Chapter 4

Ideologies of value and the place of Australian indigenous languages in education

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1 Introduction

In a multilingual nation-state, different languages will be valued differently and the way that individual languages are allocated social value is the result of language ideologies that exist within the nation state (Liddicoat, 2013; Romaine, 2009; Tan & Rubdy, 2008). Typically, ideologies of value regarding languages favour official languages, the languages of politically, economically or socially dominant groups, and marginalize non-dominant languages. Such ideologies of value are pervasive in the language practices of a society but they have a particularly significant impact on language policies relating to the use of minority languages in education. They are particularly salient in contexts of language-in-education policy and planning work around educational institutions because schooling plays a fundamental role in the development of national citizens and of human and cultural capital, and the teaching and learning of valued language practices and language varieties —that is, legitimate languages in Bourdieu's (2001) terms— is a central component of this. In policy contexts, even when space is opened up in education systems for the use of non-dominant languages in education, policy reproduces the dominant ideologies of value (Liddicoat & Curnow, 2014). This chapter will examine these processes as they play out in Australian policy on the use of indigenous languages in Australia, focusing on the Northern Territory, where indigenous languages are more widely spoken than in most other parts of the country.

2 Indigenous languages in Australia

At the beginning of European colonization of Australia in the late eighteenth century, it is estimated that there were between 350 and 750 distinct social groupings of indigenous people, and a similar number of language varieties (Walsh, 1991). These languages constitute a number of different language families. The number of indige-

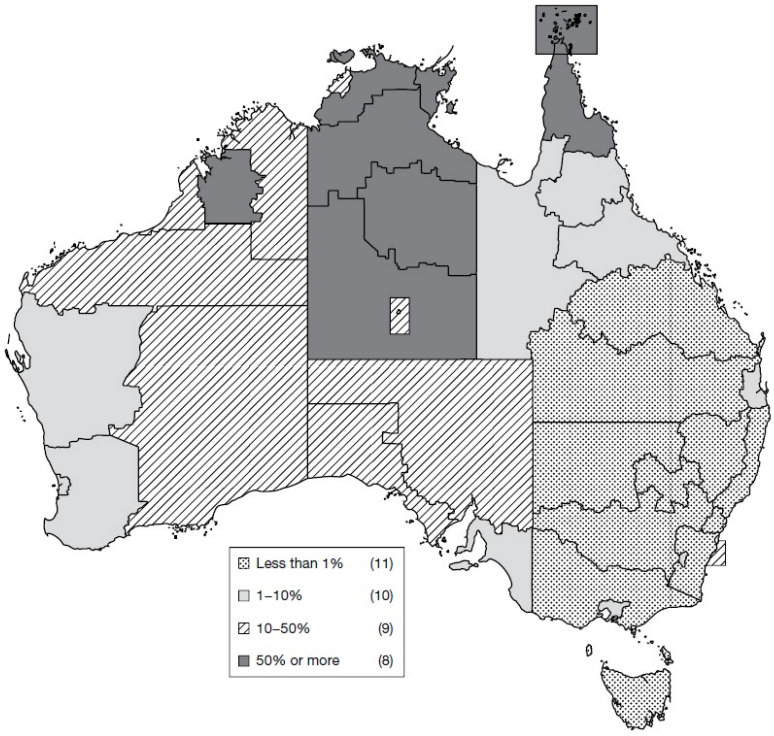


Figure 1: Percentage of Indigenous population who speak an Indigenous language at home (Source: Biddle, 2012, p. 11)

nous language varieties spoken in Australia began to decline soon after the arrival of Europeans on the continent and currently fewer than 150 indigenous languages remain in daily use, many with a very small number of elderly speakers. Of these, only about twenty are not considered to be highly endangered. Of those that survive, only 10% are being learned by children and those languages are usually spoken in isolated areas.

Indigenous Australians make up only a very small proportion of the contemporary Australian population. In the 2011 census, they number just over 500 000 people and constituted only 2.5% of the total Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Indigenous people are not uniformly distributed through the country and most are concentrated in northern Australia, in particular the Northern Territory, where they constituted almost 27% of the population in 2011. Similarly, the maintenance of indigenous languages varies across the country. Most of the languages of the areas of longest colonial settlement along the eastern seaboard are no longer regularly spoken and the most significant concentrations of speakers of indigenous languages are found in the Northern Territory, the Kimberley area of Western Australia, Cape York Peninsula and the Torres Strait islands in Queensland (see Fig. 1).

