Language Education in Australia: Italian and Japanese as symbols of cultural policy

Joseph Lo Bianco

A wide scope

In its broadest sense school language education includes a wide scope of activities, policies and experiences. To speak comprehensively of such a wide-ranging field requires attention to at least the following:

- the extension of standard English-speaking children’s ‘home’ linguistic repertoire to include literate capability (reading and writing as well as critical and imaginative literacy);
- extending the non-standard English of some communities to include spoken and written standard Australian English;
- teaching English to non-English speakers (whether of immigrant or indigenous background);
- appropriate provision for deaf, blind and other children with language-connected special needs; and
- the teaching of languages other than English.

Each of these five categories is itself broad and complex, all involving pedagogical specificities and many replete with ideology and interest. For example, the seemingly innocuous classification of ‘languages other than English’ is invested with contested issues, variable meanings, divergent ideologies and dynamic practices. The wide range of language classifications also suggests major policy shifts over time.

Each of the categories contains a history: the state of knowledge at a given point in time, and prevailing views about the transmission of culture and about whether education reflects social arrangements or is part of policy intervention to change them. In the Australian case public policy on languages other than English has been a prominent instrument for nation making, seeking at different times to support official multiculturalism and to advance the nation’s accommodation to its Asian geography. Similarly, English teaching has been pressed into national service, but with different ideological expectations. Originally invoking identification with Britain, English norms and standards later became absorbed into a politics of assertive cultural autonomy (Australianism) and later still became enmeshed in a politics of ambivalence (simultaneous embrace and rejection) towards American influence. In the present chapter passing reference is made to each of the five categories, but most attention is devoted to the sequence of policies and issues connected with languages other than English, and more in relation to immigrant and foreign languages than to Australian (indigenous) languages.

However we define ‘formal language education in Australia’, it is clear that it has been a vibrant site of cultural expression, exhibiting both change and continuity. This cultural expression has been social as well as cultural. Experimentation and innovation, but also dogma and conservatism, have been motivated by aspirations for social transformation as well as reactions resisting change. English and literacy teaching have been invested with hopes from the marginalized, poor and excluded seeking either access to the norms and discourses of powerful language registers for social and economic betterment or, more radically, to undermine the extant status hierarchy in so far as language is a medium for its intergenerational reproduction. But formal language education also serves the interests of the already advantaged and can function as both practice and symbol of exclusion and domination. In these ways public policy in formal language education has oscillated between reformist zeal and conservative reproduction.

The history of language education reform movements therefore is a dynamic complex with moments of social transformation to ameliorate class inequalities, policies to inculcate attachment to Asian regionalism, moves to disengage from colonial cultural dependence, moves to validate cultural pluralism and institutionalize various minority interests, and, of course, energetic resistance to and rejection of all of these.
Indigenous Australian languages

For most of Australia’s tens of thousands of years of human occupation, some 250 languages (representing some 600 dialects) coexisted (Jupp, 2001). By contrast, in the 200 years since British settlement, many Australian languages have become extinct and all have been rendered vulnerable to extinction. Language extinction is the result of the obliteration of indigenous patterns of intergenerational socialization, the disruption of native processes of intimacy, and the erosion of the sustaining cultural contexts that scaffold languages, which then die as their speakers transfer, inexorably, to the replacing culture and language.

Today, only about 20 Australian languages are still passed on to children; only about 50,000 Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders speak a traditional language, approximately 10 per cent of all indigenous people. Some 50–60 languages are known only by old people and are not used in communication across the generations, which usually relies on code switching. This means, then, that some 170–180 languages are no longer used at all, and about some of these languages virtually nothing is known.

Immigrant Australian languages

Australians also speak more than 120 immigrant languages ('community' languages) from all parts of the world (Jupp, 2001). Community languages are spoken everywhere, but the large cities are especially multilingual. Although there had been small minority communities since the First Fleet (with vibrant German-, Chinese-, Italian-, French- and Irish-speaking populations throughout the 19th century), the immigration programme that commenced following the Second World War permanently and radically transformed the overall population mix, and, ultimately, many of its public policies.

