INTRODUCTION

In this paper I will discuss the treatment of Aboriginal languages in Western Australia. I will concentrate on the way in which programmes have been established and look at the various avenues of funding that they have used to become established. I will also look at the attitudes of the Western Australian Government to the maintenance of Aboriginal languages. While concentrating on institutional involvement with Aboriginal languages, there is no suggestion that the responsibility for maintenance of Australia's indigenous languages as continued media of communication lies with government agencies. Indeed the involvement of these bodies may be positively deleterious to the continued use of minority languages (see Folds' argument below).

A brief historical overview is followed by an account of the more recent changes in approach to indigenous language work in Western Australia. The events of the late 1980s portend even greater changes in the next decade. It is to be hoped that further encouragement and funding can be provided to record and support the use of these languages now and in the future.

THE ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA TODAY

We would expect, in the post-colonial society of modern-day Australia, to find a range of language types from so-called 'traditional' indigenous languages through to the language of the dominant culture, English. This is certainly the case in Western Australia today where an Aboriginal language is still used as the everyday medium of communication, for example in Kimberley or Western Desert communities, while at the other extreme there are (typically urban) Aboriginal people whose vernacular may be a distinctively Aboriginal English (either structurally or functionally distinct from Middle-class English) (see Eagleson, Kaldor & Malcolm (1982) on Aboriginal English, and Kaldor and Malcolm (1980:412) for a sketch of six different types of language situation that are found in Western Australia).

---

1 From late 1985 to 1987 I was employed by the Institute of Applied Aboriginal Studies, at the WACAe (now Edith Cowan University), to collect information about Aboriginal languages of Western Australia (which appears in Thieberger (forthcoming)). The work involved research, travelling in parts of Western Australia and visiting communities with existing language programmes. In October 1986 I organised a conference in Perth at which Aboriginal people from around the state discussed language issues. From 1988 to 1990 I was at the Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre, a project funded by the Federal Government's National Aboriginal Languages Programme. Unless otherwise indicated, the information presented here is a result of this experience. I am grateful for the opportunity to associate this work with Susan Kaldor. She encouraged me to return to Western Australia and also provided models of language work that are not concerned solely with structure.
Number of Aboriginal language speakers

Figures presented in McGregor (1988) and Thieberger (forthcoming), based on reports by linguists and language workers, suggest that there are around 6500 speakers of Aboriginal languages in Western Australia (this is an approximate figure since it is based on research from the 1960s to the present).

According to the Census of 1986 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, WA Office) (1989), 23% of Western Australian Aboriginal people aged 5 years and over (7,420 people) spoke an Aboriginal language in addition to English (by self-report), of these, 3,700 speak it in the home. In the Pilbara 49.4% (1,834 people) and in the Kimberley 39.8% (3,255) spoke an Aboriginal language. 897 people in the Pilbara reported using an Aboriginal language in the home, compared with 1,561 in the Kimberley.

LINGUISTIC RESEARCH IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Wurm (1972) characterizes three main periods of research into Australian languages, the first extending from first contact through to about 1930, the second ending with the establishment of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies and the foundation of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, and the third continuing from then until the present. In Western Australia, these periods are compressed somewhat, with the first major contact in the south-west occurring in the 1830s. Wordlists from the early days of contact are numerous, especially for the south-west. More detailed records, including texts and grammatical analysis, are rarer in this period (Laves' work on Kurin and Karajarri is a notable exception).

Since then there have been a number of non-Aboriginal researchers who have recorded aspects of local languages. The quality and depth of recording varies from a few inconsistently written words through to scholarly grammatical analyses. For information on specific languages of Western Australia and a list of research that has been done, the reader is directed to McGregor (1988) and Thieberger (forthcoming).

STATE/ABORIGINAL RELATIONS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Funding for Aboriginal language programmes in Western Australia (WA) has been largely a federal matter (the Kimberley Language Resource Centre and the Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre are funded largely through Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) respectively, and community schools are also funded through DEET). This contrasts with the Northern Territory, for example where the Education department has recognised the need for bilingual education since 1973 (see Watts et al 1973). To understand the lack of support for Aboriginal language programmes by the WA State government we need to know something of the context of Aboriginal/state relations here.

Aboriginal people in Western Australia were initially "protected" by legislation of the British government. The Constitution of 1889 included a provision (section 70), which requirement that Aboriginal people were to receive one cent of the state's income. This section was repealed in 1898 (see McLeod 1984 for a discussion of the importance of this section). It appears that the repeal of section 70 sets the tone for relations between Aboriginal people and the government of Western Australia that continues into the present.

The Aborigines Act (1905) empowered the Chief Protector to act as guardian for all Aboriginal children, and a 1911 amendment denied the rights of mothers of 'half-caste' children (Liberman 1980:123). This history of 'protection' continues throughout the twentieth century; for an account see Biskup (1973), Liberman (1980) or McLeod (1984).

Aboriginal language maintenance is likely to have been affected by Government policies in three areas: the state's removal of Aboriginal children from their families; monolingual schooling; and the continued relocation of Aboriginal people away from their traditional country. Further study has yet to ascertain the extent of the influence of these three factors. Children are still removed from their families by the Department of Community Services (under court orders) or required to attend school in other parts of the state. With the development of the homelands movement a number of Aboriginal groups are reasserting this resettlement and moving back to the country from which they or their parents were taken. The relationship of land and language has been discussed by Melan (1981), and by Rigby & Sutton (1981) and it should be stressed here that a move "back to country" includes moving back to traditions, of which language is an integral part.

