# THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS OF THE FIRST NATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY IN AUSTRALIA
# - THE ROLE OF AND DEMAND FOR EDUCATION IN A NATION -

Maiko AOKI

## Introduction

The main purpose of this paper is to consider the role of and demand for education in Australia, analyzing the development process of the first national language policy of Australia. Before the publication of *National Policy on Languages* (NPL), in 1987, there was extensive discussion on its establishment, led by the senate standing committee. In this paper, I will mainly refer to the proceedings and references recorded by this committee.

Previous research into Australian language policies focused on the relationship with multiculturalism, Australia's national policy from the middle of the 1970s.[1] According to this research, the status of and attitude towards languages other than English (LOTE) shifted significantly after the 1970s. The federal grants for ethnic schools commenced in 1980 and the promotion of multicultural education for all Australian students gained wider acceptance in the 1980s.[2]

However, it must be remembered that the status of English has not changed in Australia. Regardless of whether English language teaching is regarded as a "force" or as a "right", all Australians are still thought to need Standard Australian English (SAE) for life in Australia.

Australia has been struggling with these two aspects of multiculturalism; developing the linguistic and cultural diversity in Australia and maintaining the framework of the nation. Although this latter 'framework' has not often been the focus of previous research, in this paper, I would like to consider these opposing ideas of multiculturalism through the role of and demand for education in the development process of the first national language policy.

## 1. Language Policies in Australia
### 1-1. Concise History of Language Policies in Australia

Australia's first national language policy, NPL, was formulated in 1987. Prior to this,

each state had its own language policy and some responsibilities for language education, depending on the demands of the local communities.[3] So, at that time, this national policy was designed to accommodate demands for general language education especially of immigrants and stressed the importance of bilingual education.[4]

In 1991, however, when a new language policy was prepared and implemented by the Department of Education, the aim of the policy in general changed. The new policy viewed language teaching as an important contribution to national economic performance because they believed that there was some linkage between the benefits from language teaching and economic development.[5] So, this policy emphasized the teaching of English literacy and some LOTEs, which were considered important for the nation politically and economically.[6]

More recently, in 1994, the government published a report focusing on four Asian languages,[7] *Asian Languages and Australia's Economic Future* (COAG report). As its title shows, this report emphasized the need to extend Asian language teaching in Australian schools to assist national economic development, especially the expansion of exports.[8] Accordingly, the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools Strategy (NALSAS program) was established, and subsequently all states have promoted Asian language teaching in line with the recommendations of this report.[9]

As well as Asian languages, in 1997, the Department of Education initiated the Commonwealth Literacy Education Program (CLP). This program was based on the concerns that the weak economic performance of Australia was caused by the low literacy rate of Australians.[10]

Above all, from the point of language policies seen historically, I wish to point out that the purpose of language policies changed from that of accepting social demands to contributing towards national economic development. These interests also focused on some languages for special purposes, which should be taught in mainstream schools. While tied up with this trend, English literacy and Asian languages assumed greater prominence in Australian language teaching. Figure 1 indicates the shift as mentioned above.
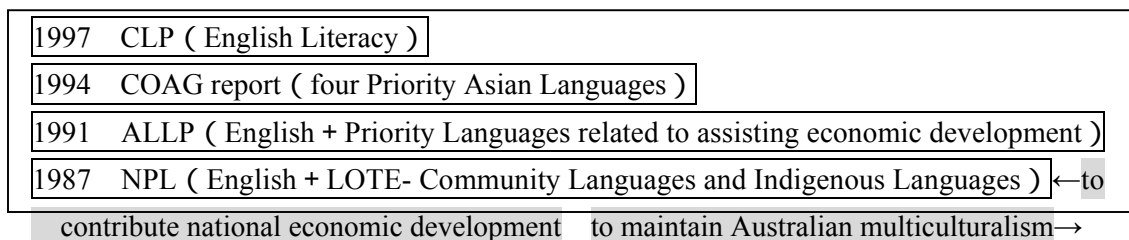
| 1997 | CLP | English Literacy |
| 1994 | COAG report | four Priority Asian Languages |
| 1991 | ALLP | English | Priority Languages related to assisting economic development |
| 1987 | NPL | English | LOTE- Community Languages and Indigenous Languages | ←to |

contribute national economic development    to maintain Australian multiculturalism→

**Figure 1    The shift of rationales and target languages in language policies in Australia**

## 1-2. Literature Review

According to the history of the language policies as above, a lot of research related to language education or multiculturalism focused on ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity in Australia. For example, Djite reviewed the history of language policies from the viewpoint of LOTE,[11] and Jupp considered Australian multiculturalism in relation to immigrants.[12]

Although I recognize that diversity, represented by LOTE and the large number of immigrants in the country, is a most important aspect of multiculturalism, I argue that multiculturalism as a national policy also requires the framework of the nation.

