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Anglisztika alapszak

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A gyarmatosítás hatása az ausztráliai bennszülött nyelvekre

The Impact of Colonisation on Australian Aboriginal Languages

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to take a closer look at the Australian Aboriginal languages and show what effect the colonisation had on them. Throughout history, many of these languages have been lost. When the colonisation of Australia began, the main reason for the loss was the spread of European diseases and the frontier violence that reduced the number of Aboriginal communities. Sometimes whole communities were wiped out and therefore there was no one left to pass on the knowledge of the language. However, as time passed, the main reason for the further loss of languages was the fact that English language affected Aboriginal languages, introduced changes in meaning and vocabulary; and finally replaced many of them.

Examining the Pama-Nyungan languages of different regions of Australia, one common feature can be discovered among them: they all suffered under the white dominion. The consequence of the European settlement was that the majority of Aboriginal heritage disappeared, not only the languages, but also other parts of their culture. Most languages now only have a few speakers, and there are even fewer of them that are likely to survive.

However, a general desire to revive Aboriginal cultures and languages has been present in Australia since the 1970s. Bilingual education is present in about thirty schools, and non-Aboriginal people are also getting interested in learning Aboriginal languages.

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Introduction

Language is the most important part of a nation's culture. The fact that languages change with the passing of time is a general phenomenon; however, this change does not always mean something positive. In certain cases, a more powerful language can easily oppress languages that are spoken by smaller communities. What is more, novelties can be introduced, through which the sentence structure, the grammar, the phonology or the pronunciation of particular words are altered, therefore ending a long-term tradition of speaking a language. In this way, the language also loses part of its uniqueness.

On the other hand, if two languages are used next to each other on a daily basis, it is not uncommon that they adapt words into each others' vocabulary, therefore enriching their own vocabularies. That is how, for example, words from mostly the field of business and technology, such as *web*, *chat* or *online*, could be adapted from the English vocabulary into the vocabularies of different languages.

As language is part of culture, if a language is enhanced, that means that also the culture develops. In fact, the introduction of smaller or bigger changes into a language is inevitable if we want to keep pace with the developing of the world and the quick progress of the society.

Unfortunately, not all that glitters is gold. There were, and there also are nations that lost much because of British colonisation and interference into the traditional life and culture, and languages that lost much because of the impact of English. This is especially true for Australian Aborigines. Beginning with the establishment of the first colony, indigenous languages went through a number of changes.

What happened to the Aboriginal languages after the whites entered the Southern continent and claimed the land for themselves? How has the number of languages changed throughout the centuries? What has remained from the Australian Aboriginal languages, especially from the Pama-Nyungan language family? In the present thesis I would like to concentrate on these questions.

1. Historical background

“The event of colonisation was a catastrophic fracture in Aboriginal history, but there was still some continuity of tradition, of values, of ways looking at the world, and of personal histories giving the next generation the understanding of what it was to be Aboriginal.” (Arthur 7)

The colonisation of Australia did not start with the first discovery of the land. Historians still argue about who arrived first to the southern continent. There are even theories that the first visitors to Australia were the Chinese (Sharp 1), and there are others who claim to have found some evidence of Australia on a French map in the middle of the sixteenth century. Some people think that the Portuguese arrived first, but the most accepted theory is that the first Europeans who set foot on the land were the Dutch. The boat of Willem Janszoon arrived on the West coast of Cape York peninsula in 1606 (Sharp 16). In 1616, another Dutch seaman, Dirk Hartog arrived on an island in the West coast of Australia. This island now bears his name: Dirk Hartog Island.

In spite of the fact that the Dutch discovered much of the Australian mainland, and also Tasmania in 1642, they did not want to settle on the islands because they regarded it as a

country that was not worth colonising. Then, Captain James Cook arrived on the East coast in 1770 on the ship Endeavour. He discovered almost the whole East coast, during which he wrote a detailed diary about the plants and animals he found there which were quite different from those living on the British Isles.

The colonisation of Australia is said to have been started with the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788. With the leadership of Arthur Phillip, eleven ships arrived with more than a thousand people on board, and they set up a settlement in Port Jackson (Sharp 183). This was the point when major conflict began with the Aboriginals already living there.

