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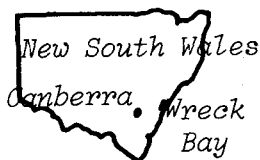
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THE INCORPORATION OF NEAR EXTINCT ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES INTO THE CURRICULUM OF JERVIS BAY PRIMARY SCHOOL



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Comparatively few Aboriginal words remain in the speech of the Wreck Bay Aboriginal community. The words that have survived are remnants of two Aboriginal languages of the South Coast of New South Wales - the Dharawal language and the Dhurga language. Linguists consider that these were the main languages on this section of the coast. Since the turn of the century, however, it is thought the vocabularies were mixed up, so that now it is sometimes impossible to know for certain from which language particular words have come. It is on the basis of the words that have survived, a grammar of the languages compiled by Diana Eades, and her advice, that a language unit has been developed for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children who attend Jervis Bay Primary School.

The language materials have been designed for children aged eight to nine years. In the materials emphasis is placed on the human qualities of language - its day-to-dayness, enjoyment and human interaction. By means of colourful, self-corrective manipulative materials, games, songs and vocabulary built around themes, the children are encouraged to work and play with the languages. These enjoyable experiences are expected to motivate the children to undertake language learning in the future. By teaching the Aboriginal languages of the area, the school demonstrates that it values the original Australian languages and that it desires to achieve in its curriculum some cultural transmission by the Aboriginal community.

SURVIVAL OF ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES

In his monograph on Aboriginal languages, Michael Walsh states -

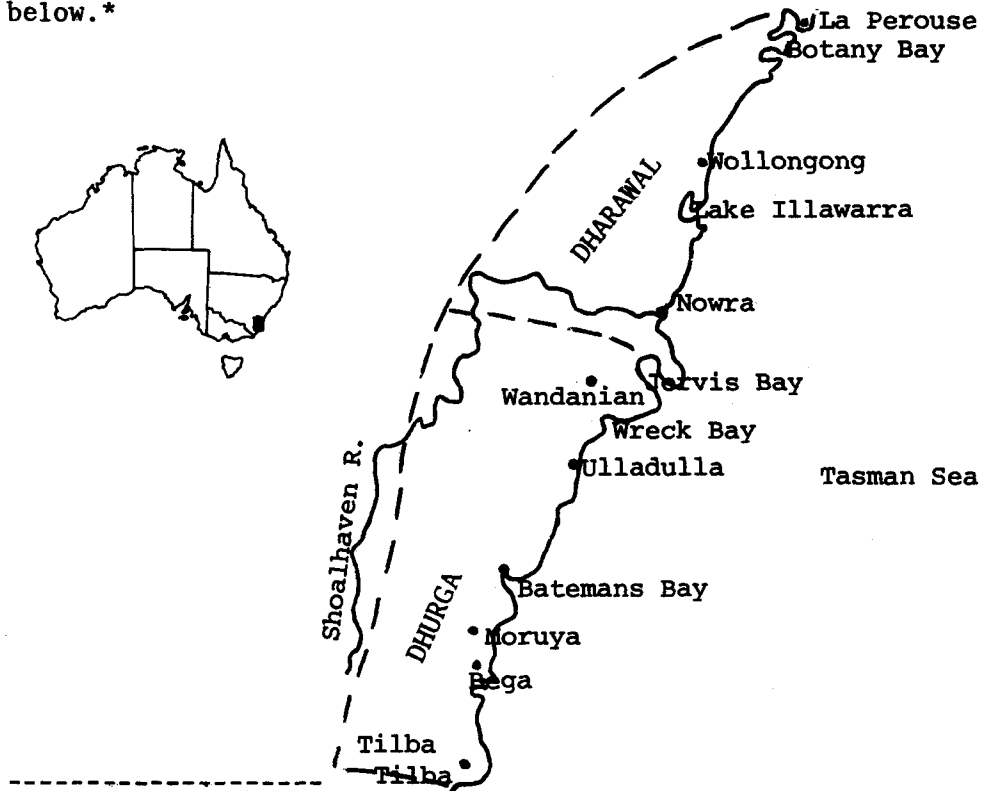
...there were perhaps six hundred tribes (Tindale, 1974) at the time of the arrival of the First Fleet. These tribes were distributed over the whole of the Australian continent, each tribe having its own, distinct dialect. It is thought that there were two hundred or more distinct

languages. Many of these languages have since become extinct so that the number of distinct Australian languages still used (to some extent) would be something like half that figure. (Walsh, p.2)

The Wreck Bay/Jervis Bay area provides evidence of the extinction of Australian languages that has taken place over the last two hundred years. The Dharawal language and the Dhurga language of the South Coast of New South Wales are listed among those Aboriginal languages that have one to ten speakers (P.Sutton). Add to this comment the fact that several local informants of these languages have died in the last five years, then Dharawal and Dhurga join the ranks of the considerable number of Aboriginal languages that have been extinguished since 1788.