Recently, researchers such as Lo Bianco and Henderson have criticized the bureaucratic development process of recent language policies after the 1990s.[13] Lo Bianco, who wrote the first national language policy of Australia (NPL), raised an alarm concerning the recent trend of language policies in his publication *Australian Policy Activism in Language and Literacy*, stating that:[14]

> The 1980s alliance gathered together Indigenous language educators and community personnel, immigrant language groups, teachers of English (both of primary literacy educators and secondary subject English teachers), Deaf groups, interpreters and translators, business lobby groups and so on. This alliance was a strategically effective working collaboration around reasonably principled compromises that permitted collective action, 1990 policies, and divisive prioritisation they have established, have exaggerated partisan allegiances, enshrined cooptions and generally produced a waning of enthusiasm for participating in government sponsored research and policy projects.

While being critical, he also recognized the continuity of ideas in the policies.

According to Lo Bianco, the explanations of the trend of Australian language policies differ from the position of the second national language policy (ALLP) published in 1991.[15] For example, Clyne mentioned that "the ALLP represented itself and claimed to be a continuation of the NPL." [16] Moore, however, pointed out the contrast characteristics between NPL and ALLP.[17]

Lo Bianco considered these explanations and then stressed the continuity of the ideas of NPL and ALLP. He stated that "although they differ in both stance and style, ALLP explicitly claimed to be 'derived from' and 'closely influenced by' the NPL and they share the common feature of attempting to encompass wide interests."[18] I accept the stance of his research, I would like to try to analyze the development process of the first national language policy of Australia in depth in this paper.

## 2. The Development Process of the First National Language Policy in Australia
### 2-1. Timeline for Establishing the First National Language Policy

In 2001, Australia celebrated 100 years of federation. Before that, many people from various countries and regions migrated to Australia. After WW2, in particular, Australia needed a labor force for economic reconstruction, and Australia accepted large numbers of immigrants from countries including Southern Europe and Asia as new citizens.[19]

The flow to Australia of these people whose mother tongues were not English brought about awareness of the necessity for the government to support migrant language education, primarily education in English.[20] Although teaching English for immigrants was at first regarded as governmental 'forcing' or 'fosterage', it was gradually seen as their 'right' as the number of immigrants who had Non-English speaking backgrounds grew steadily.

This shift occasioned concerns over teaching the immigrants' mother tongues.[21] This motion, with a background of increasing economic and political interest in Asian countries and their languages, caused the government to feel the necessity of teaching LOTEs to all Australians.

Previous research pointed out that the first national language policy of Australia was brought about by three broad aspects whose origins can be traced to the 1960s. The first is the education of minority language children, the second the crisis in schools and university foreign language study, and third has to do with the change in direction of Australia's international relationships away from Britain and increasingly towards Asian

countries.[22]

Under these conditions, various kinds of research and investigations were planned and executed.[23] In 1982, the Department of Education investigated the condition of language education at schools and submitted the report *Towards a National Language Policy* to the parliament. Then, the Standing Committee on Education and the Arts was established in the Senate and started an inquiry into the needs of a national language policy of Australia.

Although this committee collected a huge quantity of data and materials, the report did not influence the establishment of the first national language policy directly. The parliament required Mr. Joseph Lo Bianco to re-investigate. So finally, in 1987, the first national language policy of Australia was accepted and published as I mentioned previously.

In the next section, I will describe the submissions and proceedings which the main governmental departments submitted to the committee in 1982-3.


**2-2. The Stance of Each Governmental Department for National Language Policy**

(1) Commonwealth Department of Education

(later, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs)

The Department of Education believed there were four ultimate educational objectives of a national language policy of Australia. These were;[24]

1)  for all Australians to have competence in English
2)  for all Australians to have the opportunity to have their native language maintained and developed
3)  that children whose mother tongue is not English should not be disadvantaged in their overall learning experience
4)  for all Australians to have an appreciation of the cultural and linguistic diversity of Australia


These objectives were divided into those related to English or LOTE. English, regardless of being the mother tongue or a second language, was regarded as the most important, because English is necessary for every Australian to have social, economic and educational opportunities in Australia. So, the Department thought that the governments had to support the teaching of English for people whose first language was not English.