When Governor Phillip arrived, he brought a list of words recorded earlier from Aborigines, but when he started to talk to the indigenous people, they could not understand him. That was the point when Arthur Phillip realized that in Australia not only one, but a number of languages were spoken. The following discovery concerning languages came in 1841. George Grey noticed regularly occurring similarities between the languages. This was followed by a general interest in indigenous cultures and languages before Aboriginals began to die out. With the declining of the population, the languages also declined, but the few that remain today receive proper attention: researchers collect traditional narratives, and also a number of dictionaries are made in different Aboriginal languages.

2. How has the number of languages and population changed?

The number, languages and culture of Australian indigenous people were untouched research areas for a very long time. Serious research on Aboriginal languages and the number of inhabitants on the mainland only started to take place around the twentieth century. However, there was a great irony in the research for Aboriginal languages: in the first 150 years many languages were spoken throughout the country but there was no one to deal with

them; nowadays there are many linguists who would examine the status of languages but the number of languages still remaining is relatively low (Vászolyi 47).

The number of actively spoken indigenous languages has been decreasing gradually. According to Austin, today children only learn twelve of the Aboriginal languages, which means that more than 90% of the language heritage of Aborigines has already been lost or is critically endangered (79). They also look into the future, and speculate that two-thirds of the still spoken Aboriginal Australian languages will die out until the next generation of children.

It is hard to count how many Aborigines lived in Australia and how many languages they spoke, as most part of the population and the language heritage had already been lost by the time historians started to deal with the topic seriously. There are different theories about the number of Aborigines living in Australia before and after colonisation and the number of languages spoken today.

Arthur says that at the time of the colonisation, beginning in 1788, about two hundred languages were spoken by Aborigines throughout Australia, and within these there were also many dialects. This means that there were more than five hundred dialects altogether (1). Because of the European impact, the number of languages have declined constantly, and by now, from the two hundred languages only about eighty have remained that are spoken by elderly people, and there are even fewer, that are spoken by whole communities (Arthur 1). Another research shows that 160 languages are extinct, 70 are under threat and there are only 20 that are likely to survive (Walsh 2).

According to Dixon, Ramson and Thomas, about half of the original languages of Australia have no speakers at all, and nearly no one remembers if they had ever existed. There are about a hundred languages that are still spoken but only by an insignificant number of people (5). The future of these languages is not so reassuring, as people who still speak them

do not use them much, and the greater part of them is not learnt in school or at home by children. The number of languages that are still in use today among the Aboriginals is relatively small, researchers estimate it to a couple of dozen (Dixon et al. 5).

The number of fullblooded Aboriginal Australians on the mainland is approximately forty-six thousand, but many of them do not speak an Aboriginal language at all, or only partly speak it. However, there are still a lot of people who have some knowledge of an Aboriginal language. Their number can be as much as forty thousand, but usually these people are very old. The language that has the most speakers in Australia today is the Western Desert Language. The number of speakers is approximately four thousand. The others that follow only have a few hundred speakers, and there are many more, that only have some dozen speakers. It is also not rare that an Aboriginal language has only one speaker, who is very old, and the knowledge cannot be given to other people because no one else understands it (Wurm 11).

Vászolyi writes about a theory which says that at the beginning of the colonisation, the number of indigenous people exceeded 300000. They lived in five hundred tribes, and they spoke approximately the same number of languages. According to him, now about 32 000 people speak 92 languages but only twenty of them are used on a daily basis in Northern and Central Australia (17-19).

Another researcher of Aboriginal languages, Dixon states there were about 600 tribes, with members between five hundred and one thousand, and each of them claimed that they and their neighbours spoke different languages. There were some cases when they truly spoke another language, but in most cases they were dialects of the same language. Based on this he arrived at a conclusion, that the 600 tribes with their own languages spoke altogether about 200 different languages (35). That the neighbouring languages can be quite similar is

supported by the fact that in North Queensland there are the languages Jirrbal and Girramay, whose grammars are almost the same, and eighty percent of whose vocabulary corresponds.

