



## What role for the Asian language expertise of children in Australian schools in the Asian Century?

Jackie Coleman

*Australian Catholic University*

### Abstract

*The first languages (L1s) of Asian-background English as an Additional Language (EAL) students in Australia represent a valuable, yet widely under-recognised linguistic resource for this effectively English-monolingual nation in the Asia Pacific region, as what the Australian government terms ‘the Asian century’, unfolds. This paper contends that the release of the Labor government publication, Australia in the Asian Century, White Paper and the roll-out of the new Australian Curriculum: English provide a unique opportunity to focus attention on this linguistic resource and on theory-supported ‘additive’ pedagogies (Lambert, 1975) capable of promoting simultaneous development of EAL students’ L1s and achievement of English proficiency within mainstream classrooms. It considers some of the challenges to the realisation of ‘additive’ pedagogies, such as teacher knowledge about language (KAL) and Second Language Acquisition (SLA), and the English-monolingualism of the majority of Australian teachers, and draws on data from a small study to illustrate those challenges in one site. Suggestions are made for teacher professional learning so that the Asian language expertise of children in Australian schools is not squandered.*

**Key words:** *English (additional language); teacher roles; knowledge base for teaching; professional development.*

### Introduction

Despite its multicultural population, Australia is effectively a monolingual, English-speaking nation within the multilingual Asia-Pacific region. In 2012 the Australian Labor government recently released *Australia in the Asian Century, White Paper* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012) which considers how Australia can position itself to respond to “Asia’s extraordinary ascent” (p.1). It presents Asia’s ascent as “an Australian opportunity” (p.1) and argues for “a whole-of-Australia effort” (p. 3) to take advantage of this opportunity. In the education sector, ‘Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia’ has been named one of three Cross-Curriculum priorities (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2011) of the new national *Australian Curriculum*. (Previously curricula were state-based). This suggests that this new orientation to Asia, given the geographical and economic imperatives to pursue it, will continue regardless of any change to government which may occur.

*Australia in the Asian Century* names 25 objectives and ‘pathways’ for achieving these by 2025. Amongst them is “All Australian students will have the opportunity, and be encouraged, to undertake a continuous course of study in an Asian language throughout their years of schooling” (p.16). Chinese (Mandarin), Hindi, Indonesian and Japanese are identified as ‘priority Asian languages.’ The ‘pathways’ to achieve this objective are formulated within the paradigm of these being ‘foreign’ languages in Australia requiring ‘foreign’ language teaching methodology. They include the development of “detailed strategies for studies of Asia and Asian languages take-up in schools” (p.16) and “increas[ing] understanding of the benefits of learning a foreign language” (p.16).



However, the *White Paper* gives no target for Asian language proficiency and has been criticised by prominent Australian linguist Joseph Lo Bianco, as being “unrealistic” and “built on the dreams of people unconnected with schools” (Armitage, 2012). Lo Bianco claims that the government will not fund sufficient teaching hours to allow for English-speaking students to develop proficiency in ‘foreign’ Asian languages. Given this claim, it is concerning that the *White Paper* fails to recognise an alternative ‘pathway’ to achieve its objective, that is, the ‘priority Asian language’ expertise that exists amongst Asian-background English as an Additional Language (EAL) students in Australian schools. For example, in New South Wales, 8.2% of EAL learners are Chinese (Mandarin) speakers, 3.9 % are Hindi speakers, 1.5% speak Indonesian and 1.1% speak Japanese (New South Wales, Department of Education and Communities, 2012). This article contends that the Asian-origin linguistic capital and insider cultural knowledge of EAL students are inextricably linked (Crozet, Liddicoat & Lo Bianco, 1999) and of great value to Australia in ‘the Asian century.’ It argues that this valuable capital should, and can, be developed within existing instructional paradigms in Australian schools.