The Department reconfirmed the status of English as:[25]

> The underlying reasons for Commonwealth Government support for teaching English to migrants is the significance of English as a key to employment, economic security and education, its role as a "lingua franca" and its importance in developing a multicultural society.

The Department also recognized another role of English. That was the teaching of English for international students. The Department believed that Australia would become the leader in the Asia-Pacific region,[26] so that Australia had to take responsibilities for teaching English as an international language.

Languages other than English, including Aboriginal languages were also regarded as important for the nation. At mainstream schools, the teaching of LOTEs was implemented in multicultural education and insertion classes, which were part of the Ethnic Schools Program.[27] Although the LOTEs were taught at a lot of schools in the 1980s, there were some criticisms that this kind of language learning was not realistic or practical.[28] So, especially for Asian language teaching, the Department suggested to be more practical. Asian languages were regarded as significant for trade, diplomacy, security, tourism and cultural exchange for Australia in the region.[29]

(2) Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs

The Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs took "the view that the most desirable model of multicultural society has important implications for the status of language and for government policies and programs relating to language."[30] In terms of multicultural society, the Department quoted the four fundamental principles for multiculturalism from the publication, *Multiculturalism for all Australians*;[31]

1) The maintenance of social cohesion
2) The right of all Australian residents to maintain their cultural identity
3) The guarantee of equality of opportunity and access irrespective of ethnicity, race, sex or classes
4) The equal responsibility of all residents for, commitment to, and participation in Australian society.

From these principles, I can point out that, in terms of language policy, there were two main objectives; establishing and keeping social cohesion, and overcoming the disadvantages related to languages.

In order to establish and keep social cohesion, the Department believed that every Australian should recognize the status of English as a common language of Australia and should obtain the skills of English. As well as English, the understanding of different languages and cultures was also regarded as important for achieving this goal.

On the other hand, for overcoming the disadvantage related to languages, they thought that governments had to;1)support literacy education for all residents in Australia, 2)increase the number of bilingual translators and interpreters, 3)recognize the qualifications people obtained overseas.[32]

As a result, the Department believed that national language policy had to include these five matters:[33]

1)   The prime place of English is spelt out and access to it guaranteed for all Australian residents.

2)   The legitimate role of ethnic and Aboriginal languages- as community languages- is acknowledged and the responsibility for their maintenance agreed to.

3)   The essentiality of the widespread employment of interpreters and bilingual officers to ensuring equality of opportunity and access especially to education and justice is recognized.

4)   The critical need for area specialists competent in the appropriate languages is recognized in order to meet our defense, foreign policy and trade needs.

5)   The obligation incumbent upon Australia to ensure the recording of those Aboriginal languages which are under threat of extinction is acknowledged.

(3) Department of Aboriginal Affairs

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs recognized and emphasized the needs of two types of language education related to aboriginal culture; English and Aboriginal languages.

English was taught through bilingual education or alternatively in second language

learning according to their mother tongue.[34] Aboriginal languages were taught for three reasons; for Aboriginal children to maintain and develop their languages, for non-Aboriginal children to understand Aboriginal languages and cultures, and to record the languages which were facing extinction.[35]

So, the Department believed that, in the development process of language policies, they have to consider and include in the policy; 1) the responsibility for Aboriginal languages, 2) the equality between Aboriginal languages and other languages, 3) including demands and hope from Aboriginal people, 4) support for Aboriginal people to learn English. [36]

(4) Department of Foreign Affairs

The Department of Foreign Affairs believed that national language policy emphasized three matters; 1) development of cultural and linguistic diversity in Australia, 2) support for people who have just arrived in Australia to learn English, 3) offer English language education to countries which are close to Australia.[37]

In other words, this meant that Australia had to enrich the linguistic resources in Australia and to bring up diplomats who acquire language skills. That is, languages, both inside and outside Australia, are regarded as important for the nation.