3. What are the reasons for the loss of Aboriginal languages?

Beginning with the earliest discoveries of different parts of Australia, Aboriginal cultures and languages started to decline. One of the main reasons for the loss of languages was the violence of white people towards the Aborigines. European people felt superior to the 'primitive' people of Australia, and they massacred thousands of them. Sometimes there were only a few survivors left from certain tribes and they decided to join other communities. Arthur says that people who spoke different languages came to live together in government settlements and town camps (1). The Queensland Government placed the remainder of the tribes to two or three different settlements, so any remaining connection with the previous traditional life would be broken up (Dixon 78). As a result, in these settlements and camps one dominant language emerged, which was either a form of English or one of the Aboriginal languages. Walsh calls this phenomenon the "emergence of indigenous lingua francas" (8), which means the increased use of an indigenous language and the application of it as a means of communication in a community or a region. However, while certain languages emerged, there were even more which were oppressed and slowly died out.

Aborigines were forced to speak English, because whites forbade the use of their original languages, and if they violated the rules, they were strictly punished. One way was physical punishment, so they were seriously beaten. Another possible form of punishment was rather psychological. Aboriginal people were discouraged from using their own language, and they were made to feel ashamed if they used it in front of other people.

Children between 10 and 16 were sent to boys' and girls' dormitories (Dixon 79) where students who spoke different languages were intentionally put together. Teachers spoke to them only in English, and if they used their own languages, they were laughed at or punished. There was also a desire to fit in the new society, so some Aboriginal families decided by themselves to learn and use English instead of their own languages. As children heard only English at home and in the school, too, the knowledge of the indigenous languages began to fade away. The media through newspapers, radio and television programmes have also contributed to the spread of English that continuously took over the power to be the first language instead of Aboriginal languages.

By killing the population of a particular area, the whites also killed the language spoken by that community. The most terrifying genocide happened in Tasmania. Before the whites arrived to the island, the population could be placed between 3000-5000. Because of the cruelty of the settlers and the diseases they brought with them, against which indigenous people could not protect themselves with medicine or vaccine, the number of Aborigines living there was halved every year. Finally, the three hundred people that had remained in 1830 were moved to an island in the Bass Strait. The population began to die out even faster, and the last full-blooded Tasmanian died in 1876. 70 years of white presence was enough to wipe out a whole community and their language (Dixon 78).

Other groups were not treated that cruelly, but a decrease in the number of population can be observed in every tribe. However, the tendency of the decrease of the population was reversed in the 1950s, due to the development of medical care. The Aborigines also got used to the new way of life, and they hoped they could regain their old population (Dixon 79).

4. Changes in Aboriginal languages

“A tribe can totally disintegrate in just a few generations if sudden, major alterations are made to its economy and general pattern of living, or to its social system and authority structure, or to its traditional religion, or to its territorial domains, or to the language which codifies, explains and relates together all these elements.” (Dixon 77)

When two languages meet, and live together for a long time, it is inevitable that they introduce novelties in the other language. As in Australia, thanks to colonisation, English became the dominant language, this also had effects on the pronunciation and meaning of words, vocabulary and grammar of Aboriginal languages.

4.1 Pronunciation and writing

Words that were taken over from the English language must have been altered slightly so as to be adequate for the phonetic system of the Aboriginal languages. Some loan words from English have been fully assimilated phonetically, but there were cases when problems arose, and as a consequence some alterations had to be introduced. In Aboriginal languages there are no /f/ or /v/ phonemes, so in writing and pronunciation they turn into [p] and [b], that is how ‘soft drink’ became ‘tyopdrink’ or ‘fishing line’ became ‘pityinglajn’ (Vászolyi 62-63). Usually, Aboriginal languages contain only three vowels, whereas in the English language we can find twenty short and long vowels and diphthongs, so during the adaptation there was a change also in vowel length.

