TEACHING CREOLE-SPEAKING CHILDREN: ISSUES, CONCERNS AND RESOLUTIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM

Gillian Wigglesworth *University of Melbourne*
    gillianw@unimelb.edu.au
Rosey Billington *University of Melbourne*
    rbil@unimelb.edu.au

There are now significant numbers of children who speak a language other than English when they enter the formal school system in Australia. Many of these children come from a language background that is entirely different from the school language. Many Indigenous children, however, come from creole-speaking backgrounds where their home language may share features with the school language whilst remaining substantially different in other ways. What often makes this situation more challenging is the tendency to view creole, rather than as a different language, as a kind of deficient version of the standard language. Children entering the school system with a creole thus often encounter considerable difficulties. In addition, teachers who are not trained in teaching creole-speaking children may not recognise these difficulties. This paper explores some of these issues in the Australian context with reference to home languages such as Kriol and Torres Strait Creole (TSC) as well as minority dialects such as Australian Aboriginal English (AAE), and discusses possible resolutions.

KEY WORDS: creoles, education and bilingual education, attitudes, language differences

INTRODUCTION

Prior to the colonisation of Australia, the Indigenous peoples spoke over 250 distinct languages or dialects across Australia, with most people speaking at least two to three of these. Over the last two hundred or so years, the vast majority of these languages have been lost, or are well into the process of language death, with only around twenty Traditional Indigenous Languages (TILs) being learned by children as a first language today. However, the process of language loss is not a simple straightforward process of losing one language and learning the standard language of the wider community, in this case English. In many cases, the move away from a TIL may be characterised by a shift to a new variety that has features of both the TIL and the introduced standard language, called a pidgin. Pidgins develop as a result of prolonged contact between two or more language communities, often the coloniser and the colonised, and a need to communicate. In the early stages of development, pidgins generally have a limited communicative reach, but as a pidgin comes to be used more widely and eventually as a first language (through children resulting from

people intermarrying from different language groups) a creole develops. Creoles are fully-fledged languages, incorporating elements from both the coloniser language and the local TIL(s), generally with a large amount of the lexicon drawn from the socially dominant language in the contact situation. These languages are widespread across the world with over one hundred pidgins and creoles spoken and a variety of lexifier languages including Spanish, French, Dutch, Portuguese and English (Tyron & Charpentier, 2004).

Many Indigenous children in Australia, and particularly those who live in remote areas, grow up today speaking a creole as their first language. In Australia, there are many varieties of creoles (e.g. Fitzroy Valley Kriol, Roper River Kriol, Torres Strait Creole) with each encompassing varieties that differ to some extent depending on the TIL of the area, as well as various sociolinguistic factors which may result in the language being more basilectal or acrolectal.[i] While these creoles share some features of Standard Australian English (SAE), they have unique structures that differ from SAE in significant ways. There are also many children who grow up speaking Australian Aboriginal English (AAE) which share more characteristics of SAE than the creoles. Some varieties of AAE have arisen as post-creole varieties, whereas others result from Indigenous influences on SAE. While the linguistic distinction between the Australian creoles and AAE is that the creoles are distinct languages from SAE, and AAE is a distinct dialect, they both represent a situation where the home language variety has a close relationship with the standard language variety.

For many Indigenous children in remote areas, their first encounter with SAE in any meaningful sense (that is, apart from brief interactions in the community shop, or via the television) is when they arrive in school. Unlike children who start school with another language and come from a migrant background, however, Indigenous children, particularly when they live in remote communities, begin school with not only another language variety, but also often with no second language support, and in a school in which their teachers may view their creole or AAE as a deficient form of English, rather than as a distinct language variety. In addition to this, it is important to note that these children are mostly growing up in what is effectively a foreign language environment, in that creole, or a new mixed language, or a combination of the two is the language of the community. In Australian schools, children who speak creoles and AAE varieties as home languages face similar challenges in learning a new, but related, language variety with little educational support. In addition, the linguistic differences (and similarities) are not the only source of difficulty for teachers. We have chosen to treat Australian creoles and AAE together in our discussion of the Australian context, with reference to other creoles and minority dialects from elsewhere in the world.