The Department also indicated three major groups of languages, which governments should support;[38]

1)    major Asian languages- Japanese, Chinese and Indonesian/ Malay
2)    major world languages- French, Spanish, Arabic, Russian and again Chinese
3)    "Related Culture" languages such as French, German and Italian

Major Asian Languages were thought as important because of Australia's neighboring languages. These languages, especially Japanese and Chinese, were considered to have value for politics and trade. "Related Culture" languages were regarded as important to Australia for historical and cultural reasons. Many people from countries such as Germany and Italy settled in Australia, and also the languages like French and German were very popular in Australian schools for a long time.

(5) Department of Trade

The Department of Trade confirmed and presented its principle objective which was the development and expansion Australia's export markets.[39] To achieve this objective, the Department regarded language skills as essential elements. So, as well as the Department of Foreign Affairs, the department identified priority languages according to the countries which Australia thought important as trading partners.[40]

Heretofore, I described the submissions on the first national language policy of Australia from main governmental departments. I would now like to raise some differences and similarities within the departments.

Firstly, I have to point out that the statements from each department were affected by their fundamental roles. So, these different roles of the departments influenced the stances towards the national language policy. The departments like Education and, Immigration and Ethnic Affairs held to the ideal of social cohesion and abolition of racism or inequalities, and emphasized the status of English as a national and official language and required educational support for migrants and indigenous people. Aboriginal Affairs pressed for the responsibilities of the government for the education of Aboriginal people. The Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Trade emphasized language education from the point of the political, economic and cultural contribution to the nation. According to the extent of the importance for Australia, they decided the priority languages to teach.

We can find these differences which came from the stances and roles of departments, however, there is a point in common. That is to think a great deal of education. They considered important as language education, especially the studying of English and LOTE. Language education was thought to contribute to achieving social cohesion and an equal society, and strengthening the relationship between Australia and the countries in the Asia- Pacific region.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, by analyzing the discussion in the development process of the first national language policy, I acknowledged the differences between each department. I can also point out that every department recognized the importance of not only LOTE, indigenous languages, but also English, in common. This indicates that both of these

languages were thought important in order to achieve the social cohesion as a nation, equity and equality regardless of the ethnicity, and strengthening the relationship with neighboring Asian countries politically and economically.

In the 1980s, and also still now, people have believed that the social cohesion has been brought about by all Australians recognizing the status of English as a national and also official language, and that all Australians have had respect and tolerance for other languages and cultures. Accordingly, they also mentioned the needs of educational support, both for English and LOTE, for people who had non-English speaking backgrounds. In terms of LOTE, the departments tried to go through historic change. However, LOTE were regarded as the elimination from the society by the reason of obstacles to acquire English and assimilate to Australian society before, it was seemed to the linguistic resources for the contribution to national development politically and economically, now.

Previous research, which focused on languages and multicultural education in Australia, paid attention to the utopian side of multiculturalism that is the acceptance and development of diversities in the society. Undoubtedly, the idea of multiculturalism may pursue only the diversity of a person. But, as I mentioned above, multiculturalism as a national policy may require not only the development of the diversity but also maintenance of the framework of the nation. It is the actualization of the social cohesion, which is not uniform, but is still diverse; Australia has expected the education system should seek.

Maiko  AOKI

Doctorate Course, Graduate School of International Media and Communication,

Hokkaido University

# Note

[1]  I will mention the previous research in section 1-2. Jupp indicated that Australia shifted from White Australia Policy to Multicultural Policy as the national policy in the beginning of 1970. (q.v. Jupp, J., *Understanding Australian Multiculturalism*, Australian Government Publishing Services (AGPS), 1996.)

[2]  Previous reports indicated that ethnic schools were established in the early stage of the colonial days to maintain their traditional languages and cultures through education. (Ethnic Schools Advisory Committee, *Future Directions for Ethnic Schools in South Australia; Report of the Ethnic Schools Advisory Committee*, 1988, pp.1-2.) However, they did not receive some grants from federal government until 1980.

[3]  Some states such as Victoria and South Australia had their own language education policy prior to the national language policy of Australia published in 1987. Each state has their own responsibilities for primary and secondary education because of the decentralization of government to local jurisdictions in Australia.

[4]  Lo Bianco, J., *National Policy on Languages*, AGPS, 1987.

[5]  The Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), *Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy*, AGPS, 1991.

[6]  They decided the 14 Priority Languages to teach in mainstream schools. Based on these 14 languages, each state government chose some languages to support as Priority Languages in the state and provided funds to them. (DEET, *Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy; Companion Volume to the Policy Paper*, AGPS, 1991, p.76.)

[7]  These four Asian languages included Japanese, Chinese, Indonesian and Korean.