For most of the period since colonization, little attention has been paid to the place of indigenous languages in education and indigenous people were routinely educated in a monolingual English classroom environment, regardless of their own language background, as a part of an assimilationist program (Harris & Devlin, 1997; Welch, 1988). Initially, missionaries developed some schools specifically for indigenous people and used indigenous languages as their usual languages of instruction, with the aim of converting indigenous people to Christianity and developing the literacy skills necessary for religious purposes (Gale, 1990). However, in the course of the nineteenth century such mission schools were either closed or required by governments to use English as the sole language of instruction. Thus, the usual educational program for indigenous people in Australia has been monolingual in English, although occasionally education programs using indigenous languages have existed sporadically in church schools, such as the bilingual Pitjantjara and English program that began operation at Ernabella Presbyterian mission in 1940 (Edwards, 1969; Macgill, 1999).

3 Bilingual education in the Northern Territory

The Northern Territory, because of its high proportion of indigenous people, has been a significant focus for language policy in education. In fact, the first sanctioned use of indigenous languages in schools since the early colonial period was the introduction of government funded bilingual education programs in the Northern Territory in 1973. Bilingual education programs were designed for indigenous children who did not speak English as a home language and provided a curriculum taught in an indigenous language (the child's first language) and English. The rationale for such programs was therefore to begin education in a language spoken by the child and to introduce children to the official language of the nation in which they lived. By 1996 there were 22 bilingual schools in operation in the Northern Territory, teaching 17 indigenous languages alongside English. The period 1973–1996 was a relatively stable one for bilingual education policy, although the overt policy became less well supported over time as the result of continuing budgetary cuts for bilingual provision (Nicholls, 2005). The policy was introduced by the Federal Government, which at the time was solely responsible for the governance of the territory, but with the introduction of responsible government in the territory in 1978, responsibility for implementing bilingual education was devolved to the Northern Territory Department of Education, which was overall less supportive of bilingual education than the Federal government had been.

From the late 1990s, the government commitment to bilingual education weakened considerably and since 1998, there have been two significant policy changes relating to bilingual programs. In 1998, the Northern Territory government announced the closure of bilingual education programs and legislated to disband bilingual programs in government schools. The move was controversial and there was much opposition to the proposed policy change from indigenous communities, human rights groups and academics. The support from indigenous communities for the continuation of bilingual programs was particularly strong and seen as having a strong relationship to cultural maintenance and indigenous identity. In the end, the policy was not fully enforced with 11 programs remaining open (Devlin, 2009) and the government

continued acceptance of bilingual education for some indigenous people, under the name of 'two-ways schooling'.

A decade later, the remaining bilingual programs were further restricted when the government legislated to reduce the amount of indigenous language instruction in schools and increase the amount of English, effectively limiting the place of indigenous languages in bilingual programs (Devlin, 2009, 2010). This change was also widely challenged and one consequence of the change in policy was that school attendance in the new English-only programs decreased dramatically (Dickson, 2010). The challenge to the new policy was so strong that the policy was withdrawn at the end of 2010, after one year of implementation of the new policy, an alternative policy, *Literacy for Both Worlds* (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2010), was put in place, only to be withdrawn after a few weeks, after which the policy of compulsory teaching in English for the first four hours of each day was reinstated.

The remainder of this chapter will examine the policy statements relating to these two changes to investigate the ideological positions that informed these policy responses.

4 The 1998 policy change

The 1998 policy change was set out in a brief media release issued by the then Minister for Education, Peter Adamson (Adamson, 1998). This media release was entitled *English a High Priority in Bush Schools* and with this focus, the document constructed a rationale for ending bilingual education and maintained the change that was necessary to develop the English language abilities of indigenous children. It presented the time spent on indigenous languages as being problematic for children's English language development.

