then language issues pertinent to this will be the flag bearers of the language constituencies' public case.

The critical issue for the constituency is its cohesion. Its breadth needs to be sufficiently wide to enable individual groups to continue to attach specific problem-related aspirations to their membership of the lobby and to have their ordinary members perceive this. It also needs to encompass breadth enough to make 'pork barrelling' difficult. The discourse, then, involves a tension between localized interests and the broader case. Reconciling these is more difficult when entering open-ended dialogue with a powerful resource holding outgroup, than when engaging in a relatively closed internal monologue. The former tends towards practicalities, compromises, deals and bargaining, conceding and gaining. The latter tends towards purist

positions. The constituency starts to introduce caveats and escape clauses in its log. It will tell the outgroup that although it is united there are different 'perspectives', 'affinity groups', 'streams', 'schools of thought' - all euphemisms for factions. It may be offered places on working parties, steering groups, committees, consultancy selection groups. The selection of these representatives is invariably difficult. A tension between the technical expertise which the bureaucracy will demand and the 'authenticity' and 'representativeness' demanded by the groups may be acute. Constant gravitating between these two is likely but, with good leadership, progress can be made.

- (4) *Characterising the outcome.* When a policy is agreed - a compromise reached, a result obtained - all groups seek to own it. It may be characterised by the same group in different ways depending on the audience it is addressing. The lobbies will claim a victory for their power, a concession to their moral rightness. The authorities will claim to have made a responsible deal with the lobbies and to have responded to their claims by 'ensuring' that national interests were kept paramount.

The adoption of the National Policy on Languages in Australia has evolved through processes similar to those described above. The groups involved in achieving this result have maintained internal cohesion. In the last year language issues have been prominent in the media, particularly focusing on economic (trade and tourism) needs which Australia has in key Asian languages: Chinese, Japanese, and to a lesser extent, Indonesian. Recent political changes have made the media attention a source of great tension as far as the language constituency is concerned. The present tension, which may well worsen, is between two key groups. The following characterisation contains

both the self-definition of the group's core adherents and the attributed definition by its opposing group. For the sake of making the points both simple and clear, the following is a slight oversimplification of the reality. For purposes of argument, I will label the first group the 'Anglo-Asianists' and the second group the 'Community Language - Multiculturalism Advocates'.

The former group caricatures the latter as being overly concerned with, 'obsessed by', 'useless' languages, atavism and naive rationales. They accuse them, at their most extreme, of ignoring Australia's 'real' language needs, of subordinating national interests to sectarian ones. At the same time, the latter group caricatures the former as being ignorant of what will motivate students to become bilingual, of being ignorant of schools and their communities, of exaggerating the relationship between economics and languages, of underestimating the usefulness of English and its position of strength as a *lingua franca*, in Asia in particular. At their worst they accuse them of not 'trusting' Asian-Australians who, by the community language thrust, would 'inevitably' be more proficient speakers of the so-called key languages than would Anglo-Australians.

The Asianists have the dominant position at present. A reflection of their position is the extent to which they control the language of the debate. The term 'community languages', which in the early 1970s was used in contradistinction to modern and foreign languages to connote greater immediacy and relevance, is now characterised as parochial, limited and domestic. Asian languages (really only Chinese and Japanese with Indonesian a long way behind) were labelled originally by their supporters 'key' languages, and then relabelled 'national interest' languages. As the debates became more contested more belligerent labels were employed: 'strategic' languages was popular for a time. The belligerence has given way to an uneasy truce, but preparations for battle continue, manifest in an increasing militarisation of the language for arguing about language. The Anglo-Asianists now speak of

'front-line' languages - the community languages advocates talk of 'holding the line' with the major community languages ('rearguard languages'). The stakes are the distribution of the existing allocations of resources and the deployment of any new or marginal resources.

The Community Languages - Multiculturalism group, although its largest components would be southern Europeans, is led by north and east Europeans. The group contains, of course, many Asian communities.

They are not usually the same as those considered most economically important; they would include Vietnamese, Cantonese, Hokkien and Hakka Chinese, Laotian and Kampuchean speakers. This places these groups in a somewhat ambiguous relationship overall, but usually they have adhered to community language justifications and rationales.