ATTITUDES TOWARD CREOLES AND MINORITY DIALECTS

ATTITUDES IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY

To speakers of the standard language of the region, creoles and minority dialects are often viewed as inferior or 'deviant' forms of the standard language (Siegel, 2006). Creoles have grammatical and phonological differences incorporated from the TIL, and may also retain some of the simplifications that take place during pidgin development. These can be perceived as evidence of "careless" or "lazy" production of the standard variety, instead of evidence that a different variety is being used, and the creoles and minority dialects may be referred to as "bad English", "broken English" and "street language" (Siegel, 2006, pp. 40–41). These types of judgments have been expressed by policy makers, educators and the general public in many countries in which creoles are spoken. The stigmatisation of creoles and minority dialects is not just based on ideas of correctness, but also closely related to the circumstances in which these varieties develop. The association between creoles and low social status is persistent in the contact situations that gave rise to these languages, and continues to foster the idea that creole use should be restricted to certain domains, such as day-to-day oral communication. Migge, Léglise and Bartens (2010) observe that even though the situation for creoles is gradually shifting in some parts of the world, such attitudes remain a major obstacle to change because the language varieties are not seen as legitimate tools in educational institutions.

In the wider community, creole-speakers themselves may not want the creole to be used in school, because this can be seen as a move that will deprive them of access to the standard language, and hence limit their opportunities for employment and further education. Shnukal (1992) discusses this explicitly and suggests that the use of the creole in school can be seen as an instrument of political domination, claiming that the idea of using Torres Strait Creole in school was almost universally opposed by the Islanders, although there was no evidence presented of these negative attitudes, and they do not seem to be written about elsewhere, making it difficult to accept these assumptions as reflective of the actual situation. However, negative attitudes towards creoles are not set in stone; groups working to disseminate information about creoles and their value as distinct languages have had successes in dispelling common myths and misperceptions held by authorities, educators and the public, seen for example in the activities by Da Pidgin Coup in Hawai'i (Higgins, 2010). It is important to understand the attitudes of the wider community, which includes creole speakers, because such attitudes can affect the way creole speakers feel about their own language and the ways they engage with the language used in school.

ATTITUDES IN THE SCHOOL

In the school environment, children may be exposed to a range of conflicting attitudes towards creoles and minority dialects. Teachers may reinforce ideas expressed by

governments and educational authorities that the standard language is the only 'correct' form. Cahill and Collard (2003) observed that in Western Australian schools participating in the *Deadly Ways to Learn* project, SAE was called things like 'good English', 'educated English', 'his best talk', and 'saying it properly', implying judgements that the AAE spoken by the Indigenous students as their native dialect was inferior to the SAE dialect used at school. After a series of workshops and classroom visits over the course of the project, Cahill and Collard observed that the teachers and AIEOs (Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers) were without exception more careful in the terminology they used to talk about the two varieties of English, better reflecting a parity of esteem.

However, there are other complexities that can affect how students feel about the standard language in relation to their home language. For many creole and minority dialect speakers, the language is closely tied to membership of a particular cultural group; using the language is, as one speaker of TSC says, "about your identity and identifying where you are from" (Wallace, 2009, p. 2). Matters of identity and group affiliation are particularly important to children and adolescents. In a school situation where a different language is the norm, children may reach a point where they have to "decide with which camp to identify", as noted by Delpit (2006, p. 95) with reference to African American Vernacular English (AAVE). In the face of negative attitudes towards their home language, students may simply choose not to align themselves with the standard language being taught at school, preferring the solidarity offered by continued use of the home language.

If use of the school language is stigmatised by the students, teachers then need to consider activities that offer students the opportunity to use the school language without jeopardising their creole–speaking identity. Ovington (1992) discusses the game 'Kartiya' (*white man*), designed to take place within language awareness programs as a means of avoiding the 'shame' that Kriol speakers experience when speaking standard English. He provides two illustrative examples of 'shame' from Hudson (1983): a Kriol-speaking man who married a non-Kriol-speaking woman explains how "[w]hen my wife first came she used to make me really ashamed. She could only talk like a 'whitefella'". Another young woman said "[i]t's not okay for blacks to speak English to each other", and recalled being made fun of for speaking to a white woman in English. The game uses role play to provide a less threatening environment for English use; students adopt the personas of SAE-speaking members of the community and, from the 'mask' of these personas, are able to confidently practice using SAE and non-Indigenous paralinguistic features in a range of meaningful and functional ways. This context of use was less likely to jeopardise Indigenous identity and invoke feelings of shame, because "[t]he Kartiya game is essentially a giant role play of Standard Australian English and culture" (Hudson, 1983, p. 90). The game includes explicit teaching of dominant white Australian culture, based on the fundamental understanding that in order to learn the target language, one must learn something about the culture that goes with that

language. Ovington (1992, p. 90) argues that this explicit approach "is designed to facilitate Aboriginal culture maintenance by protecting against the unconscious absorption of hidden Anglo-Australian values".