In spite of the fact that since the arrival of the settlers, Aboriginal languages suffered much from disrespect, the presence of whites also did something appropriate: they introduced writing. Writing was not present when British came to the newly discovered land because Aboriginals had no need for that, as in tribes of small numbers verbal communication was more than enough. Written records about the life, culture and language of Aboriginal people only started to appear after 1770, when the land was first discovered by the British. Vászolyi says that the English alphabet colonizers brought with them had to be applied from the beginning for the writing of Aboriginal words because legal and administrative cases made it necessary that the names and other details of persons be written down (49).

As time passed, changes also took place in writing: some words were shortened, for example in wemba-wemba, which is a Western-Victorian language, yabij, which means a freshwater crayfish became yabby. Cases were also observed where consonants were doubled in the English language (Dixon, Ramson and Thomas 19).

4.2 Changes in meaning

According to Vászolyi, polysemy had been a feature of Aboriginal languages even before the British invasion, but this event has contributed to the extension of the meaning of many words (167). Settlers brought numerous objects with them that were so far unknown to Aboriginals, so they had to find a name for them. A possible way of the broadening of meaning comes from the fact that through colonisation, the indigenous world continuously broadened, so old words were used to refer to newly acquainted objects, that is how the same word, 'tyina' became to be used for 'shoe, boot', which was used also for 'leg, foot' in

Pitjantjatjara language (Vászolyi 167). In Pitjantjatjara, the primary meaning of ‘nyina’ is ‘to sit’, but then it started to mean ‘to camp, to stay, or to settle’.

In many Aboriginal languages, the word *wilbarra*, which comes from the English ‘wheelbarrow’ is used for any vehicle that has wheels. In Nyangumarda, which is a Western-Australian Aboriginal language, there is a word for the cat, ‘*minawu*’, which probably comes from the sound that cats make: *miaow* (Dixon, Ramson and Thomas 240-241). Words describing the family relationship were also added to the Aboriginal vocabulary, but their meanings were expanded, so that ‘mother’ and ‘father’ are used to refer to relatives who in English might be ‘aunt’ and ‘uncle’ (Arthur 71).

4.3 Borrowing words

An interesting phenomenon was observed when studying loan words from the English language. Dixon, Ramson and Thomas observed that in cases when verbs were taken over, they were not used as verbs in the Aboriginal languages. Rather, they were used as nouns, but they could also be used as verbs by adding a grammatical suffix (241).

It was not an uncommon feature that languages that were actively used by colonisers and Aboriginals took over words from each others’ vocabulary.

“The first white settlers named some local animals after old world species, like *native cat* or *native dog*, and called others after species in other countries to which they showed superficial resemblances. Thus, our word *goanna* is based on the American term *iguana*...Our possum is based on *opossum* in American English... while *cockatoo* reached us, via Dutch, from the Malay *kakatua*.”
(Dixon, Ramson and Thomas 62)

Aboriginal words were adapted into English vocabulary and vice versa. Indigenous people who did not speak English, collected some words from the English language and started to use them. However, there was no need for the adaptation of a great number of words, as indigenous people had to learn English, either by themselves or by force. But Aboriginal words were also introduced into Australian English vocabulary. If a word could not be found in their own language, English speakers borrowed indigenous words to name the so far unknown phenomenon, plants or animals, that is how, for example, the word kangaroo was adapted to the English vocabulary. This contribution is small, but not insignificant as it provides the most unique Australian words of all, like koala and dingo, much of which are now part of active Australian vocabulary (Dixon, Ramson and Thomas 219). Borrowing was a linguistic need of the settlers, but there were cases in which changes occurred in form and function, allowing words to conform more readily to the requirements of the language itself.

4.4 Creating new languages

At the beginning of colonisation there was a great problem between the colonisers and the people already living there: they could not communicate with each other. To bridge this linguistic barrier, a simplified language, a pidgin was created, which later could develop to a creole.

4.4.1 Pidgin

With the creation of pidgin languages, settlers were able to communicate with the Aboriginals. As conquest of the lands and tribes continued towards the North, the pidgin remained the contact language. It spread through much of the country, and many regional varieties were formed, including Sydney-pidgin, Kriol of the 'Top End', Cape York Creole, and Broken or Blaikman Tok of the Torres Strait islands (Austin 81). Aboriginals learnt the

new language, added some indigenous words and “this colonial language changed, became a complete and sufficient form of English, sometimes still called ‘pidgin’ but Aboriginal English is more accurate” (Arthur 2). This is a form of Australian English, which is mainly spoken by indigenous people and those living on the Torres Strait Island. Aboriginal English has some identical characteristics as nonstandard varieties of English, for example double negation and nonstandard verb agreement.

