

○ **M. G. CLYNE, *AUSTRALIA'S LANGUAGE POTENTIAL***

(SYDNEY: UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES PRESS. 2005. PP. VI, 208)

In reading and reviewing Michael Clyne's *Australia's Language Potential* it repays the effort to 'de-condition' oneself. Many linguists and applied linguists, teachers and students have been influenced, not to say formed, by Michael's longstanding view of language issues, especially those of us who might identify as sociolinguists and even more particularly those who work on the ecology of immigrant languages in Australia. While this is far from being his only, or even his dominant, field of interest, it is perhaps the one with which he is most consistently associated. The de-conditioning is useful because *Australia's Language Potential* has a freshness that is delightful to read. It reads as a mature and reflective overview, a survey directed at a non-specialist intelligent reader, that tells them, and indeed us, about the value of the accumulating corpus of data about the health of the Australian lingual state. Clyne's research is publicly funded, and he is telling the public what it is getting for its money. It is a lot. This quality of public openness, or conversation with the wider Australian community, is to be admired also because it proceeds from one of Michael Clyne's distinctive personal qualities, his refusal to see a divide between 'science' and 'action'. He wants to produce knowledge for engagement with schools and universities; families; community organisations; churches, temples, mosques and synagogues: all those public and private places where languages live and make possible the distinctive life of immigrant communities.

The book's introduction begins with a reference to the Cornelia Rau case, a mentally ill woman detained in a Brisbane jail and then held in the Baxter Detention Centre without medical treatment. Ms Rau, who had lived in Australia since the age of 18 months, used German and German accented English to escape from a Sydney psychiatric hospital only to be incarcerated in appalling conditions as a suspected illegal immigrant. The case highlights a central concern of the book about how speech forms are used to form judgments about people's lives, mental states, probity, honesty and other kinds of statuses and how this process can lead to abuse, including deplorable miscarriages of justice and denial of basic human rights.

The fundamental desire of the book is that we might progress to a more sophisticated understanding of languages than the one that appears to be in operation today.

The first chapter offers a brief history of the recognition of the pluri-lingual demography of Australia supplemented by statistical data of the state of our languages. The chapter supplies an excellent summation of the extensive documentation that Clyne and colleagues have been collecting of language use by various indicators (municipality, state and different collection units used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, age and vintage of migration, sex and country of origin) over periods of time. It is fascinating and leaves the reader wondering how much more ordered and effective our language planning could be if it were based on sober assessment of the realities of who speaks what to whom and where.

The second chapter is a wide ranging consideration of how this multilingualism could be, and in part has been, regarded, even valued over time. While not discarding the role and significance of English as an international language, this chapter makes a strong case for the complementary development of multiple languages with English.

In Chapter three Clyne looks at how the multilingualism of the population has been transmitted, comparing different ethnic and national groups over different periods of time and posing questions of core value, parenting, home country contact etc and predicting the various outcomes for intergenerational transmission of languages for each factor. It concludes that there is underutilisation of the multilingual resources of Australia.

Chapter four turns to the school sector and more generally to education. There is a detailed look at issues that arise in schooling when languages that are spoken in learners' homes are included in the curriculum as well as discussion of some of the rhetoric that surrounds language choice.

Chapter five is essentially a policy overview. It looks at language policy over a long reach of time and in many settings in which language policy can occur. In this chapter, as for previous ones, Clyne finds a tension, or an oscillation, between moments of openness to multilingualism and its cultural consequences, and moments of closure and rejection of pluralism, with varying degrees of intensity. In Clyne's view this is a tension at the heart of Australian public life. Chapter six asks what can, and should, be done. This question is asked of governments, schools, universities, community organisations and families. Clyne argues that only a collaborative approach is viable and calls for governments to take the initiative by reinstating a commitment to the principles of the National Policy on Languages. He returns to his starting point, interrogating the meaning of the Cornelia Rau case, and arguing that it is monolingualism rather than multilingualism that is the costly policy option. Although Clyne's concluding remarks are sanguine, if not downright pessimistic, about any rapid return to enthusiastic embrace of multilingualism as a framework for language policy, he feels that 'sooner or later' the initiative

will return to the 'grassroots' and a more enlightened dispensation regarding the appreciation of the potential national, social and personal benefits of multilingualism will ensue.