The nature of the language program in place at a school may also affect student attitudes towards the school language. Murtagh (1982) compares the attitudes of Kriol-speaking Indigenous students towards both SAE and Kriol depending on whether they have been receiving a monolingual (SAE-only) or bilingual (SAE and Kriol) education. Students beginning their fourth year of each program were played eight short recorded passages, four in SAE and four in Kriol, and then answered brief attitudinal questions. While both groups had significantly more positive than negative attitudes towards Kriol, only the bilingually schooled group had significantly more positive than negative attitudes towards Standard Australian English. Given that the results for English proficiency (discussed in detail later) showed that "students schooled bilingually have demonstrated a very definite superiority over their monolingually schooled counterparts", Murtagh (1982, pp. 26–27) argues that "[t]his result would appear to bear out the widely held claim that motivation for children to learn a second language is closely associated with their attitudes to speakers of that language."

UNDERSTANDING CREOLE AND AAE-SPEAKING CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOUR IN THE CLASSROOM

COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES

A significant proportion of children entering the formal school system in Australia, and living in remote areas, will come to school with very little awareness and understanding of Standard Australian English. For many of these children, their teacher will be young, inexperienced, and without adequate training in the cultural and language differences s/he will encounter in the classroom (see Moses & Wigglesworth, 2008). When communication difficulties arise, teachers and students may perceive different reasons for the difficulties. Aboriginal adults interviewed by Malcolm (1992) shared the types of language/communication problems they had experienced or seen in school, and these fell into four basic concerns: *unfamiliarity* with teacher and school environment and expectations, *irrelevance* of the content of schooling, *fear* of being made conspicuous or judged wrong, and *incomprehension* of teacher language. In contrast, teachers interviewed about the communication of their Indigenous students felt that it was problematic in terms of *speech use*, rather than *language*; that it was inhibited *inside* but not *outside,* that it was viewed in terms of *responding* rather than *initiating*; that it shows *inexplicitness*, rather than *explicitness*; and that it shows a *pupil-pupil* orientation, rather than a *pupil-teacher* orientation. As Malcolm (1992) observes, the Aboriginal respondents were clearly more concerned with the context of the message, while the teachers were focused on differences in the form of the message.

LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES

Australian creoles have unique linguistic structures and show systematic differences from SAE in all areas, including the phonology, lexicon, grammatical structures, semantics and pragmatics. These differences result from a range of influences, including the inheritance from different TILs, the incorporation of features of SAE as well as other varieties of English present at the time of European settlement, and the natural processes of language evolution over many decades. AAE varieties, while having more in common with AAE, also exhibit many systematic differences. Teachers need to be aware that when children produce forms that differ from SAE, it is likely because they are drawing on their first language knowledge. In order to recognise what language varieties children are using when, teachers need to understand more about the nature of Australian creoles and AAE. However, there remain only limited materials that both describe these varieties and are useful to teachers. An excellent resource is the recent teacher-training resource *Tracks to Two-Way Learning Part 2: The Grammar of Dialect Difference* (Education Department of Western Australia and Department of Training, Workforce and Development Western Australia, 2012). This volume contains comprehensive and detailed descriptions of not just grammatical characteristics of AAE, such as unmarked gender on pronouns, but also exercises that test knowledge of the differences between the varieties. *Tracks to Two-Way Learning Part 2* also focuses on other types of language difference in speaking, constructing texts and telling stories.

CULTURAL AND CONCEPTUAL DIFFERENCES

Both students and teachers need to be aware of the different ways meaning is transmitted through different languages (i.e. cognitively) and through culture. Many Indigenous cultures have oral traditions through which cultural knowledge and historical understanding is transmitted. Teachers need to be aware of cross-cultural communication differences between Indigenous people and themselves, for example, the way information is organised, and the importance of silence, and of gestures, which are used extensively by Indigenous children as alternative way of expression. New skills are taught not through a series of explicit instructions, instead "[i]t is more about being shown and not told how to do things" (Wallace, 2009, p. 2), and a person is expected to learn not through asking questions but through carefully watching, listening and experiencing (Cahill & Collard, 2003). Malcolm (2011) focuses on this issue in detail, describing how Indigenous Australians approach experience and knowledge differently from Anglo Australians, and how Australian creoles and AAE are a product of Indigenous experience and the way it has evolved.

