

# E Pluribus Unum

The fourth JBLM, presented in Sydney on 29 September 1995 by **Mr Chris Puplick, MA**

Australia has an odd, but by no means unique, history of linguistic diversity. Like many places that were settled by foreign colonists, Australia at the time of the arrival of the first Europeans had a rich variety of languages spoken throughout its length and breadth. The Macquarie Dictionary of Aboriginal Words claims that at least 250 different Indigenous languages were spoken. We have little or no way of knowing the extent to which different language groups were able to communicate with each other, or how many of the Indigenous people were multilingual, but it is fair to assume that given patterns of Aboriginal marriage, quite a large number were. Similarly, we have no idea of the nature of interpreters among the Indigenous population.

Our early colonial history reveals little about the role of interpreters between the colonists and the original inhabitants, or the extent to which the colonists learned or studied very much about Indigenous languages. The messages printed by Governor King in cartoon-pictorial style to try to explain to the Indigenous people some of the rules of the new colony, and its system of laws and punishments in particular, relied upon anything but the spoken or written word.

There is, for example, nothing in our colonial history to demonstrate some equivalent of the role which the famous Dona Marina played as the interpreter between the conquering Spanish conquistadors of Hernan Cortes and the court of the Aztec ruler Montezuma. Those familiar with the history of the conquest of Mexico will know that Dona Marina (the Aztec princess Ce Malinalli) in her role as interpreter, was also a significant shaper of policy in relation to that sorry episode. Indeed, I doubt that anywhere else in history can one find an interpreter who was so crucial in deciding the policy outcomes of so great a venture.

Like most colonial situations, the loss of diversity in Indigenous languages has been one of the saddest features of the last two hundred years of our national history. It is estimated that:

“...only 10% of Aboriginal people still speak their Indigenous languages. Of the original 250 or so distinct languages, two-thirds (about 160) are either extinct or have only a handful of elderly speakers remaining. Only about 20 of the surviving languages are actively transmitted to children and are spoken fluently by both

**Chris Puplick** became President of the Anti-Discrimination Board of New South Wales in 1994. The Board, part of the Attorney-General's Department, administers the anti-discrimination laws in NSW, including complaints of unfair treatment or discrimination, and tries through education to prevent discrimination happening, reporting to the Government if it thinks the law needs changing to help give more people a ‘fair go’.

Chris Puplick's first public address as President of the ADB was to a Law Week seminar in 1994, on cross-cultural issues and the law. A representative of AUSIT presented a paper on interpreters and the courtroom at the same seminar.

Born in London, Mr Puplick arrived in Australia in 1962. After completing a B.A. (Hons) in 1968 and an M.A. in 1969 at the University of Sydney, he began his career as Parliamentary Press Secretary to Hon W.C. Wentworth, Minister for Social Services and Aboriginal Affairs. Subsequent positions included Principal Research Officer for the Liberal Party Federal Communications Centre and Parliamentary Research Officer to Senator Peter Baume, Senate Government Whip from 1975 to 1978.

He became a NSW Senator in 1978, and from 1987 to 1990 was a member of the Federal Shadow Cabinet, variously responsible for Environment, Arts, Heritage and Sport as well as being Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate and Coalition Health spokesman in the Senate.

children and adults in a wide range of activities. The other 70 remaining languages are weakening and are no longer transmitted to or spoken fluently by the younger generations. ...Roughly half of the surviving languages have only 10-100 fluent speakers.

(from the *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia*)

On the other hand, the number of community languages (so-called) continues to grow in Australia. The recent report “Immigration and Australia's Language Resource” claims that

“Language diversity is one of the most notable consequences of Australia's immigration program”.

You will perhaps note what this bald comment means in relation to the way in which, yet again, the interests of Indigenous Australians are ignored, but it is an important statement nevertheless. In the 1991 Census

it was reported that 14.8% of the Australian population use a language other than English (LOTE) at home - an increase over the figure reported in the 1986 Census (13.6%). The range of newer languages coming from South East Asia, the African continent, and the former states of eastern and south-eastern Europe are starting to make their mark.