Clearly this identification with parts of the country conflicts with the interests of miners and pastoralists who see the land as a potential economic resource.

Mining is a recurrent theme in Western Australia's history (see Howitt 1981 for three case studies), and there is a resulting conflict of interest between Aboriginal people (who are determined to remain on land that may be leased to mining companies), and the government of Western Australia (a large portion of whose revenue is derived from mining).

"The governments of Western Australia and Queensland have been reluctant to fund any development that would increase the economic or cultural vitality of the Aboriginal people in fear that a revitalized Aboriginal population may press land claims, particularly in regions where mineral resources are, or may be, located." An Aboriginal civilization that modernizes while retaining its traditional culture poses a permanent political and economic threat to the conservative regimes of Western Australia and Queensland, whose economic prosperity depends on multinational mining developments located on traditional Aboriginal homelands" (Liberman 1981:144).

Since Liberman visited WA there would appear to have been some changes. The Seaman "Aboriginal Land Inquiry" (1984) conducted an extensive consultative process over a year, but its recommendations were not acted upon (see Berndt 1985). The subsequent Labor governments have not instigated Land Rights legislation but have proceeded with a few excisions from pastoral leases in some parts of Western Australia. Some Aboriginal communities have bought stations (e.g. Strelley), others have moved out to land that has been or may soon be excised to provide their living area (e.g. M.J. James, Pannu).

An important aspect of patterns of Aboriginal settlement over the past twenty years has been the movement to 'settle down country' (Spencer & Nathan 1983), for Aboriginal peoples to re-establish themselves on or near their traditional homelands regardless of their legal right to that country. The result in Western Australia has been the establishment of 71 outstation or homeland centres (House of
The clear voices of the girls and younger boys, were much admired, giving a contradiction to the prevailing opinion, that their native nasal or guttural sounds could not be subdued" (Haynes et al 1976:11).

The literature indicates that little was done by the government to encourage the use of Aboriginal languages over the next century. This is more noticeable by the omission of any mention of language policy and by the general attitude of the authorities (largely integrationist and assimilationist, see Bisk 1973:260-270) than by any explicit reference to programmes.

Not all advocates of assimilation had the same approach. Some commentators ignored that a different language was spoken by Aboriginal children. For example, Brandreth (1965), in a thesis about children at the Forrest River Mission presented for a 'Higher Education Certificate' informs us that 'The purpose of educating the native is part of the general plan for their assimilation into the white community' (ibid:2). Under the heading of 'Linguistic Ability', he goes on: "A most determined effort must be made by the teacher and indeed by any person who is handling native children to be consistent in making the children answer questions properly and in using good manners" (ibid: 116), suggesting, it seems, that good manners will lead to articulation use of English. In a study which at least understood the distinctive nature of Aboriginal children's language, Makin and Ibotson (1973:5) discuss the need for students to learn English, and for ESL programmes for children whose first language is Aboriginal English (which they define as a "dialect with an English vocabulary but a structure, grammar and intonation which is influenced by and accompanied with a superceded vernacular language"). Their survey found that Aboriginal children spoke Aboriginal English all over the state except in remote areas, to which their study does not refer any further. The use of the traditional language in school is not discussed, but 50% of the teachers surveyed considered knowledge of 'local Aboriginal dialects' to be of 'some value', while 25% thought it was of 'great value' (ibid: 10) (see Kaldor and Malcolm (1980) for more discussion of Aboriginal English).

The 1984 Beazley Inquiry into education in Western Australia, recommended bilingual education for Aboriginal children where it was required, and ESL teaching for students whose first language is Creole. This proposal has been supported by the (now defunct) Western Australian Multicultural Education Advisory Committee whose report (Jenkins [1986]:40) recommends Aboriginal bilingual education within the state education system. The report further notes that the loss of Aboriginal languages is not just the loss of an alternative means of verbal expression, but the loss of important cultural information.

In February 1986 the State government established a Ministerial Working Party to develop a policy on the teaching of Languages Other Than English in State schools. The working party produced a policy in March 1988 which strongly recommended support for Aboriginal language programmes in schools, from bilingual programmes through to teaching Aboriginal languages to non-Aboriginal students. Subsequent statements by the Minister indicate that there will be more support for Aboriginal languages in State schools in the near future. An Aboriginal Studies course (triailed in 1990) includes a section in which students will have the opportunity to learn an Aboriginal language. A training centre for Aboriginal language workers (similar in aims to the School of Australian Linguistics) opened in Hedland in 1990.
The current Labor government policy on Aboriginal languages explicitly mentions Aboriginal languages, and, like many policies, it promises a great deal. The actual workings of government are not in conformity with the policy as closely as one would have wished. State ALP policy (State Platform 1984) includes the following paragraphs:

"A Labor Government will

23. Protect the richness and diversity of Aboriginal language, both traditional and modern, by the appointment of linguists as a matter of course in each region; by the provision of in-service courses in "Teaching English as a Second Language" (TESL) techniques for teachers of Aboriginal students; and by the establishment of bilingual education programmes for Aboriginal students.

24. Establish Aboriginal language resource activities in appropriate centres."

Two language centres have been established in WA; neither was funded by the State government. There have been a few TESL inservices for Ministry teachers, but the rest of the policy remains unfulfilled. There are no linguists appointed to each region, and there is no bilingual programme established for Aboriginal students. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that the bulk of Aboriginal community schools in Australia are to be found in Western Australia.