Malcolm (2011) also points out that Indigenous speakers have different conceptualisations of time that can impact on the way Indigenous children construct their understanding of the classroom activities, and the way they express themselves within the classroom. Indigenous understandings of experience and expression can be quite different from those put forward

by classroom teachers as the norm. As a result of this, and because the unfamiliar language means children do not fully understand what is going on around them in the classroom, they cannot relate the activities in the classroom to the real meanings in their lives and they are unable to develop their knowledge despite the exposure to the Standard Australian English, with the result that they are unengaged and uncommitted to the educational process. Malcolm continues:

> Craving something that relates to experience as they know it, Indigenous students are expected to adjust to talking in terms of abstracted existence and time. They are confronted with language which too quickly focuses on attributes and components, losing sight of the entities to which they belong. Even the language they think they know seems in the speech of others who do not share their dialect to have hidden meanings which they cannot appropriately respond to. (Malcolm, 2011, p. 270)

In fact, these linguistic and cultural factors are not only artefacts of the Indigenous populations living in remote areas. Sharifian (2005) reports on the results of a study undertaken in metropolitan Perth where participants had extensive exposure to non-Aboriginal society. He found that Indigenous students, who spoke perfect SAE, maintained distinctive conceptualisations related to Indigenous cultural experiences. He argues that such conceptualisations capture various aspects of human cognition and are multi-dimensional, derived from bodily, environmental and cultural experiences, and used to make sense of and organise new experiences.

Sharifian's (2005) study examined primary school students' associative responses to everyday English words. Twenty-eight Aboriginal English speaking students (primarily from a Nyungar background) and 30 Anglo-Australian students were provided with a word, like "shame" or "family" and asked to explain what it meant to them. He found two culturally distinct but overlapping conceptual systems for the two groups. Distinct words were *shame, home, people, family, kangaroo, deadly* and *camp,* which all evoked different concepts for the two groups of students. Words/concepts that overlapped tended to be related to similar environmental experiences (in schools, parks, shops), access to the same sort of 'modern' lifestyle and school materials, and membership of the same age group. The Indigenous participants' responses tended to rest on the importance of family, no matter what the word. For example the concept *park* also evoked the concept of extended family (i.e. a park is a place to spend time with family). Sharifian also noted some "cultural seepage" where students from both groups had cultural schemas that appeared to be a result of contact with the other group. He concludes that differences between the two groups are at the level of cultural conceptualisation, despite the fact that the students are all considered to have perfect Standard Australian English, both grammatically and phonologically. Language, then, is a way of instantiating cultural knowledge.

DIFFERENCES IN SCHOOL LANGUAGE AND HOME LANGUAGE

VALIDATION OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

As Haig, Königsberg and Collard (2005) point out, above all, it is crucial that children understand that both languages are equally valid, and that they provide the children with different ways of expressing themselves. Thus children need to be taught that code-switching is sometimes appropriate and they need to learn when this is the case. In other words, children need to be encouraged to develop their knowledge of language, both their own and the standard, in a caring and supportive environment, which builds on the skills which they bring to school. Inevitably, this means that teachers must be aware of the cultural differences between their own and the children's experiences, and be able to draw on these experiences, which will allow children to engage more fully in the classroom environment. Similarly, teachers need to recognise there are a range of pragmatic behaviours which may be interpreted in ways which result in negative evaluations of the students, when in reality they are culturally appropriate responses in their community. These include acknowledgement that pragmatics may be responsible for what is seen as 'bad behaviour' (i.e. teachers are actually faced with cross-cultural communication issues), an understanding that direct questions may not be the best way of seeking information, awareness of avoiding behaviours which may result in feelings of 'shame', and that silence is appropriate in communication in other cultures although uncomfortable in SAE culture.

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY TESTING

Lack of awareness of the variations in language and in particular of creoles as fully-fledged languages can also result in serious errors in language use in potentially high stakes situations. Wigglesworth, Simpson and Loakes (2011), in an analysis of the trial version of the Australian NAPLAN test,[ii] demonstrate this problem by pointing out that one of the distractors in a grammar multiple-choice test was in fact perfectly correct in Kriol although not in English. In addition, they note that the sample reading passages on which multiple-choice questions are based can contain material that is not only linguistically unfamiliar, e.g. the types of words and sentences structures used in movie posters, but also culturally unfamiliar, as a movie poster is not a genre encountered in remote communities. These types of standardised tests are therefore problematic as a diagnostic tool for the literacy skills of Indigenous students. In general, a greater awareness of language variation would eliminate problems of this kind, as well as providing teachers, educators and test writers with an understanding of the importance of variation in language, and help them not only to more effectively assist their students, but also to avoid mistakes of the types outlined above. Angelo (2012) illustrates the difficulties that TSC-speaking students experience when writing practice narrative texts in preparation for the written component of the NAPLAN test, pointing out their frequent use of non-SAE language features, which will significantly affect

results in an actual test situation. Angelo (2012) observes that through repeated practice, some of the students have clearly internalised the structural components of the genre for the upcoming written component of the test, but that knowing the expected structure of the narrative genre did little to help them succeed in producing a narrative. She argues that their lack of success is due to the limits of their proficiency in SAE, and that instead of repeated practice of the test genre, these creole-speaking students need explicit instruction of SAE as a distinct language variety. Knowing the differences between the home language and the school language is extremely important if a child is to have the best chance of success at acquiring the school language.