ESL is the central issue which has generated consensus among community languages groups. This is despite the fact that for the largest groups, the southern and northern Europeans, this is scarcely a relevant consideration since they are now enrolling their third generation, which is largely English-speaking, in schools. This group seems to have more supporters among the language professionals: linguists, applied linguists and language teachers, although many of these are associated with the 'traditional' languages of the curriculum, especially French, which in the past has been repudiated by both of the key groups mentioned above. The first group is supported by business and government. The second group is perceived by government to be a strong electoral constituency.

We must surmise that unless significant concessions can be made by both groups to the interests and needs of the other, the successful language constituency may evaporate. Unlike the U.S.A., where the status of English has emerged as the major issue in debates about bilingual education (Marshall, 1986), the only conflict which seems likely to emerge in

Australia in English language education (apart from hardy perennials like the 'standards' debate) is the question of the relative priority to be accorded to English as a second language teaching as against the new economically more attractive English as a foreign language teaching. The latter is now regarded as a major potential export income earner for Australia.

Many of the elements of the tension described above are present in this emerging issue also.

## **Problems and Prospects**

The Senate concluded its inquiry by declaring that a national - as distinct from a Commonwealth - approach to planning action on language matters was not only justified but necessary. Language policy making which deals with status attribution is not usually undertaken by or entrusted to linguists. This is a reflection of a political perception that language has powerful symbolic importance and group identity functions beyond its more obvious communicative functions and that, as a consequence the contested, disputed interests of different social groups are inextricably bound up with language issues. Policy making is not, therefore, a technical application of formulae, but rather one of negotiating consensus, of haggling out workable agreements about desired outcomes on language questions. Australia's languages policy has come about this way. A quick consideration of the following list of what may be called 'language problems' in Australia should be ample demonstration that policy is political and that, therefore, policy involves making choices. These choices are often between equally morally defensible claims and needs, balanced against economically imposed stringencies.

Some of these language problems are:

- (a) Almost half of Australian students of migrant background who need extra help and instruction in English at school do not receive any such instruction. There are serious gaps in both the adequacy and appropriateness of much of the ESL provision for non-English speaking background Australian students. The most comprehensive studies undertaken of ESL provision in schools, the Campbell reports, attest to a serious inadequacy in the level of provision. They estimate that an increase of up to 30% of resources is justified and that there exist serious deficiencies in the ESL effort. Since the Campbell calculations the ESL program was cut sharply in the 1986 budget, thus further damaging the level of provision (Campbell et al., 1984, 1985a, b).
- (b) Although in the U.S.A. deaf people can study to Ph.D. level in American Sign Language, it is extremely difficult for deaf Australians to study and attain qualifications in Australian higher education institutions.
- (c) The rate of extinction of Aboriginal languages is over one per year and only a handful of the over 50 still spoken may be spoken by children in the year 2000.
- (d) There is a consistent pattern of language shift among immigrant background Australians who learn a non-English language at home away from their mother tongue to using English all the time. This is despite the not insignificant successes in having community language bilingual and immersion second language programs introduced in primary schools.
- (e) Australia's interpreting and translating provisions are inadequate and stretched. Although in recent years community interpreting has been the main planning emphasis, the provisions of interpreters and translators are inadequately and poorly used. There is virtually no high level accreditation provision (levels four and five of the National Accreditation

Authority for Translators and Interpreters) in languages of key economic significance and poor provisions for Aborigines and the deaf.

- (f) Well over 300,000 Australians of immigrant non-English speaking background speak English poorly to very poorly. The majority of those of work force age occupy jobs in industries undergoing the greatest degree of employment dislocation and attrition due to economic restructuring. The retraining of these workers, not to mention their economic and social prospects generally, is severely constrained by their inadequate proficiency in standard English.
- (g) Over 3.7% of Australians, i.e. English-speaking background Australians, are functionally illiterate in English; a much higher percentage has only rudimentary reading skills and, when written skills are included, the proportion increases dramatically. Social class correlations are strong. This means that almost one million Australian adults have problems with English literacy. In its recent study in Victoria, the Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC, 1987) calculated that about 430,000 adults - migrants *and* others - require literacy help but only 4,000 receive tuition. Clearly, in addition to being an issue of individual social justice, adult illiteracy also carries significant economic and social costs to the country. In Victoria well over 80% of adult literacy students who work are employed in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. Such jobs account for only 33% of all jobs - a proportion which is declining (VALBEC, 1987).
- (h) Although only 7% of Australian undergraduate students were enrolled in language courses in 1982, and

overall some 30 languages are taught, three languages attract 60% of students.