We are thus presented with an interesting dilemma for what we seek to call language policy, in having a background in which our Indigenous peoples' languages are being lost at an alarming rate, with very little being done to stem this loss, while significant efforts are being made to develop interpreting and translating skills for the LOTE people; and the teaching of community languages, especially those which might also have some economic/commercial utility, is given an increasing priority in our schools. I do not know if there are any translating and interpreting courses which provide skills in the Arrernte, Warlpiri, Wiradjuri or any other Indigenous language - the very ones which might most help us to understand the true nature of the continent upon which we are settled, rather than the continents from which we have come or [with] which we seek to connect. A subject perhaps for another day.

Australia has taken an international lead in attempting to develop a genuine national language policy. I am sure that I do not need to recite the history of the 1982 Federal Education Department paper "Towards a National Language Policy"; the 1984 Senate

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Committee Report ("A National Language Policy"); the 1987 Lo Bianco Report ("National Policy on Language"); the 1991 Dawkins Report ("Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy") and the 1992 Rudd Report ("Asian Languages and Australia's Economic Future").

To this list could be added such reports as the 1978 Galbally Report and the 1989 National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia. Each of these has made a significant contribution to the development not so much of a coherent national language policy, as of a sensitisation of the political and educational debate to the importance of developing appropriate linguistic skills in our community.

In this development however, the role of the T&I sector has been ignored largely. The emphasis has been upon the promotion of multilingualism. For many Australians, this is simply not a real option. I do not refer to the people like myself who are hopelessly monolingual and indeed have real difficulty attempting to learn even the most basic conversational or survival skills in another language, but rather those who will never have the level of competence in the single national language of this country to allow them to exercise their rights or participate in its life to the fullest of their potential. For them, the role of the T&I sector is critical.

In this respect it is appropriate for me to pause to acknowledge the pioneering and immensely significant contributions of the late Jill Blewett, in whose memory and honour I have the pleasure to speak tonight. Jill's work, first in the Community Language Programme at TAFE in Adelaide and later in the translating and interpreting course at the SA College of Advanced Education, was pioneering work. Her contribution to the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters Board, and her role in developing accreditation standards, has established standards in Australia which are looked to from overseas as a model of community based services and facilities. The publication of the Jill Blewett Papers has added immeasurably to that.

I had the pleasure of knowing Jill personally through our mutual interests in the theatre. At the time that Jill was Chair of the SA Theatre Company, I was the federal Shadow Minister for the Arts. As a result, Jill and I spent many delightful evenings together in Adelaide discussing not only funding questions (the principal preoccupation of every theatre company Chair), but also real questions of artistic and social policies relevant to contemporary Australia. Many of these related to the question of community languages in theatre and the performing arts. I remember in particular my visit to Adelaide to see the Rustavelli Theatre Company from the old Soviet Republic of Georgia performing Shakespeare's Richard III and marvelling at the extent to which when I saw a play that I knew, but did not spend a moment listening to the words (all in Georgian and no translation), I gathered so much more meaning from what the actors were doing as actors and the new perspectives on the internal dynamic and movement of this great play. Even where I know only the basic story and not the text, such as when I saw a Spanish production of Marquez' *No-one Writes to the Colonel*, the effect can be the same.

In his 1992 Inaugural Lecture in this series, Adolfo Gentile remarked that Jill's most exceptional contribution to the T&I field was her role in the development of translator and interpreter education and what he described as her concern for verisimilitude in the classroom. Similarly, Max Bourke in his 1994 Lecture remarked on his and Jill's shared Francophile interests (not something too many people would admit to at present) and on her insistence on standards of intellectual rigour in all that she did.

I think what impressed me most about Jill was her sense of humanity and her understanding, through both her work in the languages of others and in the universal language of the theatre, of just what could be done by each of us given just an opportunity to reach our fullest potential. Essentially this is what translation and interpreting is all about.