EAL students in Australia are diverse, with a variety of cultural and educational histories and differing proficiencies in their first languages (L1s) (ACARA, 2011). The majority receive English language instruction incidentally with curricular instruction from mainstream teachers, rather than EAL specialists, or in bilingual programmes. Bilingual programmes represent the ideal for development of minority L1s. However, Australia historically has had “no system wide large scale initiative in bilingual education” (J. Gibbons, 1997, p. 210). Advocacy for harnessing EAL students’ Asian L1 skills as one ‘pathway’ for promoting Australia’s Asian language proficiency must, then, be situated within a mainstream paradigm. Part of EAL students’ knowledge base for the construction of additional ‘school’ knowledge is their L1 proficiency. The possibility of simultaneously promoting English and L1 development exists where teachers are language-knowledgeable and employ appropriate pedagogies to actively draw on students’ L1s. However, the prevailing methodology in Australia, to borrow from Cook (2001) “do[es] not so much forbid the L1 as ignore its existence altogether” (p. 404). Such ‘ignoring’ is consistent with reports that many teachers of EAL students regard English as the only legitimate linguistic capital for school success (Wallace, 2005).

Currently, professional learning to build Australian teachers’ language and pedagogical knowledge for teaching EAL students may not occur, especially outside metropolitan areas (Allard, 2006). A companion document to the new *Australian Curriculum, English as an Additional Language or Dialect: Teacher Resource*, states that “Teachers will assist [EAL] students’ learning by both delivering the content of the Australian Curriculum and providing instruction that explicitly develops the English language skills of EAL students” (ACARA, 2011, p. 7). The Curriculum thus provides a valuable opportunity, in the context of *Australia in the Asian Century*, to focus on explicit pedagogies to develop students’ English proficiency, and on how they can simultaneously develop EAL students’ L1s. A brief description of such pedagogies and the theoretical bases supporting this ‘pathway’ follows.

## Relevant Second Language Acquisition theory

Language pedagogies which add proficiency in a new language to existing proficiency in another language are termed ‘additive’ (Lambert, 1975). Conversely, those which replace proficiency in one language with proficiency in another are considered ‘subtractive’ (Lambert, 1975). Pursuing ‘additive’ pedagogies in English-speaking Australia is problematic due to the “hegemonic influence of English as the current lingua Mundi” (May, 2011, p. 235). May (2011) notes “the relative novelty of adopting an additive bilingual approach to TESOL” (p. 235). Nonetheless, many ‘additive’ pedagogies derived from bilingual programmes are adaptable to “teaching for cross-linguistic transfer” (Cummins, 2005, p. 588) in mainstream classes. For example, Cummins (2005) claims that “systematic attention to cognate relationships across languages”, “creation of student-authored dual language books” and “sister class projects” (p. 588) where students from different backgrounds collaborate using two or more languages, are effective in both teaching contexts.

Use of ‘additive’ pedagogies in mainstream classes is supported by Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research outcomes, such as the Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) hypothesis (Cummins, 1981) which contends that literacy and cognitive skills developed in the L1 are transferred to the L2, once a ‘critical’ level of proficiency has been attained in the L1. There is, Cummins (2000) claims, a “central processing system which underpins academic performance in both languages” (including dissimilar languages such as Japanese and English) (p. 191). CUP indicates that EAL students’



English proficiency will not develop through classroom exposure alone, rather formal instruction which links “English concepts and knowledge with the learner’s L1 cognitive schema” (Cummins, 2000, p. 39) is required. This can only be achieved where L1s are afforded a classroom role by teachers with a “clear view and understanding of learners’ full linguistic repertoire” (Taylor, 2009, p. 310). Consistent with this orientation, the *English as an Additional Language or Dialect: Teacher Resource* (ACARA, 2011) recommends that teachers draw on EAL students’ cultural and linguistic resources by “allow[ing] [students] to make use of their first language to make sense of Standard Australian English and to facilitate the learning of new concepts” (p. 94). CUP supports this position, suggesting that mainstream teachers can promote students’ L1 development even when they do not speak it, by acknowledging, valuing and encouraging classroom L1 use (Franquiz & de la Luz Reyes, 1998). Teachers can further support ongoing development of the L1 by encouraging parents to involve students in outside school-hours language classes, and to continue L1 family and community use.