MISSIONS AND ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES

Christian missions in Western Australia have both supported and helped to erode Aboriginal languages in the areas in which they work. The Aborigines Act of 1905, mentioned above, gave missions the duty to 'provide for the custody, maintenance and education' of Aboriginal children. Thus missions largely owed their existence this century to the practice of taking half-caste children away from their families. It was in the missions that these orphaned children were taught to be productive as domestics, blacksmiths, carpenters, tailors or stockmen (Biskup 1973:126). In many of the missions during this century children were punished for using their first language (Tonkinson 1974:126, Blakett 1983 passim). I have heard from people who attended the Mt. Margaret mission that use of their mother-tongue was forbidden to the point of corporal punishment. One of them, May O'Brien, is nevertheless grateful to the mission, "I would not be in my position today: if the missions had not educated the Aborigines, no one else would have" (Miller 1969:340). As an aside it is interesting to note that the report from the Eastern Goldfields (Mt. Margaret mission's main sphere of influence) Aboriginal Committee on Education, (Aboriginal Committee on Education 1980) mentions under 'Language' only that 'Straight forward English to be taught to our children'. In 1981 a concern of how the education system could be improved was that children should be "taught to speak better English" (Aboriginal Committee on Education 1981). This report does not mention the use of local languages.

On the other hand, many of the Catholic missionaries could not speak English (arriving in the missions, as many did, almost directly from their home countries of Germany, Spain, or Italy), so their main means of communication was often through the local language (Blakett 1983:200). In addition it was not so much a sign of respect for local tradition that Aboriginal languages were used by missionaries, but of their distrust of the outside world. The use of the local vernacular was often to prevent Aboriginal people from learning English which could lessen the influence of the missionary authorities and increase their communication with outsiders (Blakett 1983:200).

A study of Mogumber Mission, north of Perth, (Ingram 1966) illustrates the attitudes of those at one of WA's missions (by no means the most strictly religious, see Blakett 1983:1147ff on Kalumbur mission).

"The Church believes that its prime task is to replace the spiritual life of the tribe by the spiritual content of the Christian Gospel. These people have lost contact with the Tribes from which they descended, the Tribes, that gave them their language and customs"

(Ingram 1966:47)

"Through education and training it is hoped that the native will be changed from a nomadic, idle discontented person into settled industrious and happy citizen"

(Ingram 1966:54).

This philosophy reflects a broader societal concern with the assimilation of Aboriginal people into mainstream society, and, as attitudes changed, so did the policies of the Catholic missions. As will be discussed further below, the Catholic schools in WA have recently been more open to the use of indigenous languages and the incorporation of Aboriginal cultural knowledge in the curriculum.

However, it should be pointed out that some Catholic missionaries took a great interest in Aboriginal culture, reasoning that the beliefs that they were trying to inculcate in Aboriginal people would be more successful if they were blended with the local creation stories (Biskup 1973:48). In addition, as pointed out above, the missionaries did not always speak English, so they had to learn the local language to be able to communicate with their parishioners. Late last century and in the early twentieth century, for example, Bishop Salvado (1851) collected vocabularies from the South-west, and Frs. Worms and Nekes (see McGregor 1989:Chapter 4) from Balgo and Beagle Bay. More recently Frs. Rooney (Moora), McKelson (La Grange), and the late Fr. Pelle (Balgo) have collected information about languages of their parishioners. In addition, the Catholic Education Commission has initiated school programmes using Aboriginal languages.

In terms of publications, length of time in the field and number of members, the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) is the largest single organisation working with Aboriginal languages in Western Australia.

The creation of the Summer Institute of Linguistics from the Wycliffe Bible Translators (WBT) provided a new organisation with ostensibly academic aims (Stoll 1982:3-4). The charter of SIL shows that among other goals are:

1) Language learning, linguistic analysis and publication of linguistic papers.

2) Literature production including translation of books of high moral value.
3) Preparation and introduction of literacy materials.

(SIL/WBT handbook 1984:2)

The attempts to establish a bilingual school at Jigalong and in the South Kimberley have only been possible due to the efforts of the SIL linguists there. The overriding aim of this non-denominational Protestant organisation is the translation of the New Testament, at least, into "all those languages of the world where it is needed" (Article II A. 1. WBT Articles of Incorporation 1980). While there is a need for members to engage in other tasks, such as preparation of literacy materials, teaching and so on, "the translation and the publication of the Word of God is our primary goal as an organization and this essential task must not be crowded out by other worthwhile activities" (SIL/WBT handbook 1984:1).

In Western Australia, SIL has worked in a number of locations. As its aim is providing access to the bible through translations into the local language, its members are often involved in literacy training workshops. The type of literature produced by SIL members varies, but a large part of SIL material produced in Western Australia has been Christian, e.g., see the list of the Kimberley in McGregor (1988).

Other Protestant missionaries who have studied local languages have included Douglas (1964), Glass & Hackett (1970), and the Hadfields, responsible for the field work for Vasavili (1979).

ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE IN SCHOOLS

As in the rest of Australia, there are both state and independent schools in Western Australia. On 1983 figures, there were about 10,500 Aboriginal students in state schools, and about 2,000 in non-government schools (Bartlett 1985:207).