The focus on English resulted from the fact that indigenous children's levels of literacy were considerably lower than those of the rest of the population (Devlin, 2009). The reasons for the difference in outcomes in education for indigenous children and other children are complex and related to issues of marginalization and the consequences of colonization (Bradley, Draca, Green, & Leeves, 2007). Most significantly, however, there is a logical flaw in comparing the literacy levels in English of native-speakers and non-native-speakers, without considering questions such as the students' first language, their overall language proficiency and their history of English language learning. The consequences of this flaw were that the differences in educational levels were attributed to the types of programs delivered to indigenous children. Programs that included teaching in indigenous languages were particularly singled out as problematic. One reason for this is that bilingual programs differ in nature from regular literacy provision: that is, monolingual English language programs are the norm within the nation (as monolingual English speakers are the dominant group numerically as well as politically). Thus, bilingual programs appear deviant within the monolingual habitus (Gogolin, 1994) of Australian schooling and so were an apparent target for intervention. Moreover, reactions to bilingual education were based on what Ferris and Politzer (1981) call a 'common sense' view of language acquisition that more time spent on the target language automatically equates with better literacy in the target language; a view that Ferris and Politzer criticize as flawed because it does not take

into consideration the role of literacy development in the first language and literacy development in a second language. This common-sense view further reinforces the monolingual habitus found in educational policy.

Within the media release, the change of policy was described as a removal of "bilingualism" to focus on English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction: "The bilingual program will progressively make way for the development of ESL programs." (Adamson, 1998.) The text of the media release therefore established the relationship between indigenous languages and English in bilingual programs as one of conflict, with the indigenous language undermining or threatening the place of the dominant language in the educational context. The media release also established a sense of conflict between bilingual education and ESL, as removing bilingual education would allow space for ESL. This implies that ESL is not present in bilingual programs and renders the presence of English as a core component of such programs invisible at the rhetorical level. The ideological construction of bilingual education in the text therefore constructs a view of bilingual education as education in the indigenous language rather than education in two languages. In policy rhetoric, therefore, the sense of the role of English in bilingualism is diminished and bilingual education is presented as instruction in an indigenous language. ESL is thus under-developed because it has to compete for space with the indigenous language and is not given the space warranted for an important language.

The policy itself is based on the recommendation of an internal government report on indigenous education, which argues for the removal of bilingual programs as a way of "allowing the schools to share in the savings and better resource English language programs" (NT Department of Education, 1998). This argument is one that constructs bilingual education as an educational cost rather than an educational benefit: it consumes resources that could otherwise be used to teach the dominant language of the nation. This logic has a number of underlying ideological assumptions. The first is a perception that the indigenous language has no inherent value for its learners; that teaching them their mother tongue contributes little or nothing to their education. The second is the related assumption that only learning of the dominant language counts as an educational attainment—the purpose of education is to develop capabilities in English and only those capabilities have value. Thus, the ideological construction present in the decision to stop bilingual education is that, in a bilingual program, only one language has true value —the dominant language— and the other language functions primarily to limit the time devoted to the dominant language. In this way, the social and political hegemony of the English language shapes the idea of value that attaches to particular languages and discounts the legitimacy of other languages in education.

5 The 2008 policy change

Although bilingual programs in indigenous languages had continued to exist beyond 1998, they did not receive strong government support. In 2008, the Northern Territory government sought to restrict the amount of time spent on teaching and learning the indigenous language. As in 1998, the decision to change the policy was announced in

a brief media release from the then Minister for Education Marion Scrymgour. The proposal did not specifically address bilingual schools, but rather was expressed as a requirement for all schools: "The first four hours of education in all Northern Territory schools will be conducted in English to improve attendance rates and lift the literacy and numeracy results in our remote Indigenous schools." (Scrymgour, 2008.)

Although this is a provision for all schools, it is only meaningful for bilingual programs. For other schools, which have monolingual English language programs, the institution of four hours of English language teaching per day is meaningless. For a bilingual program, the four-hour requirement means that there remains around 60 minutes of the school day during which the indigenous language may be taught. This policy change, like the 1998 change, focused on increasing exposure to English for indigenous students who spoke an indigenous language at home, although it did not do so by attempting to remove bilingual education but by determining the minimum space in the curriculum for the dominant language and thus the maximum space available for indigenous languages. This emphasis of increasing the role of English was also signalled in the title of the media release *Education Restructure Includes Greater Emphasis on English* (Scrymgour, 2008). That is, the government policy discourse equates a greater emphasis with more time and represents a greater allocation of time to English as a pedagogical solution to the lower literacy levels of students who do not speak English as a first language.