According to Vászolyi, pidgin is not a poor, bad, primitive form of English, but an independent language that has its own phonetic system, grammar and vocabulary (64). Comparing it with the English language, we can discover some differences. In Aboriginal English, the definite and indefinite articles, and much of the morphology of nominals, such as the indication of plural form had disappeared. The system of verbs was also simplified: there is no future form, but they express it with present tense verbs.

4.4.2 Creole

Pidgins developed when two groups that spoke different languages tried to communicate with each other. If the purposes of the newly formed language were limited then the language remained in limited use, but at certain times there was a greater need for a common language, which is how pidgins were able to develop to creole. Creoles are English-based languages, but a lexical and structural influence of Aboriginal languages can clearly be seen. This is how Kriol, formed in North-Australia, took on a more important role than just a means of occasional communication. Now Kriol is spoken by more than twenty thousand Aboriginals and their descendants as their first or second language. Austin puts this number as much as 30000 just in North Australia (81). Kriol is spoken by more people as a mother tongue or second language than any other Australian language. The creation of this unique language played an important role in the national identity of Aboriginal people because before

the colonisation, indigenous people did not have a national language. This deficiency was fulfilled by Kriol (Vászolyi 67).

4.5 Missionaries

Approximately a hundred years after colonisation missionaries came to the country. They intervened into the lives and cultures of Aboriginal communities which they knew nothing about. Aboriginals naturally accepted the food that the missionaries gave to them, which was an easier way of accessing food than hunting and gathering for hours. In this way, “the major criterion of excellence and respect was removed” (Dixon 78), and this resulted in less value being placed on men proving themselves to be hunters. Missionaries introduced a new religion, and they prohibited religious ceremonies and rituals, but the new religion was quite different from the traditional ceremonies since Aboriginals could not feel connected to spiritual sites. As the traditional life was totally demolished, tribes quickly fade away. The fact that fewer children were born during this time also contributed to the disappearance of tribes and their languages.

5. Pama- Nyungan languages

Languages spoken in nine-tenths of the whole territory of Australia belong to the Pama-Nyungan family. The division of the languages was made by Ken Hale in the early 1960s, when he put the Aboriginal languages into two large groups based on their similarities: Pama-Nyungan and non-Pama-Nyungan languages (Dixon, Ramson and Thomas 7).

5.1 Western Australia

According to Dixon, Ramson and Thomas (35), about forty languages were spoken in Western Australia before the settlers entered there. However, as the white population gradually grew in this area, wars occurred between settlers and Aboriginals here, as well. As a result, many languages have already died out but a few of them are still spoken today, even if only a few of them are learnt by children.

5.1.1 Western Desert Language

The Western Desert Language is spoken by people living in the “desert areas” (Douglas I) of South and Western Australia and the Northern Territory. It is hard to make a distinction between tribes here because local groups can be found on huge areas, and their dialects are similar to those of their neighbours’. Before colonising the area, the dialects were spoken over a vast area of well over a million square kilometres in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia (Walsh 1).

According to Vászolyi, the Western Desert Language is a group of dialects spread in a large area (23). These dialects do not differ from each other in many aspects, so the neighbouring tribes are able to communicate with each other without changing their dialects. Unfortunately, the number of speakers decreased gradually, because people have gradually migrated into European-settled towns. Linguists think that about 15 loan words were taken over from this language, but they are not commonly used (Dixon, Ramson and Thomas 39).

Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara are neighbouring dialects that are both parts of the Western Desert Language. As about 2500 people speak this language, and it is still being learnt by children, ‘Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara counts as one of the less endangered of Australian languages’ (Goddard 871). The two dialects are quite similar and 80% of the

vocabulary is identical. However, there was a prestige difference between the languages: Pitjantjatjara was regarded the more prestigious of the two, as this was the dialect which had been used by missionaries when translating the Bible and during Christian worship, and the dialect was also used in bilingual education.