The use of the term '*potential*' I found to be particularly well judged. While it implies a criticism of our present efforts as a country, it also has a confidence that having done things quite well in the past we might regroup and find our way again.

Without wishing to sound parochial I think it is defensible to describe the change in linguistic demography in the past four decades in Australia as quite remarkable. At present I, like many others, work in schools with teachers of English as a second language. One group seems to capture this generational shift perfectly. They are middle aged adults with Southern European surnames who were trained to teach students from Southeast Asia, but who are now learning to teach students from the North East of Africa. This Europe, Asia, Africa convergence in our local schools encapsulates the vital role of public schooling in inter-ethnic, inter-generational contact and the central role of language in these processes. These vintages of immigration, language, personal experience, public institutions and world view underscore something of the key argument in *Australia's Language Potential*. Each of these population vintages connects Australian places and people to foreign places via family networks, stocks of knowledge, language, culture, emotional affiliation and, sometimes, by political commitment. These networks are what many contemporary sociologists see as the doing of globalisation in local networks.

In 2002 a group of Australian and US researchers met at Victoria University of Technology to exchange experiences, views and research models on multilingualism. The US colleagues were brought together by the late Russ Campbell, someone I thought of as an American Michael Clyne for the duration and depth of his commitment to enlightened responses to the realities of multilingualism. Our American counterparts spoke of *heritage languages*. Many of us, not least Michael himself, argued instead that the term *community languages* better described our reality. These were, after all, alive and living, with vibrant speaker domains, institutional life and social regard. Had *Australia's Language Potential* been published then we would have won the case easily.

In those encounters were encapsulated the driving theme of this book, a volume in which at each point of detail the reader is always aware and connected to the driving theme. The *potential* resides precisely in the fact that 'our' linguistic demography has taken place more recently to be sure, but also in a comparatively more accepting social environment, which has facilitated the strenuous efforts of 'new' Australians to set up schools and clubs and activities to pass on their language so that it did not become a fading heritage to protect or recover. The often tolerating and sometimes promoting nature of public policies for languages has contributed to what is therefore a greater in-

tergenerational vitality for languages than in the US. While a heritage is to be appreciated and valued, thinking of languages as heritage tends to direct discussion towards conservation, or recovery and retrieval, while for living languages of the community the potential for more vital and intact transmission between generations, and new learning by community outsiders, is greater.

Of course there are serious limits to this reasoning. The state of Australia's community languages, as Clyne's research, and that of his colleagues, shows only too well, is also endangered. The difference with north America is only one of degree rather than of kind. Here too there is 'potential': to keep still-spoken community languages vibrant, school policies open and to 'reverse' the language shift that is in some cases well advanced.

In 1984 the American bilingual education scholar Ruiz (1984) noted that language policies, despite their surface complexity are driven by one of three underlying orientations, whether they regard multilingualism as a *right*, a *resource* or as a *problem*. This book shows that Michael Clyne believes in the first, works in the second and rejects the third. No one involved in Australian language policy has ever neglected the role and centrality of English as the common language of the country. But we have entered debates that recall Kloss (1971) classic arguments about the United States, in which immigrants are required to 'pay a price' for entering a new nation. In *Australia's Language Potential* Michael Clyne wants to show the way out of the Australian version of those sterile debates that challenge immigrant loyalty to the nation by requiring a display of linguistic sacrifice. It is a credit to him, and a challenge to us.

Review by Joseph Lo Bianco, The University of Melbourne

REFERENCES

- Kloss, H. 1971. 'Language rights of immigrant groups'. *International Migration Review* 5: 250–268.
Ruiz, R. 1984. 'Orientations in language planning'. *National Association for Bilingual Education Journal* 8: 15–34.