TEACHING CHILDREN WHO SPEAK AUSTRALIAN CREOLES AND AAE

BUILDING ON EXISTING SKILLS

Haig et al. (2005, p. 7) highlight the importance of building on the children's "considerable oral skills in their home language". They suggest that these skills are not often acknowledged, or used to assist in development of writing skills, which makes the focus on writing detrimental to AAE speaking students. Without using existing oral skills as a bridge to literacy skills, children may experience reading and writing only as decontextualised operations with words, rather than alternate forms of expression. Malcolm (1992) relates how some Aboriginal teachers, as a result of their own schooling experiences, had very different ideas of reading to non-Aboriginal educators, thinking that it was about calling out words as they appear on paper or learning pages of words by heart, rather than operating on the idea that the words make a story. Haig et al. (2005) additionally point out that teachers may take background cultural knowledge for granted, without consideration of the fact that when this knowledge is not available, students will be unable to produce texts. For example, they point out that there are a range of oral genres that AAE speakers are likely to be very familiar with (for example, travel or scary stories) but that these are different from the same genres in SAE, and are shaped by cultural experience and cultural ways of making meaning.

It is important to build on the existing skills not only of the students, but also of the teachers and of Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEOs) in the school. Cahill and Collard's (2003) study as part of the *Deadly Ways to Learn* project examined students in classrooms, focussing in particular on the importance of drawing on the unique knowledge of AEIOs in the classroom, encouraging teachers to be more willing to understand Indigenous meanings of words, increasing discussion about culture and languages between both staff and students, and maintaining careful use of terminology when referring to the AAE and SAE dialects. Cahill and Collard discuss the effort required for Indigenous children to 'cross over' linguistically and culturally when they go to school, and then again when they go home, and note that schools should, ideally, help alleviate some of that effort.

One of the most crucial aspects of success was the cohesion amongst the group working on the project, which was important for candid conversations related to the work. Collaborative sharing of knowledge enabled all parties to learn together. Cahill and Collard (2003) discuss the "the power of anecdote", which they found especially useful for transmitting ideas. During the project, a book was made called *Deadly Yarns* (Education Department of Western Australia, 2000a)*,* incorporating anecdotes about language, identity and power. They point out the importance of influencing the ways in which teachers think, as opposed to what they do, given that what they think is what drives, broadly, their decision making as well as their everyday behaviour towards students.

AWARENESS PROGRAMS IN BILINGUAL AND BIDIALECTAL SETTINGS

Programs incorporating explicit instruction in the standard language are referred to as *awareness programs*. These types of programs recognise that while the home language may have many similarities to the school language, students need to know how to find and learn the differences in order to successfully acquire the school language. Awareness programs differ from *accommodation programs*, which simply allow students' use of the creole or minority dialect for some activities, and *instrumental programs*, which include instruction not just about but also in each language variety, following bilingual educational models (Siegel, 1999). Siegel (1999) suggests that for practical reasons, awareness programmes are probably the best option for many students, particularly in light of the fact that many teachers have negative attitudes toward their students' dialects, and that there is therefore a need for much more groundwork to change these attitudes.

In Australia, most programs developed to assist children in acquiring the school language have been of the awareness sort. The *Deadly Ways to Learn* project was successful in introducing qualitative changes to schooling in Western Australia, and has been widely reported. The *Deadly Ideas* book produced as part of the project by the Education Department of Western Australia (2000b) contains a selection of teaching strategies which can be used by teachers with the broad aim of improving literacy outcomes for Aboriginal students through a variety of two-way bidialectal approaches. Arguing that there is a need for explicit instruction in SAE for children who speak different dialects or languages at home, the book emphasises the importance of students not at any point gaining the impression that they are required to replace their home variety with SAE. Rather, the aim is for teachers and schools to understand how to broaden the linguistic repertoires of the students they teach, to the extent that they can confidently code-switch between different varieties. The ability to skilfully code-switch is something that Indigenous speakers of creoles or AAE frequently mention as admirable or desirable (e.g. Walker, 2009), showing that these approaches are likely to have more community support than those aiming for SAE to be used *instead of* rather than *in addition to* home languages.

