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BOOK REVIEW

Eric Vaszolyi, *'Aboriginal Australians Speak: An Introduction to Australian Aboriginal Linguistics.'* ATEP. Perth. 1976.

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Language is the key to human communication. It is also the expression, and an integral part of culture. Two truths of significance for teachers and others working with and for Aboriginal people. An understanding of the language of the people can be of immeasurable benefit to white Australians living and working in Aboriginal communities - not only as an aid to communication, but also as a vehicle for gaining insights into and understanding of Australian Aboriginal culture.

Teachers are particularly affected in this regard. Every year many unsuspecting teachers are thrust into classrooms of Aboriginal children with little or no special training or preparation. More often than not they have had no training in linguistics. These teachers quickly become frustrated at their inability to communicate consistently and effectively with the children and their parents. Verbal response from the children, especially in the early weeks of the school year is little or none at all. The children often use a language which, to the teacher's uninitiated ears sounds like a degraded form of English. Worse still, (for some teachers), the children use their own Aboriginal mother tongue.

The enterprising teacher in this situation endeavours to discover more about his pupils' language and language repertoire. Most Aboriginal children in rural/remote areas have a minimal command of so-called standard English, fluency in an Aboriginal dialect of English and one, perhaps two or more Aboriginal languages at their command.

Obtaining information about Aboriginal languages and Aboriginal dialects of English is no easy task for the non-linguist. Most of the published information has been written by linguists using linguistic terms and jargon not readily comprehended by the layman. Language teaching materials available deal only with the better known and more widely-spoken Aboriginal languages and there is very little comprehensive material about Aboriginal dialects of English. *'Aboriginal Australians Speak: An Introduction to Australian Aboriginal Linguistics'* should help to fill the gap. As a general and highly readable account of Aboriginal languages in general and Aboriginal languages of Western Australia in particular it should be of particular interest and value to teachers, medical personnel, welfare officers, administrators, policemen and others who are involved with Aboriginal people in rural/remote areas.

Written mainly for teachers, the book aims at giving a general but substantial introduction to the various systems of Aboriginal languages, Aboriginal dialects of English and Aboriginal pidgin languages. The information presented is of considerable value in its own right but should also provide an excellent background and introduction for anyone wishing to learn an Aboriginal language. It should also be of help to teachers wanting to identify problem areas in the teaching of English as a second language or dialect to Aboriginal people.

Vaszolyi's account of the sound, grammar and other systems of Aboriginal languages should be readily understood by even the most linguistically naive reader. He uses linguistic terms and jargon judiciously and his comparison and contrast with English forms and systems enhances clarity without confusing.

Aboriginal dialects of English are given the status and recognition they deserve and Vaszolyi's many examples of sound, grammatical and lexical contrasts with standard English should be an invaluable aid to anyone wishing to unravel the mysteries of Aboriginal English. The many examples and explanations should also be of value to any teacher using a contrastive approach in teaching standard English to speakers of Aboriginal dialects of English.

Aboriginal and Melanesian pidgin languages are dealt with in similar vein though the emphasis tends to be on justifying the legitimacy of pidgins rather than providing practical hints for the teacher. This does not detract, however, from the information and entertainment value of this section, including, as it does, a pidgin version of excerpts from Shakespeare's *'Julius Caesar'*.

Overall, Vaszolyi's systematic approach and his excellent use of examples should provide any reader with a substantial background to Aboriginal languages and linguistics. Such a background should be extremely helpful in learning an Aboriginal language and teaching English more effectively to Aborigines.

(*'Aboriginal Australians Speak'* costs \$4.00 and is available from: The Bookshop, Mount Lawley College of Advanced Education, 2 Bradford St., MOUNT LAWLEY. WA 6050).

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Eric Vaszolyi, a lecturer in linguistics at Mount Lawley College of Advanced Education is well qualified for a work of this kind. He has researched the languages and cultures of minority ethnic groups in Hungary, Finland and Northern Russia as well as the Kimberleys Region of Western Australia. He has taught at primary and secondary levels in Hungary and has lectured at the universities of Budapest, Cambridge, East Anglia and Western Australia. He was a research fellow with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies and worked for a time as an advisor with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

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