LANGUAGE USE AND LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

IN A RURAL SOUTH AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY

Presented
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ABSTRACT

The topic of this thesis is language use and language attitudes towards Indigenous peoples in a rural South Australian community.

This is essentially a linguistic thesis, however, due to the intermeshing of sociohistory and language in the target community, this work argues the importance of considering non-linguistic factors in understanding the community situation, the most important of these non-linguistic factors being the role of people's attitudes. As Edwards (1982p.20), points out:

“With regard to sociolinguistics in particular, attitudes have traditionally been of considerable importance. This is because people's reactions to language varieties reveal much of their perception of the speakers of these varieties....”

This thesis is divided into three interrelating sections. The first outlines the situation in the target community. The second discusses language attitude research and compares attitudes to language varieties around the world. The third illustrates Australian Governmental attitudes through their past and present policies, in dealing with Indigenous Australians.
This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the university library, being available for loan and photocopying.

September 9th 1998
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I would like to thank all the members of the Riverland Community for participating in the speech evaluation and for discussing their opinions and feelings with me. Thanks to Mr G. Dowling for his tour of former Ngawait territory, Bob O’Brien, Maureen Stolz and Matthew Sleeman for their recommendations and information. Special thanks to those who kindly donated their voices for my speech evaluation, Ken and Heather Wright, Mark Elliot, Damon Inness, Ilonka Wid and Emma Sapinski.

Prior to writing this thesis I knew next to nothing about the Indigenous community in the Riverland. I want to thank all the Indigenous people who gave me some insight into their life and culture and who helped me to see things from a different perspective. I especially want to thank Bessie Rigney, Agnes Rigney, Jenny Southgate and Damon Inness at the Jerry Mason Senior Memorial Centre, Daphne Lindsay, Rob Agius and Francis Day at R.A.A.P., ViVi Healey and Sherrell Bonney at the Riverland District Education Department, Maria Rossack, Peggy Giles and Muriel Fewquandie at the Barmera Health Clinic, Margaret Lampard at the TAFE College Berri, Mark Elliot and Emily Lindsay/Meyer.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAACLAME - Australian Advisory Council on Languages and Multicultural Education
AEP - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy
ALA - Aboriginal languages Association
ATSI - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
DAA - Department of Aboriginal Affairs
FECCA - Federation of Ethnic communities council of Australia
NALLS - National Languages and Literacy Strategy
NALP - National Aboriginal Languages Programme
NPL - National Policy on Languages
UAM - United Aboriginal Mission
UMAAW - Upper Murray Association for Aboriginal Welfare
TERMINOLOGICAL MATTERS

Before beginning this work I would like to highlight some important points:

a) I have used, wherever possible, the term ‘Indigenous’, rather than ‘Aboriginal’, when describing the Indigenous community of the Riverland. Some Indigenous informants thought this more appropriate in such a formal piece of work;

b) In the Riverland the term ‘Aboriginal’ is sometimes used in a derogatory way by non-Indigenous people;

c) The term ‘Nunga’ is sometimes used only between Indigenous peoples, and not all Indigenous people in the Riverland are ‘Nunga’ e.g. Ngarrindjeri;

d) The term ‘Indigenous’ refers to not only ‘Aboriginal’ people, but also Islander peoples e.g. Torres Strait Islander people. While all these people are Indigenous to Australia, they have very different cultures and identities and it is OFFENSIVE to label them all as ‘Aboriginal’.

e) The term ‘Koorie’ is inappropriate for South Australia. Most Indigenous Riverlanders refer to themselves as ‘Nunga’, not ‘Koorie’.

WARNING: The mention of the names of certain deceased Indigenous Riverlanders may be offensive to some readers of this thesis.