Given that the educationally-oriented descriptions of Australian creoles and AAE remain limited, both students and teachers must undertake to learn about the differences together. Teachers are often surprised to discover the many and systematic differences between the home language and the school language. In the *Deadly Yarns* collection of anecdotes from those involved in the *Deadly Ways to Learn* project (Education Department of Western Australia, 2000a), many teachers relate the confusion and communication difficulties they experienced before learning that certain words meant something different in Aboriginal English to SAE; before discovering this, they had been judging students as simply using SAE words incorrectly. As well as lexical differences, it is important that teachers recognise the differences in the sound systems of SAE and AAE and Kriol because these have implications for teaching children in the classroom. Haig et al. (2005) point out that teachers need to highlight the differences between the different phonological systems so that each group can tune into the other, and that phonological awareness strategies need to be used by teacher to illustrate these differences. In addition to this, they recommend the explicit teaching of aspects of language use which are problematic, particularly to older students. Equally important is teacher awareness of the prevalence of otitis media in Indigenous children which may have a profound effect on their language ability generally (see Galloway, 2008 for a discussion of the extent of this) and on the development of the phonological skills required to acquire literacy skills (Walker & Wigglesworth, 2001).

Differences in grammatical structures across the varieties also have implications for the classroom, so teachers need to develop the children's understanding of forms through both written and oral tasks and draw attention to patterns that emerge over time. Recent materials produced for teachers of creole- and AAE-speaking children emphasise the importance of spending time showing, and helping students to find, ways in which SAE and the home language differ, with the view that a good awareness of these differences will help children to switch between the two codes more effectively. Activities suggested in the *Deadly Ideas* book (Education Department of Western Australia, 2000b) include 'code-switch puppets', 'two-way mirror talk' (recasting sentences in different varieties), and 'listening post' (listening to recordings in different varieties and identifying features). Haig et al. (2005) advocate the use of "scribing", where an adult writes down what a child says and uses these texts for activities to teach literacy, thus assisting the children to learn the relationship between speech and print. The awareness approach could also be used to discover some of the cultural and conceptual differences mentioned earlier.

CREOLE BILINGUAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The social and cognitive benefits of bilingualism are now widely recognised, as are the benefits of bilingual education, at least in the academic world. Probably the most important factor in any bilingual educational program, whether it is in an indigenous language, a standard language, or a creole, is the support of the surrounding local population. The extent

to which bilingual education is positively viewed in the wider community is highly variable. Many parents from a second language background, determined to provide their children with every educational advantage, opt for monolingual education to achieve this goal, and it is probably largely because the benefits of bilingual/bidialectal education are not made public enough, or discussed widely enough, especially when new programs are being introduced. If the reasoning and methods that underpin it are not properly explained, public furore wins (see Rickford, 2006 in relation to bidialectal programs) with the advantages of education in the standard language of the country of education seen to outweigh any potential benefits of bilingual education. This is most apparent in instances where government authorities assume that creole use in school is the cause of poor educational outcomes for creole-speaking students, when in fact the research shows that it is the key to their educational success (Migge et al., 2010). Siegel (1999, p. 520) too draws attention to the fact that forty years of sociolinguistic research "[has] not filtered through (or trickled down) to most people", and the consequence is that the speakers who have been studied remain at a disadvantage. Nonetheless, given the attitudinal factors discussed above in relation to Australian creoles, the issue is a complex one.

While there have been a number of education programs in other parts of the world which have incorporated creoles or pidgins as languages of instruction (e.g. De Kleine, 2009; Koskinen, 2010; Siegel, 1997), these have been very limited in number in Australia. A key article in the discussion of creoles in the Australian education system, despite its age, is Murtagh (1982). Murtagh reports on a study designed to identify whether a program using both English and Creole as the languages of instruction facilitated the learning of *both* of these languages for Creole-speaking Indigenous children in the Northern Territory, compared to a monolingual program using English.

The children taking part in the study were two comparable groups of Year 1, 2 and 3 students from Beswick Reserve in the Northern Territory; those from Bamyili School received bilingual instruction, while those from Beswick School received monolingual instruction. The children involved in the study were not randomly selected, but were rather chosen based on the regularity of their attendance at school and the stability of their home environment, as judged from teacher evaluations and school records.[iii] The bilingual program had been in place for a few years when the data were collected from children in Years 1, 2 and 3. Children at the bilingual school received approximately half of their daily instruction in Kriol and the other half in English. Those at the monolingual school received only English instruction. Literacy skills were only introduced in Year 3, so the measurements of English language proficiency were based on oral proficiency and not written, with an additional listening comprehension test. The results show that in Year 1, bilingually-schooled students have statistically-significantly higher scores than monolingual students for two out of five measures; in Year 2, there were significantly better scores for bilingual students in four out of

five measures; and in Year 3, bilingual students scored significantly better than monolingual students on all measures of English proficiency.