The migration programme commenced with the admission of displaced persons from Eastern Europe but, because demand outstripped supply, moved geographically to the North of Europe and then to its South, then to its South-East (with the strategically significant admission of Turks by the mid-1960s), then to Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, and most recently to Africa. The moving geography represented a progressive abandonment in practice, and from the late 1960s in law, of the 1901 White Australia Policy. Since the 1970s Asian languages have grown in prominence, adding Indonesian, Korean, Tamil, Sinhala and Vietnamese to the Arabic, Chinese, Greek, Italian, Maltese and Turkish speech communities from earlier immigration flows.

Australian community languages are maintained intergenerationally relatively more effectively than in many immigrant-receiving nations. 'Ethnic', schools, clubs, radio, television, the Internet and newspapers, not to mention more recent possibilities of travel and immersion, have helped. But most important have been the effects of policies of official multiculturalism. However, there is still language shift over the generations, with Chinese, Greek, Italian and Vietnamese having better rates of language retention into the second and third generations than Dutch, German or Maltese (Clyne, 2001).

Phases of formal language education policy

Language education policies and philosophies can be divided (certainly not neatly) into broad phases, each with a distinctive overarching theme and public attitude, towards linguistically expressed social difference. These themes invariably correlate with a wider social and political ideology that is not always directly about language, or even about education. From the establishment of compulsory education in the early 1870s, a recurring, if unevenly expressed, assimilation ideology prevailed in relation to indigenous and immigrant languages. This was more or less energetically pursued until the 1970s when quite radical changes were effected. The main protagonists of those changes can be described as language interests.

The five phases described below are broad categories; they do not represent all that was going on during the periods to which they refer, but are a sequence of distinctive policy orientations that functioned as meta-themes shaping an array of smaller actions.
**Britishism**

Policies (laws, regulations and official texts) and practices (attitudes that constitute implicit policy) that aimed to bring about cultural homogenization for immigrants, and complete assimilation for indigenous Australians, were the operating norm between Federation in 1901 and the radical remaking of Australian identity in the early 1970s. Although a goal of universal monolingualism in an English modelled on southern British norms was rarely expressed overtly, it was the always discernible underlying objective of explicit and implicit policy in education, media, policing and law.

Britishism required the eradication of difference, and difference was often most palpably expressed in language. Southern British norms of English functioned as ideal standards for Australian speech, expressing the overarching attachments of an outpost of Empire loyalty. Great Britain's geography combined with elite European cultural values as the determiners of choice for foreign language study: literary French and 'mind-training' notions for Latin. Orientalism, with its interest in the exotic, characterized the (very minor) study of non-European languages. English teaching aimed to induct the young into the prestige of canonical literature. English beliefs in the illiberality of overt language planning delegated to public attitudes the politics of pursuing monolingualism: languages were taught without an expectation that they would be used; the public use of minority languages was mistrusted, tolerated only in domestic spheres.

**Australianism**

Over time, Britishism was challenged through the progressive assertion of the value of writing whose themes, idioms, style and character extolled the landscape, experience and character of Australia, contesting its judgement and representation solely through British prisms.

Often self-conscious, this movement of repudiation of British spoken norms and literary sensibilities, asserting Australian norms as the appropriate standard, was co-present with Britishism, and ultimately prevailed. Often Australianism resided within a secure attachment to a wider English-speaking sense of the world, but merged over time into a more local pluralism, and, much later still, with a sense of geography as an identity marker for Australia: the context of embrace of Asia. Australianism was often a movement for an indigenous English to express, and to advocate, the authenticity of an Australian sensibility, for a new world to be named in its own terms. This Australianist cultural assertion, because it was internal to English (posing a national variety alternative to British), had a problematic relationship with the later emergence of multiculturalism because the latter advocated non-English ways to know and describe Australia. But Australianism also had more practical dimensions. Adult literacy, for example, was conceived mainly as 'second chance' education for mainstream community members, not immigrants. In time, Australian linguistic nationalism shifted towards including minority concerns, into constituting a new source for an original, hybrid, national identity potential for Australia (Turner, 1991) but to this day retains indications of strain with later claimants on new kinds of lingual identity for Australia.