It is because I share so much of this belief in people and in the sort of social arrangements which we should have in place in this country that I feel particularly honoured to have been asked to present the Jill Blewett Memorial Lecture for 1995.

I mentioned my own hopeless monolingualism. My father's side of the family were anything but monolingual. My father spoke three major subcontinental languages (Hindi, Urdu and Pushtu) fluently. His mother spoke those and Persian. His sister graduated from Cambridge University with honours in modern languages, spoke nine in all and headed the UNESCO education programmes in West Africa for twenty years. My cousins on that side were all naturally bi- and tri-lingual. My wife spoke three totally unrelated languages - English, Swahili and Greek! On my mother's side of the family the best Scottish and English traditions assumed that speaking in a way which 'foreigners' could understand was just a matter of shouting loudly, and slowly, and waving your arms about like in a charades party. My own attempts at various stages to learn French and Italian and to cope with Latin have never met with any success, although the grammatical discipline of Latin has served me very well in what I have attempted to do, namely speak English as well, as fluently and as elegantly as possible.

English of course is becoming the world language, "the sea which receives tributaries from every region under heaven" as Emerson wrote. From a little language, unknown when Caesar crossed over the Channel from Gaul, it is now of all the world's 2,700 languages the richest in vocabulary and the most widespread in use. Speakers of English of course do not necessarily understand each other - put a citizen of Glasgow and a citizen of the Appalachian Mountains together and see

how they manage! See whether Churchill was right in saying that the English and the Americans were two common people divided by a common language.

David Crystal's wonderful new book *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of the English Language* in part details the history of English as a threat which has displaced so many other native languages (including those of the British Isles themselves such as Cumbric, Cornish, Norn and Manx) and is yet itself under threat from Kenya to North America. While English has an infinite ability to cope with and to embrace its rivals, in some areas, such as the development of new signs in Auslan, it is losing out to alternatives derived from America. This may or may not be a good thing but I know that it is one of some concern for the purists involved in the development and promotion of Auslan as a language with very particular sensitivity and relevance to the cultural needs of Australia.

Nevertheless, I have always sought to read widely outside the corpus of English-language authors. I dote on Dostoyevsky, I know all of the plays of Euripides and my favourite poets are the Persian classics of Rumi, Hafez and Sa'di. In my contemporary reading I devour the latest novels of the Nobel laureate, Colombia's Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Egypt's Naguib Mahfouz - although only about half his thirty-plus novels are so far available in English.

My joy in these works is of course dependent upon the skills of the translators - the people who can render the minutest shade of meaning in Greek or Russian, Spanish or Arabic into the minutest nuance of the English tongue - not one overly replete with shades and

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degrees of meaning such as one finds in the Romance or Arabic languages. I well remember reading of the computer translation programme between English and Russian, which rendered the English phrase 'out of sight out of mind' into a Russian equivalent as 'blind idiot'. Or compare for example the translation of the opening words of the Iliad rendered by two notable translators.....

"The cause of the quarrel was the jealousy of Achilles..."

(Rex Warner in the Penguin edition)

"Sing O Goddess of the wrath of Peleus' son Achilles, the deadly wrath that brought upon the Achaeans

countless woes and sent many mighty souls down to the house of Death and made their bodies pray for dogs and all the birds...”

(Alston Chase in the Universal Library edition)

The sheer growth of language itself makes it increasingly difficult to communicate effectively, paradoxical as that may seem. It appears that the more words, the more confusion. For me, the perfection of the English language is found in the text of the King James Bible of 1611 and in the works of Shakespeare, written between 1590 and 1612: to me they are models of clarity which allow a complete expression of the entire range of human thoughts, emotions and moral precepts by which we can live.

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It is calculated (McCrum et al: *The Story of English*) that the King James Bible gets by with a total vocabulary of about 8,000 words. Shakespeare’s vocabulary is about 30,000 words. The most marvellous of dictionaries, Samuel Johnson’s 1755 Dictionary of the English Language contains some 40,000 words as defined by Johnson himself.