5.1.2 Nyungar

This language was spoken over a huge area in the south-western part of Australia. After the arrival of the British, a dual economy was created, which was based on hunting and gathering, so the traditional lifestyle of indigenous people, and the use of European goods (Dixon, Ramson and Thomas 36). Unfortunately, many of the population died out. The main reason was that many people died because of the illnesses that colonizers brought with them, especially measles and influenza epidemics, as Aboriginals had no resistance to them.

Another part of the traditional culture was also disappearing from 1880 to 1920 because social organizations began to cease and fewer and fewer ceremonial practises were performed (Dixon et al. 36). After a while, these were only practised on special occasions, and then they died out in 1920. There were at least a dozen tribes, and each of them spoke a different dialect.

“In the Perth area the dialect maintained an older form of the language, but further south languages underwent an interesting change whereby the last two sounds of a word appear to have been switched around metathesis. For example, the word for ‘grass’ at Perth was jilba but at Albany it was jilab; the small bandicoot *Perameles bougainville* was marla at Perth but marl further south, and it is probably the latter form that is the origin for the English loan word marl.” (Dixon, Ramson and Thomas 36)

The original form of this language is no longer spoken, however older people still remember some words. The only remainders of this language are over 150 word lists that linguists have collected through the years. Nyungar has given about fifty loan words into the English language, mostly names of animals and trees that only live in Nyungar territory. There are some loan words that are only used in Western Australia, such as ‘kylie’, because a word for the same object, in this case ‘boomerang’ has become widely known in other parts of the world (Dixon, Ramson and Thomas 37).

5.1.3 Nhanta

Nhanta was also spoken in the western part of Australia. We do not know much about this language; in fact the only information we have are “two word lists, four vocabularies and some information recorded in the 1950s from the last two speakers” (Dixon, Ramson and Thomas 40). However, a change in the structure of words has been observed: if a word began with an individual consonant, it had been dropped, resulting that the words begin with a vowel, so the original word ‘bibi’ is now ‘ibi’.

5.1.4 Languages of the Pilbara region

5.1.4.1 Yindjibarndi and Panyjima

Yindjibarndi and Panyjima are both languages of the Pilbara region which is located in the western part of Australia. We do not know much about these languages, but according to Douglas, Europeans came to this area in the 1860s, and the arrival of the whites was followed by fifty years of bloody conflict. Both languages have only a few speakers: Yindjibarndi is spoken by a couple of hundreds of people, whereas Panyjima only has a few dozen speakers (Dixon et al. 39).

5.1.4.2 Martuthunira

“The post-contact history of the Martuthunira is one that has led to their almost complete extinction in little more than a hundred years. Their decline is part of a general pattern which has seen the people of the coastal Pilbara and Ashburton River districts almost completely wiped out. The demise of the coastal groups can be attributed both to introduced disease and, perhaps, to a general despair following the complete breakdown of social structure following European settlement.” (Dench 17)

Martuthunira is another language of the Pilbara region. People who live between the Fortescue and Robe Rivers used to speak this language, but Martuthunira has fallen victim of the colonisation with much of the Aboriginal languages, as it now has only one remaining speaker. The decline of the language started in 1860 when the region was opened to European settlement. Behind the disappearance of the speakers we can find misadventures and diseases, which was one of the main causes of the deaths of Aboriginal people. However, Dench says that ‘The language will not die, its speakers will’ (22). ‘It is too late to save Martuthunira. Already it is a language serving no social purposes and all too soon will survive only as a collection of tape-recorded and transcribed texts and elicitation sessions’ (Dench X).

5.1.4.3 Jiwarli

Jiwarli was originally spoken along the Henry River in the northwestern part of Western Australia. There were not any records about this language until 1978 when a linguist made interviews with the last remaining speaker. Unfortunately, the last speaker died in 1985, so another indigenous language has become extinct (Austin 569). There is some data left

behind on the language, and this includes over seventy texts in different genres, and about a 1500-word vocabulary list. The Jiwarli language shows a close relationship with its neighbouring languages, that is, Warriyangka, Thiin and Tharrkari. It was observed that 80 percent of the vocabulary of these languages is identical, and they also have nearly the same grammatical system (Austin 570).