**Multiculturalism**

The multiculturalist movement conceived Australia differently from Australianism and its nationalist cultural politics. Multiculturalism imagined the nation as a multilingual and independent entity with attenuated connections to Great Britain, but it too contained strains and tensions: an uneasy accommodation of indigenous and immigrant interests, and tensions with mainstream or dominant language choices in education, originally European ones and later Asian ones. Basing its public advocacy originally on quite new notions of language rights, and later on minority languages as national resources, multiculturalism advocated language education selections based on criteria of 'community presence' and not traditions of esteem, prestige or 'foreignness'. A key justification in multiculturalism advocated language policy was related to intergenerational maintenance and ethnic continuity, these ideas coinciding with moves during the late 1960s and early 1970s of connecting schools more closely to the communities they served rather than to bodies of knowledge to which society determined all learners should gain access.

In addition, multiculturalism advocated English not in a British-Australianist literary dichotomy, but as applied linguistics, second language methodologies suited to immigrant and indigenous adults and children. In relation to adult literacy, which had constituted itself as a discourse for marginalized and
disadvantaged 'mainstream' Australians, multiculturalism sought a seamless provision of adult English, spoken and written, according to specific needs of learners, a tension that surfaced in the 1990s when comprehensive language policies needed to reconcile divergent advocacy and special interests. Perhaps the strongest tension of the multicultural phase was its claim to represent and reconstruct the entire nation, and its opponents' refusal to collapse the mainstream into notions of multiple and overlapping differences; they preferred instead to imagine that the mainstream would remain unchanged and new arrivals (and indigenous peoples) would have to adapt to its norms and character. Despite these complexities, cultural diversity entered political consciousness and language education as a seemingly permanent part of an evolving national compromise, which came to fuse British inheritance, ancient indigenous elements and a new demography of pluralism into a new, if not always comfortable, national norm. In this sense, multiculturalism has attained lasting success as an element in language education that has symbolized a wider remaking of cultural policy in Australia.

By the mid-1980s, advocacy of rights to the maintenance of minority languages was losing momentum. The principal reason was the realization that intergenerational language retention rests in considerable part with individual communities, and a growing view that public institutions cannot, in practice, directly intervene to support all differences of language and culture. A new manner of thinking emerged. This regarded language and, cultural retention as a 'resource' rather than a right. A right involves sanction against some authority for non-compliance. A resource involves thinking about the benefits (intellectual, cultural, economic and social) of assisting young people to retain and develop a mastery of the language of their families, and the cultural knowledge that they are developing in their communities (Ruiz, 1984).

The concrete achievements of this period of intense debate and contest, in which formal language education became the locus of claims for social reconstruction, were many and lasting: the beginnings of Indigenous rights understood as cultural self-determination, a vast array of world-first policy provisions (e.g. public interpreting and translating), and moves towards comprehensive and explicit national language planning combining demography, geography, pluralism and cultural continuity, asserting an individuated nation in an era of global multicultural connectedness (Clyne, 1991; Ozolins, 1993; Lo Bianco and Wickert, 2001). Anglo-conformity in culture and its related aim of the eradication of language diversity were overturned by the impact of multiculturalism at home and the emergence of Asian regionalism.

**Asianism**

Claims on formal language education and its role in 'signifying the nation' based on geography and economics were made powerful by the imperatives of securing new markets for Australian exports after the United Kingdom's accession to the European Common Market in the mid-1970s.