THE ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES OF THE WRECK BAY AREA.

From a linguistic point of view it seems likely that Wreck Bay lies at the interface of two language areas as shown in the map below.*



* Taken from the frontispiece of *The Dharawal and Dhurga Languages of the New South Wales South Coast* - D. Eades.

Most Aboriginal people were multilingual and it is likely that, in the past, the Aboriginal people of the Wreck Bay district would have been competent in both the Dharawal language and the Dhurga language. Social factors would have dictated the speaker's choice of language. For example, the speaker might use Dhurga with certain people and Dharawal with others, depending on where the speaker's relatives came from and on his social relationship to the listener. There were probably several modes of language which were selected for use according to social requirements, for example, mourning.

The language which has survived is sufficient to allow partial linguistic analysis and presentation, but it is insufficient to permit the drawing of conclusions about the finer social aspects, implications and uses of the languages. This means that there is no guarantee that the examples presented in the unit are, in fact, examples of living speech; indeed they might well be more akin to phrasebook examples produced for linguists in field situations. Be this as it may, the language that has survived in the community, and that which has been recorded in the grammar, is all the accessible material that remains, and perforce it is on these foundations that the language has been developed.

WHY TEACH NEAR EXTINCT ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES IN A SCHOOL?

The question immediately arises as to the value of teaching near-extinct Aboriginal languages in the school situation, particularly when existing knowledge of them is incomplete and possibly distorted. The first response must be that, although the languages are virtually extinct, what remains points to a cultural survival of some significance. That the words of the original languages still exist in the community, and that linguistic work was being carried out with Aboriginal informants as late as 1950 and 1970, indicates that elements of the languages survived the social dislocation and economic depression which took place for Aboriginal people over the last two hundred years. By teaching the original languages, the importance of the Aboriginal cultural survival is acknowledged.

Wreck Bay people and their forebears have been closely linked with the linguistic work which has been done in the Dharawal and Dhurga languages. Mr and Mrs Jock Timbery, (deceased 1978, 1979) of Wreck Bay, were informants for both Janet Mathews in the 1960's and Diana Eades in 1973. Mr Jock Timbery's grandmother was the main informant of R.H.Mathews at the turn of this century. Besides providing evidence of a cultural survival, the Dharawal and Dhurga languages are the original languages of this area, and thus hold

particular relevance for the people who live here now. They are the languages which were spoken by the ancestors of the present Wreck Bay community. As such, the languages form part of the unique cultural heritage of the Aboriginal people of the coast. If one substituted a more complete Aboriginal language for teaching purposes in the school situation, authenticity would be lost, and the right of inheritance for the present community of Wreck Bay would be usurped. By including the authentic, original languages in the school curriculum, the singular worth and significance of these languages for this particular area is asserted.

In the introduction to her book, Diane Eades states -

It is my sincere hope that South Coast Aborigines, today and in the future...will be able to see in this study the language of their own people respectfully preserved. (Eades, p.viii)

The overall aim of the language unit is very close to the sentiment expressed in Diana's introduction. The unit aims to provide Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children at Jervis Bay Primary School with some understanding of the complexity and adequacy of the original languages of the region and to give them some skill in and knowledge of the languages. By learning elements of the vocabulary and the structure of the languages, the children learn implicitly that the languages were uniquely styled to meet the needs of their users. No other language could have met, as well as these languages did, the communicative needs of these people. The wonder is that, for two hundred years, remnants of the original languages have survived in the mouths and minds of the Aboriginal families of the coast. By being exposed to the languages, all children learn that every language is intrinsically valuable in its own right, and cannot be regarded as relatively inferior or superior.

WHAT IS BEING TAUGHT?