In this section I will show that community initiated language programs have had more success than have programs that are established by outside bodies (including the state schools). I suggest that their success may be due in part to the communities' reaction to the state system's inactivity in providing what is considered an appropriate curriculum. Without doubt the non-government schools have (until now) provided far more support for Aboriginal languages than has the state system. An explanation for this is that community schools are often established specifically to teach 'old ways' including languages, and are part of the communities' emphasis on their own involvement in their children's education.

Obviously efforts to maintain languages have to have an effect throughout the speech community, not just in the school. A point that is noted by Heaven (1986) is that the school, by including study of the local language, is recognising the value of local Aboriginal traditions, and so is enhancing the status of the language. Thus there is a useful purpose in including language studies in school, even if they will not produce fluent speakers (a point made by Dorian 1987).

Table 1 shows a list of Aboriginal schools and language programs that have been running in Western Australia in the 1980s. If one considers that there are still over fifty Aboriginal languages spoken in Western Australia, the number of programs is very small by comparison.

The State Education System

The responsibility for educating Aboriginal children in Western Australia lays with the Department of Aboriginal Education from 1897 (Mounsey 1960:397). In addition, as the 1905 Act gave missions control of Aboriginal education, separate schools were provided for black and white children. In the 1930s and 1940s the Education Department became more involved in Aboriginal education. Aboriginal children were admitted to state schools "provided they met White standards of hygiene" (Mounsey 1980:399). While the content of the curriculum is not mentioned in the sources, the general attitude suggests that the use of local languages was not only not a priority, but was actively discouraged. It was only in 1952 that the state education system assumed responsibility for the education of Aboriginal children (Furnell 1974:134). In 1959 there were 23 'native' government or private schools with 1,156 children.

In an attempt to provide appropriate education for Aboriginal students, the position of teacher aide or Aboriginal education worker was established. This involved the use of local Aboriginal people in the school, and part of the aim was to allow communication between the non-Aboriginal teacher and the children. "In traditional areas, and in some non-traditional communities where the Aboriginal language has been retained, the aide must be conversant in the local vernacular" (Western Australian Aboriginal Committee on Education 1981:11). In 1981, there were fifty Primary school aides/Aboriginal Education Workers in Western Australia who had "an ability to readily communicate with Aboriginal students" (ibid:3). Whether this means that the aides could speak the local language or not is unclear.
Table 1. Aboriginal language programmes in Western Australian schools (adapted from Jenkins [1986])

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>LANGUAGE(S)</th>
<th>PROGRAMME TYPE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gnaangara Aboriginal Community College, Perth</td>
<td>Nyungar</td>
<td>Language awareness/revival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. St. Joseph's School, Moora</td>
<td>Nyungar, Wajarri</td>
<td>Language awareness/revival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Tardun School, Tardun</td>
<td>Manjiljarra, Warman</td>
<td>Bilingual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Panmu Community School</td>
<td>Manjiyjarra, Nyangumarta, Warman</td>
<td>Bilingual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Nomads Community Schools</td>
<td>Walmajarri, Nyangumarta</td>
<td>Bilingual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. La Grange Primary School</td>
<td>Kriol</td>
<td>Bilingual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Yiyili Community School</td>
<td>Walmajarri, Kriol</td>
<td>Language awareness/Bilingual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Kulka narrative Community School, Noonganbah</td>
<td>Walmajarri</td>
<td>Bilingual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. John Puhjaingka - Pyrin School, Lake Gregory</td>
<td>Walmajarri</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Billabong Catholic School</td>
<td>Kija</td>
<td>Language awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Warmun Ngala Nganpum School, Turkey Creek</td>
<td>Miriwinng, Walmajarri</td>
<td>Language awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. St. Joseph's, Kununurra</td>
<td>Kukajja</td>
<td>Bilingual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Balgo Hills Catholic School</td>
<td>Walmajarri, Manjiljarra</td>
<td>Language awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Nulunga College, Broome</td>
<td>Kartujarra</td>
<td>Language awareness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The only bilingual programme the WA Education Department has started in an Aboriginal community in Western Australia was at Warburton in 1974. The 'pilot' programme there closed down after three years, despite having both a linguist employed and input from other linguists who were highly conversant with the local languages. In late 1983 an informal 'Bilingual Education Committee' was established in Perth at the instigation of members of the government of the day. It aimed to "formulate proposals concerning the place of Aboriginal languages in school and community programmes, and to present these to the Minister for Education" (IAAS 1984:1).

In a series of discussion papers prepared by this committee, plans for types of language programmes were outlined, as well as specific guidelines for the establishment of a survey of language research materials. The first part of this proposal was funded by the Commonwealth Schools Commission in 1985 (Thibeberger 1987 & forthcoming) and as a result there is now a data base of information relating to Aboriginal languages of Western Australia. The other proposals outlined the types of programmes suitable for use in WA schools. In particular they recognised three types of vernacular-language programmes for schools (see 4.1.):
1. informal, oral, general interest programme
2. elective or option programme
3. initial literacy in the vernacular with ESL (Bilingual Education Committee [1983])

The committee detailed the costs involved in establishing a Northern Territory Model 1 type of programme and recommended the following communities as potential sites:
- Jigalong: Cosmo Newbery
- Warburton: Fitzroy Crossing
- Cundeelee: Cherrabun
- Yandeyarra: Christmas Creek
- La Grange: Mt.Margaret/Wiluna
- Roebourne: Broome

Unfortunately none of these programmes has yet been funded, although local languages have been used in some schools (Roebourne, Carnarvon East, Hedland), depending on the availability of staff, or on the enthusiasm of the principal. An example of the successful combination of community support and school willingness to recognise local languages is La Grange (Bidyadanga).