From the early 1980s, but very strongly during the 1990s, policy reports advocated the teaching of key Asian languages, and were linked with calls for pervasive transformation of the cultural orientation of public education to deemphasize Europe-knowledge and stress what came to be called Asia-literacy. Some of this built on multiculturalism, but much of it distanced multiculturalism (Singh, 2001), based on a view that Asia-literacy was needed for mainstream English-speaking Australia.

A significant feature of economically motivated Asian regionalism was the prominent role of champions from trade, diplomatic and political sectors, rather than the community members or language professionals who had advocated multiculturalism, or the political and cultural figures who had characterized the Australianist advocacy. Asianism was an immensely successful phase of language education policy, resulting in vast public investments in Asia-literacy and a consequent boom in enrolments and enthusiasm at all levels of education for both studies of Asia and the teaching of Asian languages.

**Economism**

The 1990s saw the dominant language policy discourse change again, returning, in new guise, to an old pattern: the primacy of English (this time of English as literacy), but adding the new elements of a radically reconfigured notion of the role of the state and the primacy of education's contribution to economic competitiveness.
Policy and research reports indicating declining standards of English literacy coincided with a rationality of labour market connections with education sustained by the ideology of human capital theory as advanced by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. The insistent advocacy of increasing English literacy standards, as measured by normalized and standardized tests, is buttressed by a discourse of enhancing young people's employment prospects in the post-industrial economic age in the context of intense economic globalization. One effect has been to make vulnerable achievements gained for multicultural and multilingual education, and even for Asia-literacy (Lo Bianco and Wickert, 2001; Australian Language Matters, 2 (2002)).

Economism also involves a restriction in the role of the state. As the state contracts its role, the marketplace becomes prominent. Economism makes a priority of notions of 'basics' in English literacy and numeracy, and in this new rationality, literacy, constituted as a transferable quantum of skill that public education produces, is deployed by individuals in competitive promotion in a marketplace of competence. Languages and cultural competences need to command market value to sustain their presence.

Explicit national policy

From the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, Australianism, multiculturalism and Asianism forged an alliance of discourses and claims for public education, producing an especially prolific period for formal policy making. Policy texts included the National Policy on Languages (NPL) (Lo Bianco, 1987), Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP) (Dawkins, 1992) and the National Asian Languages and Studies Strategy (Rudd, 1994). The first sought to be a comprehensive account of language policy. The second ostensibly aimed to be a comprehensive policy but was influenced by incipient economism and pitched nationally determined priorities against community-influenced diversity. The third enshrined a sharp priority for commercially oriented Asian languages, nominating four as priority choices: Chinese, Indonesian, Korean and Japanese. Both the NPL and the ALLP enshrined standard Australian English as the national variety of the common Australian language and both engaged with a wide range of language interests. The ALLP introduced a priority for English as literacy, making vulnerable minority language claims. All were made vulnerable in 1997 by the forceful emergence of a meta-policy of economism, that linked a notion of literacy as discrete skills to competitive economic success for individuals and the entire national economy, and combined these ideas with a contracted role for the state in cultural and language policy.

Interests

In previous work (Lo Bianco, 2001) I have argued that changes in formal language education emerged from the variable interaction of initially three, and later four, policy interests. These were 1) policy consciousness among language professionals; 2) the political agitation of articulate second-generation immigrants and their Indigenous counterparts; 3) business, diplomatic and political elites spurred into action on language education policy by the concrete experience of accessing markets for Australian exports in Asian markets; and 4) the OECD-inspired but politically motivated pressure for improving standards in English literacy.

The relations among these four interests have been the principal dynamic in language education policy in Australia since 1970. Initially the coalition of the three interests led to a comprehensive approach to language education planning, stressing pluralism and diversity, and notable for its 'citizen-driven' character (Horne, 1994). Working together the otherwise disparate interests evolved a shared discourse that refused to locate the value of languages within the publicly available frameworks of trade, or traditional hierarchies of cultural value. In deploying a discourse that attached multiple values to languages, they came to represent multilingualism itself as a kind of national capital endowment whose cultivation could benefit the entire society. The values of bilingualism within their own communities, their distinctive languages plus English, produced a successful claim to a wider social multilingualism. In turn this process of language maintenance and language learning was attached, in broad and deliberately not narrow ways, to potential benefits for the whole society: children's enhanced intellectual functioning, harmonious cultural relations and enhanced internationalization.