Another relevant SLA theory is the distinction between social and academic language, termed by Cummins (1981) Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). These proficiency domains are distinct and develop over significantly different time-frames; BICS usually within two to three years and CALP seven to ten years (Thomas & Collier, 2002). This theory indicates that teachers need to explicitly intervene in EAL students’ oral English production to support their gradual movement toward control of academic English. In tandem with CUP, BICS/CALP provides strong justification for the implementation of ‘additive’ pedagogies with ‘priority Asian language’ speakers in Australian classrooms. Attention now turns to consideration of the language model of the *Australian Curriculum: English* with regard to ‘additive’ pedagogies.

## **Australian curriculum: English**

The *Australian Curriculum: English* has three strands: language, literacy and literature (ACARA, 2011). The language strand provides a vehicle to focus attention on ways of teaching English that can simultaneously promote the alternative ‘pathway’ of developing EAL students’ L1s. Hammond (2012) contends that the Curriculum offers “considerable hope” (p. 224) for EAL students due to its functional language model which “sees language as a system of resources for making meaning” (Derewianka, 2012, p.141), and the affordances this provides for ‘additive’ teaching of EAL students. This functional language model provides a means of focusing on language use as contextualised and systematic and for situating features such as syntax which contribute to EAL students’ control over academic English, and potentially similar registers, in their L1s. Functional language teaching assists movement from BICS to CALP, and consistent with CUP, can be ‘additive’. EAL students can draw on their L1s and cultural knowledge to explicitly compare English and their own languages’ structures and the ways in which they reflect and establish cultural norms.

### **Challenges to ‘additive’ Curriculum implementation**

There are, nonetheless, serious challenges to the ‘additive’ potential of the new Curriculum. Hammond (2012) identifies teachers’ need for professional learning to develop deep knowledge about language (KAL) and SLA. Teachers without deep KAL often fail to recognise the challenges confronting EAL students in mastering academic English (Lucas & Villegas, 2010). As a result, they may not provide the explicit language instruction that Cummins (2005) contends is necessary to activate CUP and allow EAL learners to access advanced curricular content. Internationally, many mainstream teachers have been shown to ‘position’ themselves principally as teachers of content, rather than language (Janzen, 2008). The literature identifies a number of reasons for this including inadequate professional learning of KAL (Murray, 2010) and SLA theory (Harper & de Jong, 2004) and institutional pressure to cover curricular content (Hammond, 2012). However, a factor not widely considered in relation to teacher self-positioning and its impact on EAL students, is the English monolingualism of the Australian educational context. Given that EAL students receive most of their instruction in English-speaking mainstream classes, teacher monolingualism is significant to the prospects for implementation of ‘additive’ pedagogies with the new Curriculum as ‘the Curriculum will enter schools with existing routines and resources’ (Jones & Chen, 2012, p.167), and pivotal amongst these resources are mainstream teachers.



## Monolingual teachers of language

The literature reports that some monolingual teachers believe EAL students are 'deficient' (Black, 2006) and that monolingualism in a society's dominant language is 'normal' (Gogolin, 2002). Such beliefs obscure the value of EAL students' L1s. Despite Australia's location in the Asia-Pacific, Clyne (2005) describes a "persistent monolingual mindset" (p. xi) within Australian education which "sees everything in terms of monolingualism being the norm" (p. xi). This is perhaps reflective of English's hegemony as a lingua franca globally (May, 2011). The "overwhelmingly Anglo-Australian [and] monolingual" (Allard, 2006, p. 321) composition of the Australian teaching force contributes to normalisation of English monolingualism. The prevalence of English-monolingualism in Australia is arguably reflected in the government's failure to identify development of Australian children's existing Asian L1 proficiency as a 'pathway' for taking advantage of the 'Asian Century's' opportunities. The normalisation of English-monolingualism in Australian education suggests that teachers and indeed policy writers and teacher educators, may 'look through, rather than at' language (P. Gibbons, 2002) as part of their professional habitus.

