

DIANA EADES, *Aboriginal ways of using English*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2013.
Pp. x, 256. Pb. \$39.95.

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Aboriginal ways of using English showcases the rich career of pioneer forensic linguist, Professor Diana Eades. It brings together a selection of Eades' publications over the past three decades, mapping her evolving approaches: from ethnographic description, through forensic linguistics, to critical sociolinguistics. Eades highlights how sociocultural differences can present challenges for intercultural communication. This has significant implications for equitable participation in the Australian justice system, a key focus in the latter papers in the book.

While the book presents previously published papers, Eades includes an insightful and instructive introduction in which she explains her approach and how it has changed over time. She clarifies her choice of terminology, noting updated terms and expressions which better reflect current practice. This encourages us to critically reflect on how our own focus and methodology are positioned within and influenced by contemporary attitudes and approaches. All the chapters that follow begin with a brief introductory note, contextualising the original publication within the book. There are also side-margin notes throughout, providing supplementary or updated information, or referring to discussions in the introduction.

Drawing on extensive ethnographic research, mainly in South-Eastern Queensland, Part I introduces features of ‘Aboriginal English’, or ‘Aboriginal ways of using English’. Building on this, the six chapters in Part II consider the experiences of people who use English in Aboriginal ways in the Australian criminal justice system. Aimed at a broad audience, including senior secondary school and undergraduate university students (p. 6), Eades writes in an accessible manner, providing a list of transcription conventions (p. 219) and a glossary of technical terms (p. 220) to assist readers. As she explains, the book combines a variety of texts of differing detail, including some more suited to lay readers, and others that may be of greater interest to specialist audiences (p. 7).

Part I comprises four chapters, presenting various features of the English used by Aboriginal people in Southeast Queensland, drawn from ethnographic research in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Eades cautions against overgeneralising these findings across all Aboriginal groups. However, she identifies some common features with groups in other areas, tentatively suggesting a broader application (pp. 14-15).

Chapter 2 advocates shifting away from recording traditional Aboriginal languages— an endeavour in which Eades was involved in earlier periods of her career. Eades opts for research focusing on how language is actually used: an ‘ethnography of speaking’ (p. 23). Here she refers to Dell Hymes, demonstrating the way contemporary thinking influenced the direction of her work. She explores information-seeking behaviour amongst this group, noting differences in the types of questioning which are culturally appropriate when compared with ‘middle class white Australians’.

Building on the previous chapter, chapter 3 explores a different element of communication: the expression of future intentions and time. Eades once again emphasises the sociocultural factors that can lead to communication breakdown between speakers of English who use the same language in different ways.

Chapter 4 was originally published in a book focused on Aboriginal identity, and focuses on Aboriginal people from Southeast Queensland who speak English as their first language. Taking an interactional sociolinguistic approach, Eades argues that ‘language is impossible to separate from context’ (p. 57) and that while Aboriginal people may live alongside non-Aboriginal Australians, and may not speak a traditional language, this does not necessarily negate Aboriginal identity. She then demonstrates how this cultural identity can influence the use of English, exploring a number of different aspects of the Aboriginal English used in this region.

Chapter 5 was a text originally serving to sensitise primary school teachers about Aboriginal uses of English. As Eades explains, she uses ‘strategic essentialism’, oversimplifying the material to best meet the needs of the intended audience (p. 76; Eades also discusses this in detail in the introduction, p. 12). She dispels the negative assumption that Aboriginal varieties of English are just ‘bad English’, arguing that they are as valid as other varieties, such as Irish or American English (p. 78), and are an important expression of social identity. She then presents common features of Aboriginal English and implications for classroom settings. The contextualised focus of this chapter provides a neat transition into the second part of the book.

Part II begins with a fictional case study of an Aboriginal woman who comes into contact with the criminal justice system in chapter 6. Originally targeted at a student audience, this chapter allows Eades to present a selection of common cultural and communication-related issues that can arise when Aboriginal people come into contact with the Australian legal system, based on her research.