During the 1990s this approach of 'multiple values' - in truth, a collective compromise-was challenged
by the new rationality of governance, shared by both conservatives and social democrats, that elevated interests of economy above those of nation and community. A key device for realizing this, for dislodging the discourse of multiculturally based multilingualism, has been the crisis alleged (many say manufactured: Boreham and Mitchell, 1997; Raethel, 1997) in English literacy standards. This approach has abandoned comprehensive and pluralistic policy as expensive luxuries, gravitating instead around a consensus of English literacy first. Of decisive importance in bringing about this shift has been the work of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, whose studies have connected success in the increasingly globalized trading economy with levels of attainment in education, utilizing assessed literacy performance data as a critical indicator (OECD, 1992, 1996).

Dichotomies to hybrids: Italian and Japanese

This section discusses Italian and Japanese to illustrate changing fortunes and ideologies discussed above in relation to general languages education. Japanese is selected because it is the exemplar of the foreign Asian language of commerce that dominated the Asianism phase, and Italian because it is the exemplar community language of the multiculturalism phase.

Among the most dramatic language policy developments in recent decades in Australia has been the vast status change that both Italian and Japanese have enjoyed. Both languages have endured several complete transformations of esteem. Both are latecomer additions to foreign languages study in Australia, but today Japanese is by far the most widely taught language and Italian possibly the most studied second language overall if we aggregate all levels of formal, non-formal and community-based education (Lo Bianco, 1994). The fortunes of the two languages have a similar and intriguing pattern of esteem affected by relations first between cultural elites, then between nations, and then direct encounters between individuals.

From British prisms to Australian perspectives

The foundation of the British colonies in Australia coincided with a wave of Italomania in Britain. In the 19th century, Italian visitors to the British colonies of Australia included many artists, singers, scientists and political revolutionaries. Educated colonists knew classical Italy, the 'triumphs of art and thought' (Pesman, 1994) of its Renaissance city-states, and were constructing monuments and public buildings 'claiming for this new place a continuity with the classical world and its values' (Malouf, 1998: 70). The Italians they encountered often confirmed their cultured view, but despite constituting a kind of cultural self-discovery for educated Australians, Italian remained absent from formal education.

The beginnings of Australian self-consciousness also coincided with the Meiji Restoration, the opening up of Japan to Western influence, and promoted Western fascination with its culture as 'exotic' difference. After Federation in 1901 Japan again entered Australia's European consciousness for its assertive, independence-minded modernization. Its defeat of a major European power, Russia, in 1905 caused consternation in British Australia.

Both civilization and orientalism motivated the introduction of Japanese at the University of Sydney in 1917, and James Murdoch was appointed to Chair of Oriental Studies in 1918.

The first half of the 20th century joined Italian and Japanese in a perverse union of fortunes. From cultural self-discovery, and admired but feared exotic difference, they became the despised languages of political enemies. Interestingly, these developments stimulated attention to their teaching. For Japanese- and Italian- Australians, however, the conflation of ethnic background with presumed political allegiances that often occurs to minorities at times of hostility between source and host nations resulted in internment for some, deprivation of liberty for many, and generalized hostility (Douglass, 1994; Nagata, 1996).