Habitus (Bourdieu, 1983) is strategic practice produced through socialisation in a specific sociocultural environment. Gogolin (2002) describes a 'monolingual monocultural' habitus, maintained by the education system, contending it "function[s] as an awareness matrix, action matrix and thought matrix" (p. 132). Linguistic homogeneity as "the 'normal' ... point of departure in teaching" (p. 135) is a core assumption of this habitus. Consistent with this claim, studies have shown that some Australian teachers do not understand the role of EAL students' L1s in English learning, and do not utilise them as classroom resources (Liu, 2010). Other research internationally demonstrates that monolinguals do not possess the same implicit metalinguistic awareness as bilinguals (Bialystok, 2001). In addition, many Australian teachers lack personal experience as language learners (Ellis, 2003). Given that teachers' personal experiences "help form their educational worldviews, intellectual and educational dispositions" (Dedeoglu & Lamme, 2009, p. 27), many teachers can draw on neither the implicit metalinguistic awareness available to bilinguals, nor understandings derived from experiences as language learners, in their pedagogical responses to EAL students.

Within the 'monolingual monocultural habitus' the teacher's role is unconscious, as is its impact on EAL students' L1 development. This unconsciousness contributes to the apparent durability of the habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). However, Bourdieu (2002) argues that habitus, while durable, "may be changed by ... new experiences, education or training" (p. 29). Gogolin (2002) similarly claims that consciousness-raising can "conquer habitual practice" (p. 136). Accordingly, consciousness, and the disruption of habitus that it might represent, may be promoted through opportunities to reflect on practice. This suggests that the 'monolingual mindset' (Clyne, 2005) of Australian education is not immutable.

Having briefly sketched the potential and challenges that exist nationally for the implementation of the *Australian Curriculum: English* to act as a vehicle for an alternative 'pathway' to increase Australia's Asian language proficiency, attention now turns to part of a small study as a means of illustrating the challenges in one site.

## The illustrative study

The small ethnographic case study took place in part of non-metropolitan Australia in which linguistic diversity is increasing due to immigration (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Conducted during a ten-week school term, its aim was to explore the nature of the responses of mainstream teachers to their EAL students. Beverly and June (pseudonyms), two English-monolingual mainstream primary teachers were the principal participants. Neither had additional or foreign language learning experience nor professional learning in KAL or SLA. Each teacher had three EAL students in her class.

### Data gathering

Daily observation involved using a pro-forma based on the Curriculum Cycle (Derewianka, 1991) to record evidence of explicit, language-focused pedagogies. The Curriculum Cycle comprises stages of field building, deconstruction and modeling, joint construction and independent construction. In



Australia it is widely recognised as a means of supporting the language learning of EAL students in mainstream contexts (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). The proforma allowed for recording of the implementation of the various stages of the Curriculum Cycle and instances of explicit teaching of language that occurred within these. Audio recordings were made and transcribed and field notes taken daily. Teachers were also interviewed twice during the term to explore their observed responses to their EAL students. Interviews were open-ended. The reported data are drawn from responses to the questions: Does what you're able to do in the mainstream class meet the needs of your EAL students? What is your opinion of the use of the first language (L1) in the classroom? Does having EAL students in your class affect the way you teach the class as a whole?

### **Data analysis**

Pro formas, transcripts and field notes were studied repeatedly. Coding was used to organise data, to generate descriptions, and to develop categories. The categories reflected two broad themes; teacher knowledge and attitudes. A further analytical process involved looking for relationships between teacher knowledge and attitudes identified in interviews and observed classroom responses to EAL students.