La Grange is an Aboriginal community south of Broome at which five traditional languages and Kriol are represented. Each of the languages has been recorded by non-Aboriginal linguists, and Fr. McKelson, resident at La Grange, has prepared written material and teaching courses in some of the languages.

After a meeting between members of the local community council and the school board, a school programme began in April 1985 (Heaven 1986). It consisted of a half-hour per day segment involving all children at the school and taught by speakers of the five languages (i.e. not Kriol). Initial funding for members of the community acting as teachers was made by the community council; later funding came from the WA Education Department ($2,500), and funds for employment of a linguist came through a grant from the Participation and Equity Program. Heaven (1987) outlines the reasons for the programme's success. He suggests that the strategy of using both the language speakers and non-Aboriginal teachers together in the classroom overcame a problem that previous courses had experienced. In the past, courses had been run exclusively by elders, who had had problems with child discipline in the non-Aboriginal domain of the school, and with resource preparation. With both teachers in the classroom, the elder and the language were " accorded rightful respect" (Heaven 1987:2).

The programme emphasised oracy, partly because of the lack of literature in some of the languages, but also because of the need to ensure that the languages kept being spoken at La Grange. Physical resources required for the success of the project were difficult to acquire, eventually being collected together under patchwork funding from various sources. These included a tape recorder, a photocopier and a bus for excursions. The main strengths of the programme according to Heaven (1987:8) are listed below. Note that only one of these outcomes is specifically linguistic:
1) Very strong community support for the school.
2) Very positive student, elder and staff esteem.
3) Resultant higher achievement levels by students.
4) Strong, positive school tone.
5) The various languages were increasingly spoken and used by the children.
6) A growing awareness in the children of the precious and rich cultural heritage that was theirs.

The WA Minister for Education, Bob Pearce, after pledging support for Aboriginal language programmes at the first WAALA conference in October 1986 (see below), visited La Grange in late 1986, and promised that a linguist would be employed by the Education Department for 1987. The process by which La Grange was singled out to receive funding is instructive, especially as there are a number of communities in Western Australia that have been trying for some time to have a language programme begun in their schools (notably Jigalong and Cundeelee). The Minister responded, it seems, to the high profile which La Grange had achieved (it was the subject of press reports: a later but typical example of which is Jenkins 1987) and of a video made by the Education Department. The funding was only made available for 1987, without planning and with no duty statement prepared for the job. When funding was not renewed after a little over a year, the linguist who was employed there felt that she had only begun her work (Diana MacCallum pc).

Other state schools, while not launching as large a programme as at La Grange, have included local languages in social studies classes, or in homeroom classes. Aboriginal people at Mungullah village in Carnarvon ran an after school course teaching words of Thalanyji, and of other languages from the area ( Victor Hughes, pc), and at Carnarvon Senior High School Payungu vocabulary is included in an Aboriginal studies option. A course in Wanggatha was proposed for funding in Carnarvon in 1983 (Submission to Minister for Education WA. 12/12/83). Wanggatha was initially chosen, despite not being a local language, because there is an audio-taped teaching course available for Wanggatha. The local language Ingadha was chosen in preference due to the presence of a community teacher who could teach Ingadha. The objectives of the course were to increase understanding of and communication between community groups, and to improve self-esteem by emphasising positive aspects of both cultures (Seini 1983). The project might have originally aimed at reviving a dying language, but ended up being a language awareness programme.

This type of work is often associated with the presence of a linguist in the area who can provide material: for example Alan Dench provided material about Ingadha for Carnarvon, and about Panyinjima for Onslow school. In addition, Carnarvon High School has funding for Bernie Ryder, an Aboriginal teacher, to develop an Aboriginal curriculum, incorporating Payungu language material prepared by Peter Austin. The Fitzroy Crossing schools and others of the West Kimberley have used material prepared by Joyce Hudson and Eirlys Richards as has Yiyili, which also had help with Gooniyandi from Bill McGregor. Wilf Douglas, Amee Glass and Dorothy Hackett have supported schools in Warburton and the Eastern Goldfields. This reliance on the fortuitous presence of linguists is hardly satisfactory, since there is no ongoing training of local people, and there are not many linguists doing research (those that there are do not necessarily have the time to spend developing material for schools). Ideally there would be resident linguists in an area who could conduct literacy workshops with Aboriginal people, and support the use of local languages in schools.

However, even if there are resident linguists, it is still necessary for teachers at the school, and for funding bodies, to take an active interest in, and to actively support, the programme. An example is the Martu Wangka literacy programme, started in mid-1979 by Bill Langlands of SIL, collaborating with Jim Marsh, who had been the SIL bible-translator at Jigalong since 1967. The programme has produced an extensive amount of literature in Martu Wangka, and participated in literacy sessions in the school, with the cooperation of the principal of the day. The two SIL literacy workers ran in-service sessions for teachers, prepared instructional material (e.g. ‘You can Read Martu Wangka’) and have sought funding for the establishment of a bilingual school at Jigalong. The submission for funding recommended that a successful programme required:

- appropriate choice of teaching staff, favouring those with experience or interest in teaching Aboriginal people.
- a full-time teacher-linguist to be appointed to the school.
- regular inservices for teachers in the school.
- cooperation between the school and the community’s efforts at cultural maintenance.