Today the average family dictionary contains about 100,000 words (*Oxford Companion to the English Language*) and the 1989 version of the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists over 500,000 items as ‘words’. Of course much of this results simply from the growth of knowledge and the increasing specialisation of information, but it also means that increasingly specialists talk in language intelligible only to other specialists, and that non-specialists are excluded increasingly from both information and power.

The difficulties which this poses for the T&I sector need little elaboration, especially when one is attempting to render some of these more difficult concepts into languages which do not have the degree of specialisation which English does. Listen, as I do frequently, to a conversation in Hindi and it appears that almost every fourth or fifth word is simply the English word imported directly into the language. (The Government of Quebec and the Académie Française are of course taking active steps to drive ‘franglais’ words out of their language entirely, resorting even to harsh legislative sanctions).

Similarly there are major problems for the interpretation of language, even for people whose

primary language is English, but who are deaf. The exceptional difficulties faced by Auslan and other signers in attempting to render modern specialist language into an acceptable and useable form are formidable, in both an intellectual and a physical sense.

By specialist language, I do not simply mean language which is totally arcane and obscure. Almost every ordinary conversation these days contains words which relate to the specialist terms of the computer, broadcasting, social or economic world.

My point is that what any language policy should perhaps try to consider is the question of simplification of our language. As one can see from the examples of the King James Bible and Shakespeare, this does not mean a loss of beauty or of the mystery which should be inherent in language, nor does it mean a loss of a capacity to deal with complicated and sophisticated problems. At the Anti-Discrimination Board for example, we try to render all our publications and correspondence into Plain English. We lose nothing in doing so. Far from it, by such methods we enhance the capacity of people to understand and thereby to participate. McCrum in his book *The Story of English* in fact says of English that “Its genius was, and still is, essentially democratic”. I agree with that proposition. Associate Professor Peter Butt of Sydney University’s Law School remarked only a few days ago that lawyers still deliberately use and hide behind obscure language in order to intimidate the public, cover their own mistakes and generally because they are insecure about what they are doing. He criticised Law Schools for failing to teach students the principles of clear writing, noting in fact that “the reverse is the case”, (*Sydney Morning Herald* 27/9/95).

I believe that it should be one of the cardinal principles of the translating and interpreting profession to be an active lobbyist in support of the Plain English movement, especially as it relates to the production of statutes and other public instruments and information. In this respect, I personally welcome the initiatives being taken in this State for some back-to-basics in the teaching of spelling, grammar, and language in our schools.

Let me go on to discuss the question of language as a factor in relation to status and equality in our society.

Traditionally, we have been defined by the way in which we speak. Historically, rulers and ruled have spoken different languages. Genuinely educated Romans spoke Greek - you will remember that Casca (a real roughneck) complains in Julius Caesar that he had no idea what Cicero was on about



for “it was all Greek to me”. Henry V was probably the first English monarch to conduct most of his government in the language of his subjects, reversing the use of Norman-French of his predecessors. The rulers of the great Empires of the East spoke forms of Mandarin and Sanskrit which their subjects would not have understood, just as Pharaoh did. Only among those most democratic of ancients, the Greeks, was this probably not the case. Even when English established itself as the sole language, the way in which one spoke defined one’s place in the world. ‘BBC English’ set people apart. Professor Henry Higgins in *My Fair Lady* reminds us that “it’s ‘arrgh’ and ‘g’arn’ that keep her in her place” and that “the moment an Englishman opens his mouth he makes some other Englishman despise him”.

We know that lack of language proficiency is a major obstacle to employment. The report “Immigration and Australia’s Language Resources” makes the point that “Regular home users of LOTEs generally have a lower level of employment than the rest of the Australian community... It is clear that people of a non-English speaking background are not immediately employable purely on the basis of their language background”.

This I have to say is potentially contrary to the provisions of the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act 1977, which I administer. That Act provides that it is unlawful to discriminate against a person on the basis of their race, that term being taken to include the concept of national origin or descent. In our own publication we state:

“It is against the law to stop you speaking in your own language at work or when you are studying at college, university and so on - unless speaking in your own language stops the work or study being done properly. It is against the law for an employer to insist that you speak English fluently and/or without an accent - unless this type of English is reasonable for the particular job.”