As in 1998, the motivation for the policy change was the poor performance of indigenous children in literacy, in this case, on national standardized tests of English language literacy. Although the analysis of results of these tests has been disputed (Devlin, 2009, 2010; Simpson, Caffery, & McConvell, 2009), there is a gap between mainstream literacy levels and those of indigenous children. This is particularly so, because in Australian educational policy, literacy has been defined as literacy *in English* (Liddicoat, 2013) and literacy in another language is not taken into consideration and is not included in literacy assessment. This means that, for students in bilingual programs, what were assessed were their literacy abilities in an additional language rather than in their home language and that half of their educational program was discounted in the test results. This means that in educational discourses in Australia, the learning of an indigenous language does not contribute to the development of literacy and numeracy, as these capabilities exist only in English.

Given that the previous policy had been strongly resisted by indigenous communities, the 2008 media release expresses a commitment to the maintenance of indigenous languages and cultures: "I support preserving our Indigenous languages and culture—but our Indigenous children need to be given the best possible chance to learn English." (Scrymgour, 2008.)

The use of the pronoun "our" in describing indigenous languages and cultures and indigenous children is particularly significant here as Scrymgour identifies as an indigenous woman. This means that her ideological stance for the predominant importance of English is one that has been internalized by at least some indigenous people. The limiting of the place of the indigenous language is represented here as being done in solidarity with, and in the best interests of, indigenous people.

In this statement, the preservation of languages and cultures is contrasted with opportunities to learn English; that is, languages are conceived as being in conflict, and the presence of an indigenous language in an education context threatens children's acquisition of the dominant language. In this way, language maintenance in school is constructed as disadvantaging indigenous children as it is represented as preventing them from acquiring English. It also expresses the acquisition of English as the only legitimate goal for education. In fact, the media release indicates that the role of indigenous languages in education programs is to be very circumscribed and indigenous languages will be used for a "structured language and culture program" (Scrymgour, 2008). This means that indigenous languages will be used for teaching about indigenous culture and as a vehicle for traditional rather than modern knowledge. The ideological framing of indigenous languages is therefore that they are relevant only to expressing and communicating the past and have no place in communicating about the modern, technological world, which is the domain of English. In this way, indigenous languages are constructed as less relevant for significant learning—the sorts of learning measured in national assessment and those that are held to be relevant for employment and future success. Thus, indigenous languages are reserved only for those areas of study specific to indigenous people and not held as necessary or valued knowledge by the dominant social and political group (who do not study these things as part of their education). Moreover, such a provision reflects a view that indigenous languages have no relevance or application outside indigenous contexts.

6 Discussion

The value that languages hold within Australian society can be seen as an ideological product in which value is created discursively and is ultimately a product of those who control the means of ideological production (Althusser, 1976), for example the ministers who articulate explanations for policy decisions. The idea found in the policy texts that represent control of a particular language, English, as an objective good, is therefore highly problematic as it does not recognize the relationships of power that underlie either the way the language is understood as a good or the field in which value is attributed to the language. Ideologies that construct particular languages as having greater or lesser value and the discourses that create and reproduce them are constituent features of the linguistic marketplace (Bourdieu, 2001) in which individuals' language capabilities are judged and deemed to be useful or productive. For indigenous languages in Australia, the linguistic marketplace appears to give no value to indigenous languages and allocates all value to English. English and indigenous languages are ascribed with differing levels of prestige / non-prestige (*i.e.* symbolic capital) in terms of their perceived value in the linguistic marketplace. This is consequential for how languages are seen and treated in social actions, including the formulation and implementation of policy. That is, these ideologies of value create the conditions that prevent individuals' language capabilities in indigenous languages being articulated as forms of linguistic capital as the marketplace is conceived as being a monolingual one. Thus, education as a preparation for the linguistic marketplace cannot provide significant space for the teaching and learning of indigenous languages as these are portrayed as being without future value for learners. As Bourdieu (2001)

notes, the state, and hence the governing elite, creates and controls the linguistic marketplace; it is thus a manifestation of a dominant group's control of the means of ideological (re)production. As the dominant group is a monolingual English-speaking group, the linguistic marketplace is shaped in such a way that monolingualism provides cultural capital and plurilingualism represents a limitation on it.