Langlands (1983)

Jigalong still has no bilingual programme, but there are members of the local community who are moving out to Punamugur (Cotton Creek) to establish a cultural centre. They have seen the problems of Jigalong (see Tonkinson 1974 for a description of Jigalong’s establishment). One of the reasons for returning to their country, given by the central figures in this move (Gibbs pc), is to allow the children to grow up knowing their culture and language.

I talked with the headmaster of the government school at a cattle station in the Pilbara. The students at the school were almost exclusively Aboriginal and the school had tried to introduce the local languages in some way. He recognises the importance of a language course and the need for support for speakers of the language:

_The local community “want the language covered, they want their culture kept, but they believe that stations like Y are going to survive if their kids have got skills so they can cope outside of Y, or that they can go and receive an education...to be able to hack it in the white system... I keep saying ‘Give me people to teach your language’, they say ‘Yeah yeah we want the language taught’, but there’s no-one who’s good enough on language that can come into the school and help us do it... I think the best thing we did was to do those little (language) sessions, even though they did fall down, because it’s an antithetical thing that the kids saw that we as teachers, thought that their language was important’. If Y had a resource person, “we could go to step two of starting to formalise our language programme... we need someone to come in on a regular basis to present us, the teachers, with information.”_

From these comments, and in the absence of funding for a full-time linguist attached to the school, it seems that the sort of advice required could be supplied by linguists attached to a local language centre. There is considerable interest on the part of
Aboriginal people in some parts of Western Australia to have the local traditional language included in schoolwork. The state system could provide the advisors suggested by the headmaster at Y; it could also introduce fully bilingual programmes. In the Northern Territory, the bilingual programme has been supported, until recently, by the training facility at the School of Australian Linguistics (see further McKay, this volume). Such a programme began in Western Australia in 1990, but only a small group of students from the west had previously gone to Batchelor or attended on-site courses in literacy in their own communities. The Traditional Aboriginal Teacher Education programme (on-site teacher training similar to the Northern Territory's RATE programme, or the South Australian Anangu programme), operating as a pilot study by the Institute of Applied Aboriginal Studies at Noonkanbah, offers more hope of teachers from a local community being able to speak the same language as the children.

Thies, in a study of Aboriginal views on education in the East Kimberley (Thies 1987), reports that school language programmes are sought by local people, but with the proviso that negotiations over which language to use and who to involve in the programme are satisfactorily conducted. Her recommendation that any language programme must have the involvement of local Aboriginal people is echoed in a new programme offered by the Ministry of Education.

After the WAALA conference, the WAAECG report (see below), the establishment of the KLRC and the PALC, and Thies's report, the climate has shifted towards recognition of the needs of speakers of Aboriginal languages and the necessity to document languages and traditional knowledge of the Aboriginal population of Western Australia.

The Ministry has employed Joyce Hudson to write a language framework for primary schools, aiming at communicative competence in local Aboriginal languages. The programme will be trialled in 1991, and will then be offered throughout the state in 1992. While the programme will rely on language centres to supply linguists and local content, there is no guarantee that language centres will actually be funded. Nevertheless, this is a welcome departure from the WA Ministry's previous stance of ignoring the several thousand citizens of WA whose first language or whose parents' first language is an Aboriginal language.

Western Australian Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (WAAECG).

The WAAECG has recently taken an interest in the role of traditional languages in Aboriginal education. A research project run by them during 1986, seeking Aboriginal views on the education of their children, produced a series of recommendations, summarised below.

1) Support for language resource centres modelled on the Kimberley Language Resource Centre.

2) Support for the WA Aboriginal Languages Association.

3) The Ministry of Education should adopt strong policies for promoting Aboriginal languages, including:
   - encouraging bilingual education.
   - identifying the level of need for teaching languages and responding to it.

4) Training Aboriginal language workers.

5) Encourage oral history projects.

(Western Australian Aboriginal Education Consultative Group [1987:10])

Certificate in Aboriginal Language Work, Pundulmurra College

Established in Port Hedland in 1990, this course trains Aboriginal people to read and write in their own languages, and to produce literature themselves. It was initiated by a Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre conference held in November 1988, and is designed and run by Janet Sharp. Funding is through the WA Ministry of Education, and the Federal government's Aboriginal Education Policy.

Community Schools

Community Schools in WA are typically established in homelands camps by a group of people that has moved away from the influences of towns, one example of which is the monolingual, monocultural school. There are a number of community schools in Western Australia, perhaps reflecting the widely felt dissatisfaction with the service that is provided by the State Education Department. In fact, of the ten Aboriginal independent schools now operating in Australia, nine are Western Australian (Ngurinapli Nguranarri 1989). I will discuss examples of some of the community schools here because they are important agents for language maintenance, not only in their role of teaching the young, but also as a means of maintaining power structures within Aboriginal communities, thus providing alternatives to the predominantly English language towns.

The existence of a local school means that children do not have to be sent out of their communities for long periods of time, ensuring that they will not be exposed to English, but will continue to use their parents' language every day (if not in a school programme, then after school). The lack of electricity at many homeland camps means that videos and television are not available to present young people with European metropolitan images. Since older members of the community participate in the running of the school, they are the ones making decisions about how their grandchildren will be educated.