Your own organisation has been active particularly in relation to issues of language and the law. I congratulate you particularly in relation to your work helping the Law Society of New South Wales to get published its *Guide to Best Practice for Lawyers Working with Interpreters and Translators in a Legal Environment* (February 1995). This statement recognises the particular problems which contact with the law poses for people with lower levels of English language competence. I read recently a paper given by Ludmila Stern exploring the extraordinary difficulties encountered in the management of Australia’s recent war crimes trials. She said (in relation to witnesses):

“Coming from a different legal system would appear to me to be the foremost problem...Another unexpected problem was a linguistic one, or to be more specific, a problem of translation. It suddenly transpired in court, where an official interpreter was present, that the procedure could not be made to run as smoothly as expected. Having an unprecedentedly large number of witnesses speaking a language other than English highlighted a number of problems of court interpreting that might otherwise have remained unnoticed.

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One of the major problems of translation is that it is impossible to translate some seemingly obvious terms and phrases, especially legal ones. Thus it is impossible to translate into Russian or Ukrainian terms such as solicitor, barrister, magistrate, plea, witness box, affidavit, bail and many others without explaining the structure of the Australian legal system. Even seemingly non-legal phrases frequently used in court, such as ‘I put it to you...’ or ‘May I suggest...’ cannot be translated mechanically as they form part of a very specific legal context which is not understood by a foreigner.”

Stern concluded her remarks:

“It would be tempting to conclude by saying that as a result of the above-mentioned problems the War Crimes Prosecutions failed to reach any convictions. It is more accurate to suggest that the above cases illustrate how evidence can become distorted in court in the process of translation and as a result of cross-cultural differences, and how an uninformed approach to such problems can lead to a communications breakdown....”

(*The Sydney Papers*, Winter 1995.)

I suspect that there are many NESB and deaf people currently in our jails because they failed to make the right impression on jurors because they were disadvantaged by having to have interpreters as intermediaries. This is no slight to interpreters. Accused people who cannot talk directly to and appeal directly to their jurors are bound to be at a disadvantage in a situation where personal impressions count. Similarly, interpreters are frustrated when put under pressure by lawyers and judges to translate literally, word for word, in a situation where this is manifestly unfair in all the circumstances. Again at the Anti-Discrimination Board we deal with complaints that people have suffered discrimination and been

disadvantaged because of the failure of their legal representatives to provide them with access to such adequate services and to explain to them what is going on when their rights are at stake and when those rights might be jeopardised or forgone.

An arena of particular difficulty with which I am more familiar is in terms of access to health services. I serve on the Board of the Central Sydney Area Health Service - the largest area health service in Australia. We have responsibility for great hospitals like Royal Prince Alfred and Concord and for numerous smaller facilities. Our area health service has the highest proportion of NESB people of any in Australia. Some 45% of our population are overseas born, and 44% speak LOTE at home. The Canterbury Local Government area which we cover has 57.4% of its population (over age 5) speaking LOTE at home, compared with the State average of 17%.

You can imagine the problems of managing a health system in this situation, in particular what crises we face on a regular basis in our accident and emergency units where very often instant decisions, of a life and death nature, have to be made and when the capacity of the patient to give us relevant information may be critical.

In health and related psychiatric care, we run into additional problems where people usually bring family members to act as interpreters. This can often yield disastrous outcomes where women in particular will not confide sensitive or embarrassing health care information to other family members, where age and sexual mores intervene, and where as a consequence, the ability to provide proper health care is compromised. The State health system has no way of providing adequate interpreting resources, and the translation services especially in relation to the publication of community-based health care information remains dangerously inadequate.

In only one area do I think we are performing well, and that is in the area of our Multicultural HIV/AIDS Programme where a dedicated team of linguistically competent health care workers has made great strides in the provision of community information for some of the smaller ethnic communities such as the Khmer, Iranians, Filipino, Polynesians and others.