The Second World War changed everything, intensifying proximity to feared Asia, distance from protective Britain, feelings of vulnerability, and tensions between history, culture and geography. A critical policy response was population increase and perversely, again, this connected Australia and Australians first to Italians, and later to Japanese. The post-war migration programme recruited as its largest non-British component of the population Australia's Italian community. The eventual post-war prosperity of Japan, and its pacifist constitution, transformed it into Australia's pre-eminent economic
As Australians encountered more Italians directly, prevailing views of Italian culture changed. Unlike its origins in the 19th century, later Italian immigration was family and region based, mainly of southern peasant origins, replacing the 19th-century northern pattern of travelling artists, scientists, liberal and revolutionary-minded individuals. The new immigrants, a sub-class, marginalized and alienated, spoke dialects and regional languages that education ignored or despised. Over the subsequent three decades a locally born, articulate and dual-identifying generation emerged, coinciding with new prosperity in both Australia and in Italy and ultimately transforming Italian culture, people and language, first into a kind of exemplar minority community, and later into the preferred non-British European cultural experience for Australian society and education.

Economics and regionalism combined to transform Australian-Japanese relations. Over time Japan became Australia's dominant trading partner. The Australian direct encounter with Japanese was not through immigration, but initially trade, and later tourism. Australian commerce, strategic alliances and cultural interests produced direct and unmediated encounter with Japan and Japanese, people and language alike. And this too, as it did for Italian, produced a transformation of esteem and knowledge.

Travel was the critical medium. The encounters involved multiple flows in all directions over time. First, Italian culture travelled to Australia with Australia's largest non-British immigrant population component. Initially only the educated and moneymed few and then larger numbers of Australians travelled to the new and prosperous Italy, which during the 1950s and 1960s emerged as the world's premier tourist destination. From the 1970s, Australians commenced travel to Japan, seeking commercial relations and increasingly aware of Japan's burgeoning economy and increasingly anxious to attract its overseas direct investment. The emergence of an Australian tourism industry dramatically brought the intercultural encounter to Australia with mass Japanese tourism and investment in Australian tourism infrastructure. Japan rapidly became the major source for inbound tourism, producing a market for Australian competence in Japanese language and culture in an industry with a buoyant demand for guides, tour operators and thousands of ancillary jobs.

By the 1990s Japanese was also well on the way to becoming an Australian community language, though on a small scale by comparison with Italian, but nevertheless exhibiting the same classic pattern of settlement: adjustment (embrace and rejection), compromise and hybrid cultural practices, nostalgia and recovery, ongoing adaptation and eventual absorption.

Early 19th-century Japanese immigration involved pearlers in Broome, and the Torres Strait contemporary immigration is to Sydney and south-east Queensland: educated, business-oriented spouses and retirees. By 1996, 25,634 Japanese native speakers (Jupp, 2001) were living permanently in Australia, undergoing the standard pattern of language shift exacerbated by exogamous marriage, reduced by endogamous marriage, ameliorated by high education levels, relative ease of home contact, continuous same time-zone travel and the now booming Australian interest in Japanese language and culture. Some 1 million Australians have some Italian ancestry, whereas some 250,000 are Italian born (Jupp, 2001), but the scale differences only confirm similar patterns of settlement and adaptation.

Just as Japanese culture regained a pre-war esteem, so too Italian culture has recaptured the positive regard it enjoyed in the 19th century, though now for masses rather than small and educated elites. Today altogether new population categories, the Halo-Australians and the Japanese-Australians, sustain part of the continuing interest in education in these languages, investments in contemporary cultural knowledge, and explorations of the past. New dimensions include political and economic regionalism, an Italy integrating into a new Europe in which Britain is not dominant, and an Australian Asian regionalism led by Japan, the first globally prominent Asian economy in many centuries.

In addition, the remarkable attractiveness that contemporary Italian life, from cuisine to architecture, projects into the world signifies a cultural forming influence for the vast majority of Australians, who increasingly discover Europeanness unmediated by British prisms (Castles et al, 1992). Similarly, from cuisine to architecture, Australian direct encounter with Japan constitutes a globalization of Japanese aesthetics and life (Nagata, 1998).
Around half the Japanese programmes that currently exist in Australian universities were established during the 1960s and 1970s (Marriott, Neustupny and Spence-Brown, 1994). The all-time peak in student numbers was the tsunami of the late 1980s. At that time Japanese replaced French as the most popular foreign language at all levels of education.