- (i) Whereas over 44% of Australian students completed the Higher School Certificate - the pre-tertiary school year - with a second language in 1967, that figure had dropped to a national average of about 10% by 1986. This is particularly acute when the recommendations of the Economic Planning Advisory Committee (1986) are considered. EPAC argued that Australia must move away from dependence on extractable goods and agriculture products in its exports, and greatly improve its export of manufactured goods. It argued that Australia as an exporting nation must select and create niches in the economies of its trading partners and target goods at these. Inevitably this would require a much more sophisticated knowledge of these societies, and linguistic and cultural competence beyond present levels. Such instrumental reasons strengthen traditional 'cultural enrichment' arguments for lamenting such a serious decline in second language learning.
- (j) Despite the potentially enormous impact which communications and information technology will have on literacy genres and skills, practically no serious attention has been paid to examining the implications of these changes for education and particularly for teaching.

It is around such issues, perceived and felt by the particular communities concerned in each case as 'problems', that the advocacy for language policy commenced and the processes described above took place. Despite the adoption of a National Policy on Languages, severe deficiencies remain in Australia's response to the pressing issues of language. It is important that permanent structures for

overseeing language planning be set up.

A body entrusted by legislation with the authority to examine linguistic/technical aspects of language planning, especially in the case of Aboriginal languages, is an important goal. Although such a body -perhaps a National Institute of Languages - would be regarded by many as 'institutionalising' the issues, it could be constructed in such a way as to be representative of different interests. One of the urgent tasks of such a body would be to tackle the standardisation of existing orthographies, teacher training for Aboriginal bilinguals and literature production. These are essential if there is to be any prospect of producing significant long term curriculum improvements in the teaching of Aboriginal languages. Much of this must be done locally with Aboriginal management of the decision making, but some tasks can and ought to be done nationally.

Furthermore, for the languages policy overall it is also essential that an ongoing evaluation mechanism be set in place. The purpose would be to monitor, review and improve practice and to refine the work in this area continuously. Investigating ways of exploiting modern technologies for distance teaching and organisational variety to provide language maintenance in community languages is also a great need. Many schools in Melbourne and Sydney enroll speakers of over 30 languages and the total number of ethnic community languages is over 100. Inevitably such numbers of languages present practical, organisational and resource problems to planning mother tongue teaching provisions.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to provide a description not merely of Australia's policy on languages but also of some of the more important social processes involved in producing it. It has also attempted to consider distinctive Australian language needs and some of the deficiencies of the present policy framework. This concluding section addresses the role of policy makers in developing language

policy in complex multilingual societies like Australia.

It is the responsibility of policy makers to extricate themselves from the interest-based lobbies, generalising from specific instances, principles which meet four key criteria:

- (1) Those which can be defended and sustained intellectually (e.g. by taking account of sociolinguistic evidence about the role of schooling in language maintenance or revival efforts, by gathering evidence about how proficiency in second languages is gained, by examining resource configurations which are reasonable to the goals of programs).
- (2) Those which are feasible in terms of a fair measure of realistic or probable allocations of resources (e.g. setting realistic, attainable goals; acknowledging the jurisdictional roles of different bodies; explicitly stating the basis for the selection of options for the choices made; matching reasonable resource configurations to the meeting of goals of particular programs).
- (3) Those which are both humanitarian and just in the context of democratic societies promoting equity in the broader society for minorities (e.g. ensuring that due consultative processes are engaged in; being as comprehensive as possible about the needs, rights and demands of disadvantaged groups).
- (4) Those which are efficient and achievable in consideration of the national interest, which address the linguistic needs and opportunities of the mainstream sections of the society.

These principles involve the reconciliation of needs, demands and interests which are perceived to be national and those which are

perceived to be important by the community. It is extremely important that an explicitly principled way of doing this is constructed so that through later refinement, changes can be made. It is also important that the value positions of the policy makers be stated. Policies need also to be practical and politically wise; attainable goals should be set; evaluation mechanisms and processes set in train. Actions should be embedded in existing structures where this is possible and proper account needs to be taken of minority/majority power positions, symbolic acts and practical tasks.

Some of these have occurred in the Australian experience - others have not. The setting up of a representative Advisory Council may ensure that the strengths of the present policy positions are reinforced, that the gaps and deficiencies are corrected, and that further refinements and developments take place regularly.

#### Note

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages have, for the sake of brevity, been referred to as Aboriginal languages.

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