AUSIT's policy statement "Invisible interpreters and transparent translators" (August 1992) contains a number of important references to the problems associated with the provision of health care services for people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

That same AUSIT paper states with great prescience: "Lack of awareness of non-Australian cultures is at the heart of racist attitudes in this country..."

Lack of communication and lack of common linguistic points of reference are one of the most insidious causes of racism and racist behaviour. Apart from the obvious difference of colour, language is an immediately defining and separating feature. There is no doubt that there remains a great deal of racism in Australia, although I for one take heart from the fact that we recognise that, are addressing it, and the problem is, I believe, declining. The National Inquiry into Racist Violence and the reports from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody have served to highlight the extent to which racism and the violence associated with it need to be addressed. Again, in this State we have strong laws which deal not only with racial discrimination, but also with racial vilification. There are now federal laws on the same subject (although they are less comprehensive than our State laws) and laws are also being proposed in South Australia.

Words can be, as Gareth Evans keeps on saying and then promptly forgetting, bullets. We all know that giving things a definition or a name is an exercise which has a power dynamic to it, it is a means of exerting control. In the Book of Genesis, the first task that God gives Adam is to name "every beast of the field and every bird of the air" (2:19) and thus to "have dominion over them" (1:28). I have been associated with a major organisation (the Australian and New Zealand Council for the Care of Animals in Research and Teaching) which plays a leading role in the regulation of the use of animals for scientific and teaching purposes. I know the critical difference in human attitudes to animals depending on the words which are used to describe them. The cat which may be known as Fluffy or as ES (experimental subject) 5/95 will be treated differently, not because the cat is different, but because it is named differently - a definition not relevant to its (Kantian) status as a cat but to its status vis-a-vis its namer. The Nazis were able to persuade people to act with the incomprehensible barbarity they did by dividing humans into two classes, one of which was "*Untermenschen*" (non - or sub-humans). Words matter, and the complexities of making words meaningful between languages is a critical undertaking in any multicultural society.

Language is also a tool of political control. I believe we are fortunate in Australia to find that there is a genuine acceptance that we have only one official national

language. The experiences of Canada with Quebec; of Belgium with its Flemish/Walloon policy and of a number of other examples should serve to warn us that even well established democratic and political traditions may not be enough to hold a society together, free from violence, when there is fundamental disagreement about basic national language questions.

In the September 3, 1995, edition of the *Guardian* weekly, I read: “According to the Greek embassy, there are no minority languages in Greece; apart from Turkish. This may come as a surprise to the country’s 400,000 speakers of Arvanite, Aroumanian, Slav-Macedonian and Pomak...”

Because of the government’s failure to recognise these languages, and their exclusion from schools, administration and radio and television, they are likely before long to fade away in Greece....”

This of course is precisely the object of the exercise. Punishing people for speaking languages other than those officially approved has historically been a tool of totalitarian political control.

On the other hand, policies to increase the use of minority languages may be put in place. When I was growing up in South Wales, the use of the Welsh language was positively discouraged. A decade or so later (thanks in part to the political success of Plaid Cymru) policy was reversed and positive steps and programmes were put in place to encourage its greater use.

The issue of precise and accurate translation is one which comes before me regularly at the Anti-Discrimination Board when people complain about some alleged act of racial vilification. Most of these cases involve material which is published in the newspapers – both the mainstream English language press and community language newspapers. During the recent controversies over French nuclear testing in the Pacific, a point at issue has been the use of a particular word in a newspaper headline which, in French slang, may or may not have a particularly offensive meaning. Defining the precise nature of this slang term, getting and agreeing upon an accurate rendition into the English vulgar tongue is no mean feat, and the argument turns on this very point of translation. Similarly, complaints about radio broadcasts and printed articles emanating from the former Yugoslavia often run on the most nuanced translation of what is seen by a complainant as a particularly offensive term of abuse. A term like “criminal evil doer” is not one with which we would be familiar in ordinary English speech but the nature of

that word and the particular impact it has upon a select group of fellow Australians is of legal significance.