### **Findings and discussion**

Findings of relevance to this article relate to teacher knowledge and attitudes and their impact on the chances for 'additive' implementation of the Australian Curriculum: English for EAL students.

#### **Teacher Knowledge**

Both teachers expressed experiential understanding that EAL students have distinct English language needs. They identified their students' primary learning need as 'knowledge' of English. For example, June noted that her students' skill in mathematics, "but where they get caught is ... the language of maths." Beverly characterised EAL students' language needs as, "tend[ing] to be more in grammar." She explained that this was because "at home they've not got people who are natural English speakers therefore [they're] not going to get proper grammar." Beverly's comment is typical of a number of comments made by both teachers that implied belief that exposure alone, without explicit instruction and reference to the L1, is adequate to develop the English proficiency required for school success.

In interviews, the teachers demonstrated awareness of BICS/CALP (Cummins, 1981), and of their different developmental timeframes. They made the following comments of social English: "They seem to do it fairly quickly" (Beverly) and "They can speak it better ... I wouldn't say they're proficient [in academic English]" (June). Hence, they expressed some experiential knowledge of SLA which could be a point of potential for 'additive' pedagogies. Nonetheless, neither teacher mentioned pedagogies she employed due to her understandings of BICS/CALP and of EAL students' learning needs. Observational data confirmed minimal pedagogies aimed at addressed EAL students' language needs. For example, the data from the Curriculum Cycle pro-forma, with specific reference to the stage of deconstruction and modeling, were analysed for evidence of explicit teaching of language, particularly at the sentence level where EAL students most require explicit instruction (Macken-Horarik, 2005). The data confirmed teachers' contentions that having EAL students in their classes did not affect their pedagogies, specifically in relation to teaching language. In all observed instances in both classrooms, very little, if any, explicit attention was paid to how language realised content in the subjects under study. Teachers appeared not to recognise the language demands of accessing this content, suggestive of their monolingualism and lack of KAL and formal SLA knowledge.

#### **Attitude to L1 use**

Teachers principally viewed students' L1s as cultural resources for community use. L1s were not considered academic resources worthy of academic development at school. June linked use of 'English only' in her classroom to EAL students' academic success, making the following comment: "I think if they're going to cope educationally ... they need to speak English ... so I don't think it's a bad thing for them to be speaking English." When the researcher mentioned her observation that the children (who all shared the same L1), spoke speak English amongst themselves, June responded approvingly, saying "And they used to not do that, they used to speak in their own language." A



'subtractive' (Lambert, 1975) orientation to her students' L1 is clearly expressed in this remark. On the other hand, Beverly condoned L1 use during the stage of field building, saying she "didn't mind" EAL students "helping each other" in their L1 at that stage. However, the L1 could not be used to demonstrate knowledge at school, for example, in "a kind of ... test where you want to see what they know." Thus, the L1 served as a bridge to the 'subtractive' (Lambert, 1975) development of English proficiency.

### Professional learning for 'additive' Curriculum implementation

All the data were drawn on in attempting to understand the teachers' attitudes, knowledge and self-positioning relative to 'language' and their EAL students. Analysis suggests that teachers do not conceptualise their students' L1s as academic resources and that they maintain a binary conceptualisation of language and content, indicative of lack of formal preparation in KAL, typical of many Australian teachers (Murray, 2010). Internationally, in recent years, where professional learning for working with EAL students in mainstream contexts has occurred, it has focused on cultural inclusivity and responsiveness, rather than study of language (Aguirre-Muñoz & Amabisca, 2010). As a result, "current practice ... assumes that EAL students can deduce the linguistic structures that comprise a given subject matter" (Aguirre-Muñoz & Amabisca, 2010, p. 264). Being left to deduce linguistic structures through lack of explicit and 'additive' language instruction denies EAL students access to their linguistic capital and thus, according to the CUP hypothesis, impedes their chances of achieving academic proficiency in English while simultaneously developing their L1s. Obviously, these teachers need, and deserve, thorough professional learning.