Yiyili

Yiyili school, in the Kimberley region, was began in early 1982 (Dickinson 1987). It was established so that students would not have to travel 130 kilometres to the nearest school and live in a hostel. "If a school was not established the new community would have disintegrated" (ibid 1987:20). The traditional language of the area, Gooniyandi, was not spoken by many of the children, so the community agreed with the advice of a linguist to start teaching in Kriol. Three bough-sheds were built, and the appropriate language had to be spoken in each of the bough-sheds (English, Kriol and Gooniyandi). Thus a feature of the course of study at Yiyili was distinguishing between Kriol and English, as well as reviving or reintroducing the traditional language. McGregor (forthcoming) notes that the Gooniyandi programme only operated for a brief period in 1983-84, ending with the resigning of the teacher-linguist.

Punmu

Punmu is a community that broke with the Strelley group in 1983. The population fluctuates around 150, most of whom are Manjiljarra speakers, with a minority of Warmman and Kartujarra people. While the main source of income for such a
community is the government, and while food is brought by truck from Perth, the arrangements for this outside business are in the hands of the (non-Aboriginal) community advisor.

The Aboriginal people of this area had their first major contact with Europeans in this generation, with the development of Jigalong Mission in the 1960s. They have continued to speak their own languages through to the present and insisted on teaching their children in their own language. It seems to me that one reason for language maintenance at Punmu, besides the general conservatism of the group living there, has been social isolation. Contact with the outside world is made by radio and is usually conducted by only a few members of the community, the white community advisor and the school teachers. In addition the local network of communities share radio frequencies and communicate via the radio in local languages. The bilingual school started in 1983 and was registered as an independent community school soon after (Hobson 1986). A major aim of the school is to keep the Manjiljarra language and culture strong. Community participation is ensured by the community ownership of the school. In addition the physical isolation of Punmu (500 km east of Port Hedland) ensures very little contact with non-Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people from other communities in the area have complained to me that, when visiting Punmu, they have to speak Manjiljarra.

The language programme, originally in Manjiljarra, and recently started also in Warman, involves teaching in the children's first language, and teaching literacy in that language. As children become proficient at writing, they then begin literacy and language work in English as a second language. Typical of such programmes is the lack of literature available for use in classroom activities, so access to literature production equipment is vital. At Punmu, this equipment has been acquired slowly through a number of different grants. It includes a quality photocopier, laminating machine, computer and stapler.

Strelley (Nomads)

Strelley has always seen itself as separate from outside society, even separate from other Aboriginal communities (Bucknall 1982). Their insistence on using Nyangumarta and other languages is both a result of this tradition and a contributing factor towards maintaining separateness. Indeed from what has been seen in the present work, it appears that an effective way to maintain Aboriginal languages is by the type of isolation that Strelley encourages, a form of separate development. The other main reason for the success of the programme at Strelley is that it is members of the Strelley community who have made all decisions about how the bilingual school programme should run (McConvell 1982:63-64).

Strelley school started in 1976, and since then more schools have been established at Lalla Rookh, Noonkanbah, Warralong and other places (including Punmu, see above). The system includes a literacy cell that produces literature for the schools, and includes an artiscope camera, offset printer and associated equipment.

Bucknall (1982) points out that it is through the use of Aboriginal languages that the schools at Strelley are achieving their success. However, the introduction of a bilingual programme was never seen as a means to achieve better English literacy (Liberman 1981:142). Liberman points out that "bilingualism at the school is advocated as a way of reinforcing traditional identity, and the success of bilingual education at Strelley may be attributed to its acceptance as such by the community". When the school was established, it was felt that younger people might develop skills that would allow them to challenge the authority of the community elders. To avoid this, literacy classes in the local language were begun for adults. The staff were European teachers and linguists chosen by the community, as a long time advisor to the community, Don McLeod (1984:138), reiterates: "The linguists hired by the Nomads are the servants of the traditional language authorities, not their masters." Accordingly, the school is directed by the community, with decisions about the appropriateness of curriculum being decided by the parents and grandparents of the children, not just by European teachers.

Catholic Education Commission.

The Catholic Education Commission has supported the use of Aboriginal languages in some of the schools of the Kimberley, and elsewhere in the state. As is pointed out above, there is a history among some of the Catholic missionaries of learning and recording local languages. Some of the current language programmes have built on this work, but Catholic Education has also employed linguists in three centres in the Kimberley (Broom, Balkaw and Halls Creek) to service a number of schools in the region (Hudson 1986). The types of programme run are identical to those listed by McConvell (1986:910), with the addition of 'Language Awareness' programmes, used in schools where the children come from a number of linguistic backgrounds but speak little of the traditional language.

LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE EFFORTS OUTSIDE OF SCHOOLS.

The Kimberley Language Resource Centre

The Kimberley Language Resource Centre (KLRC) was established as a result of a pilot project (Kimberley Language Support Programme) which operated in the Kimberley in 1984 (Hudson & McConvell 1984). The pilot project was funded as a Community Employment Project (a CEP Grant of $202,000) and employed 15 people to conduct a survey of speakers of languages of the Kimberley. The rationale for establishing the language centre was to support the continued use of the languages of the region. Hudson & McConvell (1984:9) outline the aims of the language centre which include, among others, storing information about languages, producing more information and literature in and about languages, training Aboriginal people to collect and write information, and helping schools to start language programmes. The centre has produced language material, with the help of such resources as a wordprocessor, photocopier and laminator. Since it began, the KLRC has provided information for local schools, has participated in literacy courses with the Catholic Education Commission, has produced a 'Handbook of Kimberley Languages' (McGregor 1989), a guide to spelling systems (Hudson and McGregor 1986) and a guide to starting a language programme (Richards 1987).