Because this State has racial vilification laws and complaints can be made, the Anti-Discrimination Board has to assess whether or not the matter complained of is, *prima facie*, contrary to the racial vilification provisions of our Act. At the end of the day this matter can be settled only in its final form by the courts (specifically the Equal Opportunity Tribunal) but both the courts and ourselves are in the same position. We depend upon the competence and accuracy of the translators, not only to render the word or words from one language to another, but to give us a genuine sense of what that word means – psychologically, emotionally, culturally, historically, in its original, non-English usage. This is a great burden to place on a translator – it is probably also a quite unfair one as it goes beyond the simple role of mere translation (or perhaps I should say transliteration) and thus it is a burden I am reluctant to cast upon people. However, for my purposes I have to do it from time to time so that I may understand the issues involved before I exercise my statutory powers and functions as President of the Board, an exercise which may have significant impact upon many people and groups in our community.

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Let me cite three disparate yet oddly related examples about the power of language and the question of translation. On this day in 1758 Horatio Nelson was born. As I am sure many of you would know (especially those who were born in England where Trafalgar Day is a national holiday) just prior to the Battle of Trafalgar, Nelson hoisted a message aloft his flagship HMS Victory. It read “England expects that every man will do his duty” and it was spelled out in signal flags. Every sailor knew what that meant and for those who were illiterate there were plenty on hand to translate. As you can see, not everything needing translation is written or spoken in conventional form. Secondly, on this day in 1902 Emile Zola died. His newspaper article “J’Accuse” (February 1898) was one of the most powerful indictments of racism (specifically anti-Semitism) ever published and has become a touchstone of the arguments about the evils of this form of discrimination.



Thirdly, it was on this day in 1938 that the Munich Conference was convened leading to the signing of the infamous Munich Pact. Consider what differences there were between the participants – Chamberlain and Deladier, Hitler and Mussolini – about the meaning of the words in that Pact: what Chamberlain and Hitler thought was the meaning of the former’s declaration of the Pact as guaranteeing peace in our time. We know from the notes of the official T&Is at Munich how much of the history of the world was shaped by different people understating the same words to mean utterly and entirely different things.

Ensuring that for the sake of our own social harmony and national unity we do not allow different parts of our society and different people in our community to go away with the belief that different words, central to the way we live our lives as Australians, mean different and incompatible things to different people, is a critical job for the translating and interpreting profession. Key words – equity, access, discrimination, justice, participation, democracy, rights, obligations, responsibilities, entitlements – need to be understood and to be meaningful to all Australians regardless of their linguistic status.

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At present the whole translating and interpreting sector is under enormous pressure from cost-cutting exercises in government. Here is another set of paradoxes: as our success in attracting new settlers from non-traditional sources or in reuniting families (key elements of multiculturalism and our current immigration policy) increases, the need for translating and interpreting services does likewise. This is also the case as we continue to accept our moral responsibilities in relation to refugee policy and resettlement. It is likely that future immigration policies will continue to bring to this country significant numbers of people who will be linguistically disadvantaged without the assistance of translating and interpreting services.

Similarly, as deaf people continue to improve their levels of access to education and employment services, their need for interpreters will increase, not diminish. Unlike those who can hear and speak without difficulty and for whom there is a possibility of one day being competent enough in English to be able to do without translating and interpreting services, for the deaf that is far less of a possibility. Out at NIDA (the National

Institute of Dramatic Art), where I serve on the Board, we have had great success in training deaf actors for very full and productive stage careers - but that is a difficult and expensive process. As deaf people take their rightful place in areas like the entertainment and other tertiary industries, once again the pressure for increased translating and interpreting services increases.

In other words, the success of policies of multiculturalism and the elimination of discrimination will lead to a demand for increased translating and interpreting services at the very time when governments are attempting to cut them back.

This may pose major problems for me at the Anti-Discrimination Board. The denial of a service to a person who is disabled (deaf) or on the basis of their race (NESB) may well constitute a breach of the Anti-Discrimination Act for which governments or service providers may be held liable under the law.