[8]  They estimated Australia's trade pattern for the next 30 years and drew a hypothesis which languages were important for Australia. (Council of Australian Governments, *Asian Languages and Australia's Economic Future,* 1994.)

[9]  For implementing NALSAS program, the federal government and each state government shared responsibilities and grants to support for education of Priority Asian Languages, equally.

[10]  Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, *Literacy for All: The Challenge for Australian Schools, Commonwealth Literacy Policies for Australian Schools* http://www.dest.gov.au.
From the end of 1980s to the beginning of 1990s, there was some kind of tendency which educational outcomes contributed to national economic development. With this tendency, the Department of Education initiated the educational reform and developed some policies for general schooling, higher education and so on.

[11]  Djite, P.G., *From Language Policy to Language Planning*, 1994.

[12]  Jupp, J. wrote a lot of papers related to immigrants and multiculturalism in Australia, for example, *Understanding Australia's Multiculturalism*, published in AGPS, 1996.

[13]  Lo Bianco, J. and Wickert, R. ed. *Australian Policy Activism in Language and Literacy*, Language Australia,2001., Henderson, D. *Rudd Report: the Anatomy of an Education Reform,* un-published PhD thesis, 1999.

[14]  Lo Bianco, J. and Wickert, R. ed, *op.cit.*, 2001, p.42.

[15]  *Ibid.*, p.28.

[16]  Clyne, M., Australia's Language Ploicies: Are we Going Back?, *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, Series S. 8, 1991.

[17]  Moore, H., Language Politics as Virtual Reality, Two Australian Examples, *TESOL Quarterly*, 30.3.

[18]  Lo Bianco, J. and Wickert, R. ed., *op.cit.*, p.28

[19]  q.v. Sekine, M., and Suzuki, Y.,ed. *Gaisetsu Australia shi (Concise History of Australia)*, Yuuhikaku Syoten, 1998.

[20]  In 1970 Migrant Education Act was revised and the support for English language teaching for immigrants was commenced.

[21]  The concern for the languages which were mother tongues of migrants and for educational support for migrants were assumed widely after the Galbally report was published.

[22]  Djite, P.G. *op.cit.*, 1994. p.10.

[23]  That is part of the reason that the "existence of migrant" became gradually obvious in schools and then people especially teachers and the representatives of teachers association, religious groups and communities, came to advocate the "right of migrants". (Bruno Di Biase, Bronwen Dyson, *Language Rights and the School*, Inner City Education Centre, FILEF Italo-Australia Publications,1988, p.15.)

[24]  The Department of Education and Youth Affairs, *Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on*

*Education and the Arts Inquiry into the Development and Implementation of a Co-ordinated Language Policy for Australia*, p. S2364.

[25] Commonwealth Department of Education, *Senate Committee on Education and the Arts, Reference: The Development and Implementation of A Co-ordinated Language Policy for Australia, Submissions Authorised for Publication*, 1982, p.S16.

[26] *Ibid.*, pp. S20-21.

[27] Insertion classes were for people who lived in the community, who came to the school a day or two days a week and taught language or culture of the community.

[28] Commonwealth Department of Education, *op.cit.*,1982, p.S28.

[29] Department of Education and Youth Affairs, *Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts, Inquiry into the Development and Implementation of a Co-ordinated Language Policy for Australia*, p.S2379.

[30] Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, *Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts, Language Policy Supplementary Submission 11A*, 1983, S2475.

[31] *Ibid.*, p.S2475.

[32] *Ibid.*, p.S2477.

[33] *Ibid.*, p.S2479.

[34] Department of Aboriginal Affairs, *The Development and Implementation of a Co-ordinated Language Policy for Australia, Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts*, 1982, pp.S96-99.

[35] *Ibid.*, pp.S96-99.

[36] *Ibid.*, pp.S96-99.

[37] Department of Foreign Affairs, *Submission No. 191 National Language Policy*, 1982, pp.S1074-84.

[38] *Ibid.*, pp.S1081-82.

[39] The Department of Trade, *Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts (Reference: The Development and Implementation of a Co-ordinated Language Policy for Australia) Submission Authorised for Publication*, 1983, p. S.2354.

[40] The Priority Languages are: 1) Japanese, Chinese, Arabic and Russian, 2) Indonesian/ Malay and Italian, 3) Serbo-Croatian, Korean, Thai and Portuguese. (*Ibid.*, p.2357.)