Michael Walsh states that -

Many people think a 'primitive' (so called) language will have a small vocabulary...(and) it will have a very simple grammar or even no grammar at all! (Walsh,p.4)

Grammar

This, Walsh argues, is not so, and he asserts that Australian languages demonstrate considerable grammatical complexity.

In the Dharawal and Dhurga languages the grammatical constructions are very similar but inflexional markers are different. There is a Dharawal set and a Dhurga set. In the language unit a decision had to be made as to which set would be used to introduce the children to grammatical constructions. After much consideration it was decided to use the Dharawal markers in the grammar part of the language materials.

In the unit the elements of grammar which are introduced comprise a presentation of tenses and pronouns. The section on pronouns, in particular, displays the complexity and fineness of the Dharawal language. In Dharawal there are eight free form pronouns. The effect is that the speaker can select out of any group eight different combinations of people - a far greater number of combinations than is possible with the range of English pronouns, 'I', 'we', 'you'. The fineness of the designations communicated by the pronouns suggests that the creators-speakers of the Dharawal language stressed social relationships in their everyday lives. The free form Dharawal pronouns are as follows -

just me	ngayagang
just you	nyindigang
just you and me	ngalgang
you two (including addressee)	bilangang
me and one other person but not you	ngungguling
me and you and at least one other person	nyulgang
me and at least two other persons but not you	nyunuling
you people (including addressee)	nyirgang

Of course, in teaching the grammar to eight and nine year old children, lists are not presented in this way. A series of colourful games and manipulative materials for group work have been designed around the pronouns listed above. The materials are designed for play situations and they are made so that it is impossible for the children to repeat incorrect responses. By playing with the games the children will learn to recognise the pronouns and their meanings and, at the same time, they will realize that 'primitive' is not an apt term to apply to the grammar of Australian languages.

Vocabulary

Commenting on the vocabulary of Australian languages, Walsh states -

So-called 'primitive' languages are often thought to have not only few words, but 'short' words. (Walsh, p.6)

Again this misconception is not supported by evidence for the Dharawal and Dhurga languages. Diana Eades, in her introduction says -

...it should be stressed that if Dharawal or Dhurga appear in any way to lack the fullness and complexity of a human language it is entirely due to the inadequacies of the source materials. (Eades, p.ix)

In Dharawal and Dhurga the basic root words are modified by tense markers, subject markers and object markers. As in many Australian languages the inflexional markers in Dharawal are akin to the elaboration of base words as found in Latin and Greek. The result is that words produced around the base word can be quite long. For example, the base word *bulm* means 'hit', *a* is the future tense marker, *nga* is the doer marker 'I', and *dhanang* is the object 'them'. Thus the Dharawal word chain *bulmangadhanang* expresses the same meaning as the English sentence form 'I will hit them'. In Dharawal the order of the markers is always the same, base word - tense - subject - object.

The Dharawal words are introduced to the children in the first instance as whole words in situational contexts. Use is made of illustrative materials, acting out, matching and group work. The order within the words is always the same; this is shown by colour-coding of manipulative materials. In the language materials Yellow indicates the base word, Blue the tense marker, Pink the subject marker and Green the object marker. The same colour-coding applies to examples in all the three tenses, present, past and future. As well, the children interlock animal shapes which have self-correcting colour-coded dots on the back of the shapes. There are deck card games which are designed around the basic chain, base-tense-subject-object, which in colour is Yellow-Blue-Pink-Green.

In working with the materials, the children manipulate elements through cards and games, and they interact with each other in group situations. In doing this they are exposed to basic linguistic concepts - differentiation between transitive and intransitive verbs, which is simply that some base words take a green (object) or tail, if we are working with the animal shapes; the zero phoneme which is shown on the manipulative materials; sequence within words in the case of Dharawal and in word order in the case of English. By learning some grammar of the Dharawal language the children are also

learning about the structure of English. Perhaps the most important learning point in this section is that, although spoken forms differ from language to language, each language communicates the speaker's meanings. By playing and doing the children should realize that it does not really matter if the speaker says '*bulmangadhanang*' or 'I will hit you' - the meaning is the same, and one would expect the human responses to be the same. The notion of response is transmitted in group games such as charades.