Murtagh (1982, p. 24) observes that "[t]hese results indicate that bilingual schooling had a significant effect on all five dependent measures of oral language proficiency in the mother tongue" and notes

> a very definite trend away from negative transfer from Year 1 through Year 3 for students schooled bilingually, whereas no such trend is evident for students schooled monolingually. The increasing ability to separate the two languages (English and Kriol) which bilingually schooled students have shown would appear to be a result of both languages being taught as separate languages in the classroom.

It should also be noted that the progressively better scores for bilingual students as they moved towards their fourth year of bilingual schooling is additional evidence for arguments that the benefits of bilingual education will only be observed after children have been in such programs for several years. Carpenter and Devonish (2010) found similar results in the Jamaican Creole program, which the government reduced to four years instead of six, despite awareness that the recommended duration needed before positive results could be observed was held to be five to seven years (Cummins, 2001; Thomas & Collier, 1997). The necessity for long-term trial programs is an issue which is difficult for many authorities to grasp, but results cannot be achieved in a short period of time.

CONCLUSIONS

It is now widely recognised, internationally, that there are significant linguistic disadvantages for students who speak creoles. They generally exit the school system with lower literacy levels than non-creole-speakers, and with poorer academic performance in general. The fact that many pilot bilingual programs only run for a few years is problematic because research suggests that students need to have been fully immersed in a bilingual education environment for at least five to seven years before the benefits of the bilingual program can be observed and measured (Carpenter & Devonish, 2010; Cummins, 2001). There is now a significant body of evidence which points to the fact that children should first be taught in their home language almost entirely for the first few years of school, whilst being introduced to the second language/dialect orally, with a gradual increase as school years progress.

The value attributed to the dominant/school language and how it is perceived by students and their parents is crucial, as is the attitude toward creoles and the non-dominant languages (and this also applies to migrant cultures). There is also the issue of whether actually becoming fluent in the standard dominant language is feasible, particularly for children living in remote Indigenous communities for whom Standard Australian English is effectively a foreign

language, rather than a second language, since, in the communities in which the children live, access to SAE is often limited to the classroom.

REFERENCES

Angelo, D. (2012). Sad stories: A preliminary study of NAPLAN practice texts analysing students' second language linguistic resources and the effects of these on their written narratives. In M. Ponsonnet, L. Dao & M. Bowler, (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 42nd Australian Linguistic Society Conference – 2011*. ANU Research Repository. Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/1885/9313.

Cahill, R. & Collard, G. (2003). Deadly ways to learn: having a yarn about some learning we did together. *Comparative Education*, *39*(2), 211–219.

Carpenter, K. & Devonish, H. (2010). Swimming against the tide: Jamaican Creole in education. In B. Migge, I. Léglise & A. Bartens, (Eds.), *Creoles in education: An appraisal of current programs and projects* (pp. 167–181). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Cummins, J. (2001). *Language, power and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

De Kleine, C. (2009). Sierra Leonean and Liberian Students in ESL programs in the US: The role of Creole English. In J. A. Kleifgen & G. C. Bond, (Eds.), *The languages of Africa and the diaspora: Educating for language awareness* (pp. 178–198). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Delpit, L. (2006). What should teachers do? Ebonics and culturally responsive instruction. In S. Nero, (Ed.), *Dialects, Englishes, creoles, and education* (pp. 93–101). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Education Department of Western Australia, Catholic Education Office of Western Australia and the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia. (2000a). *Deadly yarns: Anecdotes about language, culture, identity and power from the Deadly Ways to Learn Project*. Western Australia: Deadly Ways to Learn Consortium.

Education Department of Western Australia, Catholic Education Office of Western Australia and the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (2000b). *Deadly ideas: A collection of two–way bidialectal teaching strategies from the Deadly Ways to Learn project*. Western Australia: Deadly Ways to Learn Consortium.

Education Department of Western Australia and Department of Training and Workforce Development (2012). *Tracks to two–way learning*. Perth: Western Australia Department of Education and Department of Training and Workforce Development.

Galloway, A. (2008). Indigenous children and conductive hearing loss. In J. Simpson & G. Wigglesworth, (Eds.), *Children's language and multilingualism: Indigenous language use at home and school* (pp. 216–234)*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Haig, Y., Königsberg, P. & Collard, P. (2005). *Teaching students who speak Aboriginal English* (pp. 1–12). Marrickville, NSW: Primary English Teaching Association.