Wangka Maya, The Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre

The PALC was established in 1988 in Port Hedland, after three years of consultation with Aboriginal people in the region. It supports the bilingual schools at Punmu and Parnngurr, as well as working with people in Hedland and Roebourne. The Centre has a store of information about languages of the region. It runs courses which encourage literacy in local languages. With no secure funding it is difficult for the Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre to enter into long-term projects, and, until recently, much of the time of the staff was taken up with securing ongoing funding.
Nyungar Language Revival

A class in Bunbury (run by Sandra Wooltorton) set about learning Nyungar. They had a sketch grammar and numerous vocabularies, and the class included two older people who remember some Nyungar. When faced with the morphological complexity of the language as presented in historical sources, the group reconsidered their aims. They drew a timeline, with 'Old Nyungar' on one end based mainly on written sources, and English at the other end. They chose a form of language that they considered would be located somewhere along the timeline closer to the English end than to the Old Nyungar end. The use of the timeline illustrates their identification of their own vernacular as related to the traditional language, however distantly.

The form of the language that they chose included use of largely English word-order and semantics, fixed morphological forms (constant use of particular suffixes regardless of the morphological appropriateness), colloquial (semantically and phonologically) distinctions found in the old language, but not found in English. While they produced some literature in their neo-Nyungar, deciding what form of language to use, and conducting fieldwork was valuable experience in itself. A great deal of information has been recorded about Nyungar languages, but this has not been used in language maintenance work until recently. A project at the University of Western Australia, run by Alan Dench, will collate this information into a dictionary which may make the information more accessible for language reintroduction programmes hoped for by Aboriginal people of the south-west.

Western Australian Aboriginal Languages Association (WAALA).

There is a need for lobby groups to act in support of Aboriginal languages at the level of the state and federal governments. WAALA is an organisation established in 1986 which represents people who are interested in, or involved in, working with Aboriginal languages in Western Australia. A logistical problem for an organisation such as WAALA is the size of its constituency, which means that meetings of the membership are very expensive. With no funding, such an organization relied, until recently, on the good offices (literally) of the Western Australian College of Advanced Education, Mt. Lawley Campus for secretarial support, and for implementation of a number of practical recommendations made by its conference in October 1986. While WAALA is not directly involved in language maintenance work, it is a forum for people in the area to share ideas. It has lobbied the relevant WA government departments, and must take some credit for the eventual establishment of language programmes in schools in Western Australia.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the apparently auspicious employment, at first settlement, of a skilled interpreter for local Aboriginal languages, the State Government has since largely ignored Aboriginal languages. It is only after Aboriginal people have insisted on recording and teaching their own languages (through independent schools and Language Centres) in the 1970s and 1980s, that the State Government is finally beginning to move in the direction of supporting these community initiatives.

Community involvement in language programmes is vital to their success, as is access to adequate resources for training and for literature and audio-visual production. While I have concentrated on language programmes, it is not clear that such programmes necessarily support the ongoing communicative use of a language. Although people may support maintenance of languages, their practice does not necessarily conform with their attitudes. Language may be associated with an idealised past, and fluency in the spoken use of the language is not always what is asked for in language maintenance programmes (see Thieberger 1988). This is clearly not the case, for example, at Strelley and Punmu where the continued communicative use of the traditional local language is the aim of the community directed schools. Nevertheless, we should be aware that language programmes might not need to fulfill European notions of linguistic excellence to still be considered a success by the 'client' population.

It is clear that social and economic factors play a large part in language maintenance and in the establishment of language programmes. Aboriginal people in Western Australia and, indeed, Australia, were encouraged to become economically dependent on either missions or government reserves have, at the same time, managed to choose how they would adapt to their changing circumstances. That many who are products of even the strictest missions still speak their language (as in May O'Brien's case) suggests that a policy of passive resistance was adhered to, tacitly if not openly. The 'enclavement' of Aboriginal people on reserves supported both the use of traditional languages, and the development of 'blended' languages (Kriol, Aboriginal English, and lingua franca (e.g. Martu Wangka at Jigalong)), based on a number of traditional languages, to a mixed reception by both insiders and by their own speakers.

In the early 1990s we are finally seeing some government support for Aboriginal languages in Western Australia. It remains to be seen what effect this support will have on the ongoing use of these languages. We must also wait and see if the support itself continues for the length of time required to actually achieve results of communicative competence in school programmes, or of adequately recording the many languages that may not be spoken into the twenty-first century.

Armstrong, F.P. 1837. Native vocabularies (ms).
Bates, D. nd. Native vocabularies, [Section 12 of the Australian National Library's Bates collection].
Brandenstein, C.G. von 1968. 'Some new aspects of Australian Aboriginal language', (ms) Paper read at the AIAS General Meeting.
NOUNS AND NOMINALS IN WUNAMBAL

ERIC VASSE
Minerva Access is the Institutional Repository of The University of Melbourne

Author/s:
Thieberger, N

Title:
The Road Less Travelled: Recording and Teaching Aboriginal Languages in Western Australia

Date:
1991

Citation:

Publication Status:
Published

Persistent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/34089

File Description:
The Road Less Travelled: Recording and Teaching Aboriginal Languages in Western Australia

Terms and Conditions:
Terms and Conditions: Copyright in works deposited in Minerva Access is retained by the copyright owner. The work may not be altered without permission from the copyright owner. Readers may only download, print and save electronic copies of whole works for their own personal non-commercial use. Any use that exceeds these limits requires permission from the copyright owner. Attribution is essential when quoting or paraphrasing from these works.