Vocabulary - Extent, Adaptations and Borrowings

The vocabulary of a language tends to reflect the interests and circumstances of the people using it. (Walsh, p.5)

To impart this point to the children, Dharawal and Dhurga words are being used in other Social Studies themes. In this way the languages are being associated with other facets of life at Wreck Bay, for example, the fishing industry, the bush resources and local history and families.

At Wreck Bay, fishing and the sea form a very important part of life. In the surviving vocabulary there are a large number of words that relate to fish, the sea and winds. The Aboriginal languages of the coast have words for the sea close (*gadhu*) and the sea distant (*ngamawan*), a distinction which is not available in English. The vocabulary that remains is sufficient to suggest that the sea and its resources have always been important for the Aboriginal people of the coast. This should become evident for the learners when they discover the number of Aboriginal names for local fish species.

In the vocabulary the children will learn local Aboriginal place names, some of which have found their way into Australian English. Bherwerre Beach takes its name from *biriwiri*, the Aboriginal name for nearby St George's Basin. Swan Lake is the anglicised name for *gurmia*, which means 'place of the swans'. The children will be encouraged, from this local beginning, to find more generalized borrowings from the original Australian languages into present-day Australian English.

Just as Aboriginal words have been incorporated into Australian English, so English words were adapted for Aboriginal purposes, particularly when they described aspects of culture which were new in the Aboriginal context. Examples of Dharawal and Dhurga adaptations are being presented in the unit so that the children can see the process of borrowing at work. Words such as *juwa* for shoe and *birid* for bread, show how English words were incorporated into

the Aboriginal languages' sound systems. New words were adapted to describe elements of the colonist culture, for example - ovenbatch for bread, solid for honey and flaps for meat. The borrowings show how the Dharawal and Dhurga speakers adapted language to meet the invasion of the new culture and the great changes that this brought with it.

THE FUTURE

Essentially we are working with the remnant of a language and it is important that the children should know this. They should understand that the loss has occurred, not wilfully, but certainly as the result of a careless and trifling undervaluing of a people's culture. With the permanent establishment of European life styles on the Australian continent 200 years ago, all aspects of Aboriginal life were repressed, so that English became the language used for communication. This meant that the communicative power of Dharawal and Dhurga was drastically reduced. The reduction of the language is part of the pattern of cultural oppression which the Aboriginal people have suffered as the result of the colonization of the Australian continent.

The children should also be aware that some parts of the languages have survived because a few early settlers and visitors to Australia tried to learn and record the languages, but most importantly because the Aboriginal people, although they suffered many hardships, kept parts of the languages alive for over 200 years within their own families and groups. The community at Wreck Bay is such a group; people there know words of the original languages, their meanings and origins. The survival of language in this group should evoke a sense of wonder in the present day learners.

Unfortunately, the children must also be made aware that more of the original languages of the coast has been lost than has been retained, and that the loss is a loss for all Australians. The loss of language should evoke a sense of regret for the harm that has been done and cannot be repaired. By introducing the children to the original languages in an enjoyable and play way, the school might well interest them in acquiring a more complete Aboriginal language at a later stage of their school lives.

In her introduction, Diana Eades (p.19) says that Dharawal and Dhurga are not being kept alive in any active way. This language unit is an attempt to encourage an appreciation of the languages. Diana has made sound tapes and devised an orthography, using English letters to help in this endeavour. Once again the

children of the coast will be able to use at least some of the words and forms of the original coast languages.

The language that remains is a fragment. Like a fragment of an ancient Grecian sculpture, it cannot be completely restored because some of the pieces are lost, but what remains tells us something of the beauty of the whole and admonishes us to treasure the relic.

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JUDY INGLIS MEMORIAL PRIZE

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies advises that the competition for 1978 attracted 35 entries from tertiary institutions throughout Australia. The judges were pleased to find essays from students training in education, politics, anthropology, sociology and history, and were impressed with the high standards of research and writing. As well as using published works by specialists in these fields, the entrants utilized recent official studies and reports, archival materials and personal experience in the field of Aboriginal studies. Health, education, the historical impact of European contact and administration, land rights and the condition of urban Aborigines were all popular topics. The prize was awarded to Mr John Ferry of New South Wales. His essay, entitled "Account for the failure of the N.S.W. missions to the Aborigines before 1845" will be published in *Aboriginal History*.

SEE PAGE 32 FOR DETAILS OF 1979 COMPETITION

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