Higgins, C. (2010), Raising critical language awareness in Hawai'i at Da Pidgin Coup. . In B. Migge, I. Léglise & A. Bartens, (Eds.), *Creoles in education: An appraisal of current programs and projects* (pp. 31–54). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Koskinen, A. (2010). Kriol in Caribbean Nicaragua schools. In B. Migge, I. Léglise & A. Bartens, (Eds.), *Creoles in education: An appraisal of current programs and projects* (pp. 133–166). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Malcolm, I. G. (1992). English in the education of speakers of Aboriginal English. In J. Siegel, (Ed.), *Pidgins, creoles and nonstandard dialects in education* (pp. 14–41). Melbourne: Applied Linguistics Association of Australia.

Malcolm, I. G. (2011) Learning through Standard English: Cognitive implications for post–pidgin/–creole speakers. *Linguistics and Education*, *22*, 261–272.

Migge, B., Léglise, I. & Bartens, A. (2010). Creoles in education: a discussion of pertinent issues. In B. Migge, I. Léglise & A. Bartens, (Eds.), *Creoles in education: An appraisal of current programs and projects* (pp. 1–30). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Moses, K. & Wigglesworth, G. (2008). The silence of the frogs: dysfunctional discourse in the 'English–only' Aboriginal classroom. In J. Simpson & G. Wigglesworth, (Eds.), *Children's language and multilingualism: Indigenous language use at home and school* (pp. 129–153). UK: Continuum International.

Murtagh, E. J. (1982). Creole and English as languages of instruction in bilingual education with Aboriginal Australians: Some research findings. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, *36*, 15–33.

Ovington, G. (1992). Teaching English to Kriol speakers: the Kartiya game. In J. Siegel, (Ed.), *Pidgins, creoles and nonstandard dialects in education* (pp. 87–98). Melbourne: Applied Linguistics Association of Australia.

Rickford, J. (2006). Linguistics, education and the Ebonics firestorm. In S. Nero, (Ed.), *Dialects, Englishes, creoles, and education* (pp. 71–92). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Sharifian, F. (2005). Cultural conceptualisations in English words: A study of Aboriginal children in Perth. *Language and Education*, *19*(1), 74–88.

Shnukal, A. (1992). The case against a transfer bilingual program of Torres Strait Creole to English in Torres Strait Schools. In J. Siegel, (Ed.), *Pidgins, creoles and nonstandard dialects in education* (pp. 1–12). Melbourne: Applied Linguistics Association of Australia.

Siegel, J. (1997). Using a pidgin language in formal education: Help or hindrance? *Applied Linguistics*, *18*, 86–100.

Siegel, J. (1999). Creole and minority dialects in education: An overview. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *20*(6), 508–531.

Siegel, J. (2006). Keeping creoles and dialects out of the classroom: is it justified? In S. Nero, (Ed.), *Dialects, Englishes, creoles, and education* (pp. 39–67). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Thomas, W. P. & Collier, V. (1997). *School effectiveness for language minority students*. Washington DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.

Tyron, D. & Charpentier J. M. (2004). *Pacific pidgins and creoles*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Wallace, V. (2009). *Valda Wallace's language story, FNQ–ISSU language interview project*. Cairns: Language Perspectives Group, Education Queensland. Retrieved 15 January, 2013, from http://www.languageperspectives.org.au/.

Walker, J. (2009). *Janice Walker's language story, FNQ–ISSU language interview project*. Cairns: Language Perspectives Group, Education Queensland. Retrieved 15 January, 2013, http://www.languageperspectives.org.au/.

Walker, N. & Wigglesworth, G. (2001). The effect of conductive hearing loss on phonological awareness, reading and spelling of urban Aboriginal students. *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Audiology, 23*(1), 37–51.

Wigglesworth, G., Simpson, J. & Loakes, D. (2011). NAPLAN language assessments for indigenous children in remote communities: issues and problems. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 34(3), 320–343.

ENDNOTES

i   Basilectal and acrolectal varieties occur on a continuum where basilectal is the furthest from the standard language and acrolectal is the most similar to it. Mesolectal is the term used to represent the intermediate between the two. Individual speakers may adopt more or less basilectal/acrolectal speech according to situation, interlocutor, etc.

ii   The National Assessment of Proficiency in Language and Numeracy (NAPLAN) test is administered in English nation-wide to all children enrolled in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 annually.

iii   School attendance by Indigenous children in remote communities tends to be somewhat erratic.