The High Court of Australia has ruled that defendants are entitled to access to legal aid and legal services to defend their rights adequately (*Deitrich v The Queen*, 1992) and that these must be provided (the argument is now at what level) by the State. It will be of interest to know how far the Courts are prepared to go to say that access to adequate T&I services at all levels of the legal system is no less important. There is already considerable jurisprudence on this matter, stretching back to *R. v Willie* in 1885 where the Supreme Court of Queensland discharged four Aboriginal persons accused of murder where no competent interpreter could be found to explain the charges to them. Harsh contracts entered into by people without a proper (linguistic) understanding of them may be put aside (*Commercial Bank of Australia Ltd. v Amadio*, 1983); the rules for natural justice may demand access to an interpreter for extended periods (*Singh (Heer) v. Minister for Immigration*, 1987) and although persons may be generally competent in English they may need special assistance when involved before the courts (*Adamopolous v. Olympic Airways S.A.* 1991)

**W**e as a society cannot claim that we have done everything we can to ensure that all Australians get a fair go while we leave unanswered the resourcing questions in the T&I sector. We would all be outraged if governments deliberately cut back funding for services for the intellectually or physically disabled, but we sit quietly by and accept that T&I services designed to overcome a real disability imposed by lack of competence in the nation’s only official language, can be subject to such budgetary whims and caprices.



It is also perhaps important to realise that as Ozolins points out (*Interpreting, Translating and Language Policy*) T&I depends largely on immigrants for its practitioners, very few native speakers of English are ever able to develop their skills in another language to a level where they can undertake interpreting/translating.

As with so much of the economic rationalist agenda, there is little thought given to things in terms of their long time perspectives. As pointed out in the report “Immigration and Australia’s Language Resources”, our fastest growing area of economic activity (tourism and the hospitality industries) and the most significant areas for the growth of our export activities (China and western Asia) are the areas which will benefit most from our making effective use of the language resources already available but under-utilised in our present population, and where the need for improved translating and interpreting services will manifest itself most dramatically.

Increased T&I services thus not only enhance our social goals of ensuring that all Australians have a fair go and are free from discrimination; they also reinforce the stability of and commitment to our basic national principles and institutions, while potentially making a significant contribution to our economic growth and wellbeing.

I would like to conclude with an observation about diversity and its benefits or otherwise. I am sure that many of you are familiar with the Biblical story of how humankind came to have so many different languages:

“Now the whole earth had one language and one speech...And they said Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower whose top is the heavens, let us make a name for ourselves lest we be scattered over the face of the whole earth. But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, Indeed, the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do, now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.” (Genesis, Chapter 11)

In essence then, our Judeo-Christian heritage tells us that it was man’s overweening pride which caused God to confuse humanity, not by dividing it into different races but into people of differing languages. The acceptance or underlying assumption of linguistic diversity as a punishment is a profound intellectual concept from which much else derives.

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By contrast, the Holy Qur’an presents a different world view:

“We have created you from a male and a female and divided you into tribes that you might get to know one another” (Surah 49:13)

Division is a positive thing. God made people different not to punish them but rather to give them the chance to come to know more about each other, to know each other better because they have to take the time to find out. It is perhaps thus not surprising that one of the things which so many people find attractive about Islam is its total lack of racism or belief in any system of superiority other than that based upon the individual’s degree of faith and piety.

In thinking about the impact of linguistic diversity in our wider society, we may perhaps pause to contemplate why we think of that diversity in anything less than a totally positive sense. Why do we not see it as enhancing our potential to be better human beings by taking the time and making the effort to find out more about one another?

Perhaps in moving us towards this desirable and ultimately, I believe, attainable goal we may acquire a better appreciation of the role which our skilled and dedicated interpreters and translators play, and may come to value and honour that more than we do.

In this respect we would be building upon and reinforcing the lead which was given with such clarity, care for humanity, concern for justice and equality and sense of national purpose, by our late and much loved friend Jill Blewett.