Despite their different histories the stories of Japanese and Italian in Australian education show signs of convergence. Japanese has been the exemplary foreign language, studied by Australians without ‘a background’. Italian has been the exemplary immigrant-community language, studied by Australians with ‘a background’. But Italian, the heritage language, is undergoing a transformation into a language of universal cultural claims (Simone, 1990; Tosi, 1991; Haller, 1994), while Japanese, the trade language, is being transformed into a language with an immigrant community. Japanese is becoming, like Italian, though on a small scale, an ‘Australian’ language. Partly this recovers the original presence of Japanese and Italian in the Australian academic world, as languages of philological curiosity for scholars. In formal education today Italian is a community language becoming foreign; Japanese is a foreign language adding community. To teach a language as foreign is to assume that its learners have little direct encounter with it, that it is not widely accessible to them in their immediate environment and that it has few psychological associations for them. Typically, a foreign language is not available for ‘incidental’ learning and commands few or no identity associations. A community language is one in which the learners are surrounded by native speaker contexts, from which they derive incidental language acquisition opportunities but also from which they come to derive personal and emotional associations and attachments. Though the classic community language, Italian is transcending its ‘migrant’ associations to function also as a language of culture in which the foreign is leavened with established familiarity.

In formal education today Japanese is the classic foreign language. It is also Australia's first, and so far only, language whose presence in education has effectively conveyed immense instrumental associations, the pre-eminent language of trade, career promise and practical utility in an increasingly anglophone world. Japanese is transcending these associations to become the Asian language of choice for Australians, functioning as a language of culture and, increasingly, of community as well. Though the classic foreign language, Japanese is transcending its ‘trade’ associations to function also as a language of culture in which the foreign is leavened with increasing familiarity.

In schools there is a sharp and interesting contrast between Italian and Japanese. Italian is holding its numbers very strongly at primary level, but is declining sharply at secondary level; at the points where vocationalism becomes a strong factor in choice, Italian is losing its candidates. Japanese is more closely associated with the secondary school, though the numbers learning it at primary school are increasing, but its attrition rates in school are low, at university high.

Perhaps there is emerging a tendency in the sociology of foreign language study that can throw light on these trends. The pre-eminent role of English in the world, and very strongly so in Asia, may have influenced Australians to see in language study not tools for immediate practical application, but training for internationalization: induction into kinds of difference alongside the traditional rationale of language study for cultural enrichment. English teaching will have to increasingly incorporate perspectives on cultural difference and communication, since English's success is the success of variation and diversity: world Englishes, varieties that carry multiple cultural values and histories. Perhaps in this emerging realization Italian appears to be evolving within the wider Australian cultural framework as a kind of common second language apprenticeship for large numbers of young learners, a relatively easily learnt second language with local presence, combined with prestige associations of past and present. By contrast, Japanese may be seen as the Asian partner in this compact, in schools where an Asian-European balance is desired, and in an Australia that increasingly imagines its cultural future in terms of an Asian-European fusion.

These education cultural functions of Italian and Japanese express an enduring European, and an emerging Asian, dimension to Australian identity: history and geography expressed though linguistic otherness. Italian appears to offer Australian education a bridging of anglophone monolingualism and Asian-language-knowing bilingualism. Japanese appears to be evolving a role of mainstream Australian encounter with ‘Asian difference’, via a prestige language highly esteemed in many parts of the world, but with sustaining economic and commercial dimensions (Hasegawa et al, 1995; Bramley and Hanamura, 1998).
In conclusion

Economic globalization involves massive population transfers (Castles and Miller, 1993) and makes diversity, multiculturalism, mobility, and therefore difference, more rather than less salient (Giddens, 1999).