In order to succeed in the linguistic marketplace, it is necessary to control the linguistic variety which has the highest market value —the legitimate language (Bourdieu, 2001)— in this case English. The value system of the linguistic marketplace and the ideologies of value on which it operates are thus part of the hegemony of the monolingual English-speaking governing elite in that it represents

> *[...] consenso* spontaneo *dato dalle grandi masse della popolazione all'indirizzo impresso alla vita sociale dal gruppo fondamentale dominante, consenso che nasce «storicamente» dal prestigio (e quindi dalla fiducia) derivante al gruppo dominante dalla sua posizione e dalla sua funzione nel mondo della produzione.* [Gramsci, 1971, p. 12.]
>
> [...] the *spontaneous* consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed upon social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. [Gramsci, 1975, p. 9.]

The overwhelming dominance of the English language and the political, economic and social power of English speakers are thus normalized in policy discourses about indigenous languages, which assert that English (and only English) is necessary for indigenous people. This means that even in policies that deal with indigenous education, indigenous languages become perceived as problematic for education, a view that is adopted by at least some indigenous people.

These dominant ideologies of value are only partial representations of the realities of linguistic ecologies in Australia, which are far more complex than what is represented in the dominant monolingual ideology. What is absent in such ideologies of value is the place of languages in the lived experiences of their speakers, especially indigenous people whose aspirations relate to developing futures within local indigenous communities where English may be seldom used and external to most social and economic relationships. In Australian policy documents, the value that a language has is constructed in terms of the supra-local nation-state rather than in terms of the local linguistic and social ecologies. In such ecologies, indigenous languages can play significant roles in communication and participation in local communities and in the construction, expression and reproduction of local identities. That is, there exist within multilingual nation-states, such as Australia, alternate possible ideologies of value that are not recognized at the national level, and which are external to the macro-level concerns of nation-states. If the nation as a whole is viewed as a macro-market in which languages are used and receive value, it is also the case that there are diverse micro-markets (*e.g.* families, peer-groups, communities, etc.)

where the value of a linguistic variety may differ from the value this variety has on the wider macro-market (*cf.* Bourdieu, 1981). This micro-market is seen in policy contexts only through localized opposition of indigenous groups to policy changes, but it is rarely the case that these predominate over the ideologies and value systems of the macro-market in indigenous education. As such, indigenous languages have value for their speakers that are not recognized within the social space of the nation-state because this value is not commensurate with the dominant discursive construction of the nature of value.

The prevailing ideologies of value that exist within Australia represent the context in which language policy and planning work takes place and they influence what can be and is done in such work. These two policy changes reflect a similar ongoing ideology about the value that languages have within a society. This ideology of value is based on the economic, political and social linguistic and cultural hegemony of English in Australian society. Moreover, it is based on monolingual habitus that represents monolingualism in English as the natural language situation and as the only legitimate focus of educational work and constructs plurilingualism as problematic. Plurilingualism is problematic in that it is seen as detracting from the speaking of English; that is plurilingual children are conceived as having a deficit in English, not an additional capability in another language. The emphasis on standardized testing, in which those who speak English as an additional language are compared with native speakers works to entrench and sustain this perception.

These ideologies also reflect a very similar view of society and the role of education in preparing children to participate in that society. The society is understood as one that speaks English, and is monolingual in its use of English. This also is understood as the society for which education prepares all children, meaning that indigenous children are not understood as having futures in indigenous communities, but only in the mainstream English-speaking culture. Education is conceived as a preparation for participation in English-speaking society and English-speaking society only. Thus, teaching and learning that is not in English is not a legitimate preparation for the future as the use of indigenous languages is seen as little relevance for learners' futures. These prevailing ideologies of language in Australia give value to English only and so constrain the possibilities for indigenous languages in education. The prevailing ideologies therefore require the closing of the space for indigenous languages in education, as the preservation of space for such languages is understood in forms of conflict within the very goals and procedures of education.

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