Designing professional learning to support implementation of the *Australian Curriculum English* in ways that will promote development of 'priority Asian languages' is an extremely complex task. Its realisation will be influenced by the constraints presented by the Australian government's stated Asian language 'pathways' and funding priorities, by the hegemony of English in Australia, and by any future changes to government. *Australia in the Asian Century*'s failure to identify Asian language expertise present in schools suggests that the alternative 'pathway' of developing students' existing Asian L1 expertise, and the professional learning teachers require to do this, will not be a funding priority. Nonetheless, the data from this small study indicate that in this site teachers need thorough professional learning in KAL and SLA. Aguirre-Muñoz and Amabisca's (2010) claim that in current practice EAL students are left to their own deductions about language appears apposite for these teachers who have not had adequate professional learning about language of the different subjects they are expected to teach, nor of research-supported 'additive' pedagogies. Teachers obviously, should not be left in this untenable situation.

In order to optimise internalisation of knowledge from professional learning, opportunities for teachers to interrogate their monolingualism and its implications relative to their understandings of 'language' and their attitudes toward their EAL students' linguistic capital, should occur. The teachers' comments suggest the influence of the 'monolingual mindset' (Clyne, 2005) on their attitudes toward languages. They indicate that Beverly and June need support to focus on the linguistic resources which EAL students bring to their learning. In this way, the monolingual habitus in which their current professional practice appears to be embedded may be 'disrupted' (Bourdieu, 2002) and newly acquired KAL and SLA knowledge possibly applied in classrooms in 'additive' ways for EAL students. While it is important to restate here that this small study is used only illustratively in this paper, its findings appear to broadly support Skutnabb-Kangas' (2000) claim that a monolingual teacher of bilingual students is "by definition an incompetent teacher for those students" (p. 632). While this claim might be considered extreme by most involved in Australian education, it seems reasonable to contend that an inadequately prepared monolingual teacher of speakers of Asian L1s, operating within an uninterrogated 'monolingual monocultural habitus' is *probably* "an incompetent teacher for those students" (p. 632) in terms of her ability to promote simultaneous English and L1 development. Given the government's apparent lack of recognition of the value of developing existing Asian linguistic capital and the "relative novelty" (May, 2011, p. 235) of 'additive' pedagogies in Australian schools and other TESOL settings, it falls to teacher professional associations, academics and informed members of the public to seize the opportunity provided by the new *Australian Curriculum: English* to advocate for the provision of appropriate professional learning for mainstream teachers, if the additional 'pathway' of developing existing Asian L1 expertise, is to be realised. The detailed description given in this paper of the contemporary Australian educational context relative to the teaching of other



languages, and any validity of a generalisable nature that it might hold, also potentially represent a useful contribution to theory and practice in other contexts.

## Conclusion

The *Australia in the Asian Century, White Paper* (COA, 2012) stresses the need for Australians to learn Asian languages as 'foreign' languages so as to take advantage of the ascent of Asia. However, it does not identify harnessing the existing 'priority Asian language' expertise of EAL students in Australian schools as a 'pathway' for developing Asian L1 proficiency. This article has contended that the *Australian Curriculum: English* offers a moment of potential for beginning a vital shift in orientation to the L1s of EAL students in Australian schools, especially those of Asian origin. Supported by SLA theory and the Curriculum's language model, mainstream teachers could draw upon, and develop, the existing linguistic capital of these students, simultaneously with their English learning, by the use of 'additive' language-focused pedagogies. This paper has proposed that in order to realise this shift mainstream teachers must receive adequate professional learning in KAL and SLA, in tandem with opportunities to interrogate their English monolingualism and how it may impact on their understandings of their EAL students' learning resources and their own pedagogical practices. If these opportunities are not made available, then a hugely valuable national resource for navigating the 'Asian Century', that is, Australia's existing 'priority Asian language' expertise, may be squandered.

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