As *lingua mundi* (Jernudd, 1992), English, common English, actually makes possible multiple kinds of exploration of otherness in language education. As languages of national states, and national cultures, at a time of challenging post-nationalism, Japanese and Italian express cultures with wide recognition of their civilizations, but with limited utility for international communication. Neither is an international language other than among the vibrant and extensive Japanese and Italian diasporas. English-knowing bilingualism is becoming the dominant pattern of multiple language competence in the world today. The sociological functionality of English, the global meta-lect, provides and makes important space for languages of prestige national cultures offering cultural diversification dimensions to bilingualism.

In the formal education system of Australia, Japanese and Italian appear to represent experiences in which wide strata of previously steadfastly mono-lingual Australians have discovered Australian-specific motivations to study languages. While in the formal education system Japanese is dominant, Italian commands remarkable numbers if we add the informal settings of community-based schools. Collectively they epitomize two distinct phases of the history of language policy making: multicultural reconstruction of Australian identity on the one hand, and economically motivated regionalism on the other.

Australian cultural policy since the middle of the 20th century finds perfect expression in the continuing presence of Japanese and Italian in mass public education, one the vast nation-making experience of immigration, and the other the equally momentous re-orientation towards Asia. As a result, there is a specifically Australian experience expressed in *Italian-for-Australians* and *Japanese-for-Australians*: educational experiences that make contemporary sense for a nation reconciling history, geography and culture in an era of intense globalization.

The contemporary Australian regard for things Italian needs to be understood in the context of an Australia that by geopolitical, strategic and economic fortunes is inextricably tied to the Asia Pacific region and to Asian trading partners; while the contemporary Australian regard for Japan and its culture and language involves Australians in processes whereby national cultural diversity is an individuating possibility, signalling national distinctiveness from the United Kingdom and United States, locating Australia as a unique and multicultural presence in Asia. Expressing precisely the dilemma of national cultures, histories and geographies has been the ongoing debate between Australian attempts to join ASEAN (the Association of South East Asian Nations) and its repudiation by Malaysia’s prime minister, Mohamed Mahathir: ‘Once you become Asian, we will think about that’ (Lyall, 2002).

Australians have embraced second language study more enthusiastically than is the case in other English-speaking nations, specifically the United Kingdom and the United States. Perhaps this reflects a search to reconcile and combine a politics of geography and region (Asianism) with demands for the recognition of diversity (multiculturalism) and respect for continuity (Britishism) in a global epoch in which distinctiveness (Australianism) is a considerable challenge.

The Canadian scholar of constitutionalism James Tully sees essentialized views of culture as ‘no longer acceptable’, because cultures are not ‘separate, bounded and internally uniform’ but ‘overlapping, interactive and internally negotiated’ (1997: 10). Constitutional change is on the agenda in Australia, and its most insistent demands are for the recognition of diversity, difference and pluralism within a framework of continuity and security: indigenous prior ownership of the land, their dispossession but continual presence; immigration and its transformation of both the population and its many and overlapping identities; histories of connection and derivation, the United Kingdom, English and the United States; and geography.

Contemporary education policymaking faces immense pressures from rampant ideologies of marketization. The already evident pressure to increase assessed levels of English literacy
attainments, in the context of widely shared political theories connecting education to the economy, will surely intensify. New discourses about national diversification and pluralism will need to evolve to account for identity and culture politics in the context of economically driven globalization.

References

Haller, H. W. (1994) From ethnic to cultural: Italian in the USA, in Italian towards 2000, cd A. Bivona, pp 118-22, Victoria University of Technology
Lo Bianco, J. (1994) Italian the most widely taught language: how much is learned?, in Italian towards 2000, ed A. Bivona, pp 149-56, Victoria University of Technology
Raethel, S (1997) Literacy crisis manufactured, say ministers, Sydney Morning Herald, 15 September, p 4
Author/s:
LO BIANCO, J

Title:
Language education in Australia: Italian and Japanese as symbols of cultural policy

Date:
2003

Citation:

Persistent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/113689

File Description:
Accepted version