Chapter 7 develops this and is arguably the key chapter of the book, providing readers with a valuable overview and introducing cornerstone cases in which Aboriginal English played a significant role. There are clear connections with Eades’ earlier work, as presented in

Part I, identifying the different ways in which intercultural communication may influence outcomes in criminal justice settings. The subsequent chapters draw on this overview, offering—for the most part—more detail and critical analysis. Already here, Eades questions ‘whether the apparent increase in awareness about Aboriginal ways of using English is resulting in a more equal delivery of justice to Aboriginal people’ (p. 118), flagging an important issue explored in later chapters.

The first cases presented in chapter 7 reappear in greater detail in chapter 8. The cases of *Stuart* and *Condren* demonstrate the potential role of expert sociolinguistic evidence in Australian courts. As Eades explains, Stuart’s case, in the 1950s-60s, is also amongst the earliest known research on Aboriginal English. In both cases, the defendants alleged that their confessions were fabricated. Linguists offered analyses of these written texts, compared with other samples of the defendants’ speech, as well as more generalised statements about features of Aboriginal English, to argue that parts of the confessions were inconsistent or questionable (Eades herself provided the analysis in Condren’s case in the 1980s). In each case, there were substantial obstacles to the legal profession accepting linguistic evidence on Aboriginal English and Eades concludes by suggesting that challenges still exist. She places the onus on linguists to make their work accessible to the legal profession (p. 157).

Chapter 9 reproduces a newspaper column that Eades wrote reacting to another key case, presented in chapter 7. The *Pinkenba* case involved six Queensland police officers who took three Aboriginal teenagers in their police vehicles from Brisbane city and abandoned them in Pinkenba, some 14 kilometres away, without charging the boys or legally taking them into custody (p. 121). In the case against them, the police were represented by the State’s ‘most highly paid and experienced barristers’. The three boys underwent harsh cross-examination by the defence barristers, who succeeded in transforming the boys from victims into ‘unreliable’ criminal delinquents (p. 122). In her column, Eades presents a list of assumptions about

communication that may undermine Aboriginal people's equal participation in the justice system, relevant to more than just the *Pinkenba* case. Nonetheless it creates a snappy segue to chapters 10 and 11, which each deal with this case in more detail.

Chapter 10 is based on an article published in a criminology journal. This reflects Eades' earlier aim, mentioned in chapter 8: that it is important for forensic linguists to reach out to and communicate with the legal community. This paper does just that, providing a clear introduction to sociolinguistics in criminal justice. She explores storytelling practices, critically evaluating a number of assumptions about communication in criminal justice settings, and the implications for Aboriginal participants. *Pinkenba* once again serves as an important case study. Importantly, Eades acknowledges here that awareness of communicative differences is not always enough. Power and politics can play a key role. This echoes the observation she made in chapter 7 that the defence in the *Pinkenba* case had a copy of Eades' (1992) handbook for lawyers on the Bar table. They may have been aware of communication challenges faced by Aboriginal people and may have even used these to work *against* the young Aboriginal witnesses they cross-examined (p. 124).

Eades takes up this issue again in the final chapter, originally published in 2012 for a sociolinguistic audience. She argues that constraints inside the courtroom may both reflect and further entrench external socio-political inequality. Redeveloping the analysis of storytelling in the *Pinkenba* case, she argues that a number of assumptions or ideologies about communication in legal settings can disproportionately disadvantage Aboriginal people, thus perpetuating 'neocolonial control over Aboriginal Australians' (p. 215).

This clear, cohesive and convincing compilation is not only well written. It also provides an insightful overview of a very important emerging area of study. As Eades claims, while Aboriginal people remain substantially overrepresented in Australian prisons, it is crucial that we continue to uncover and address the reasons for this. Eades demonstrates that

sociolinguists can play a significant role in this, by providing expert insight, and encouraging critical self-reflection within the legal profession.

(Received 11 March 2015)

References

Eades, Diana (1992). *Aboriginal English and the law: Communicating with Aboriginal English speaking clients: A handbook for legal practitioners*. Brisbane: Queensland Law Society.