5.2 Dharuk

This language was originally spoken on the northeastern part of Australia, on the coastline from Botany Bay to Port Jackson, and on the nearby mainland areas. Dharruk was only the name of the dialect spoken around Windsor, but later it became used to refer to the whole language. After the arrival of the whites, conflict arose between the Aborigines and the settlers, as in most cases during settlement. Then the population was halved because of the smallpox that was introduced by the whites, which is why it is difficult to define the exact number of Aborigines. After settlement, both English and Dharuk continued to be used by the Aborigines for fifty years, but by the middle of the 19th century most of the Aboriginal culture was lost. Despite the existence of some Dharuk descendants still living in the Sydney region, the language has not been used actively for many years. The contribution of Dharuk to the English language is not insignificant, as it contributed more loan words to the English vocabulary than any other Aboriginal language, including dingo, boomerang, wombat, wallaby or koala (Dixon et al. 27), that are use all over the country.

5.3 Yagara

Yagara is now an extinct language, which was spoken in Queensland, around Brisbane. This language had lots of dialects, and the culture of the tribe was also well-known: its body paintings and song were well known among Aborigines. Unfortunately, we do not

know much about this language, as the only thing that remained are short word lists and William Ridley's Bible translations (Dixon, Ramson and Thomas 53).

6. Revival movements

6.1 Bilingual education

The general population of Australia has been showing a growing interest in languages spoken in Aboriginal Australia and on Torres Strait Island, and that is one of the reasons why Aboriginal language courses were started in high schools in Victoria.

English-Aboriginal bilingual education only started in the 1970s-1980s. Now it seems to be a compromise between the race of the languages of the education. According to Vászolyi, by 1990 bilingual primary education was introduced in thirty-three schools, where altogether thirty indigenous languages were taught (19). There are many reasons why bilingual education is more effective for indigenous children than teaching them in English. Children start to learn in primary schools in their own languages, and then they are increasingly taught English. "It is easier for children to learn in a language they understand than in one that they do not...it makes students more comfortable and confident about attending school" (Black 212). It also helps students to feel that life in schools is not cut off completely from life in the village. At the beginning, bilingual education did not go as planned. It had more drawbacks than advantages, because students were taught by inexperienced teachers, who could not learn every Aboriginal language, of course. Dixon mentions another disadvantage:

"Many Australian Aboriginal children regarded school as white man's game, that had little relevance to the pattern of living and little usefulness; only a minority did learn to read and write. The net effect was that a generation of

Aborigines were lost to one culture, without having been taken into another, knowing something of two languages but being master of neither...Rather than producing bilingual and bicultural citizens, the Australian education system was making Aborigines into demi-lingual demi-cultural nobodies.” (90)

Then, in 1970, after the election of a Labor Party Government, changes quickly took place. The government issued that Aboriginal children would be taught in the schools on their own languages, but besides that they should also learn arts, crafts and other skills, so that they would not feel so torn from their traditional lifestyles.

Among many others, Manyiljarra and Nyangumarta is taught in Strelley, Walmajarri is taught in Noonkanbah since 1980, and children can learn Kukatja and English in Bango Hills since 1987 in the bilingual education (Black 210).

The support for education is also revealed in the action of the New South Wales government. In spite of the fact that Australian English is threatening indigenous languages, a desire for the revival of Aboriginal languages and cultures can be discovered. That is why in 2003 the government gave funds to promote Aboriginal languages and include them in the school system. The Dyaabugay language in Queensland has been revived, thanks to the bilingual education programmes (Blake 91).

6.2 Learning an Aboriginal language

A very unusual Aboriginal language is taught not only on the eastern part of the country, where it was originally spoken, but also in Victorian schools and in southern Queensland. This language is called Bundjalung. It is unusual for many reasons. First, it has survived in a densely populated area; it is one of the few indigenous languages that has been studied for a long time now, and there are still some people whose mother tongue is

Bundjalung, although the language has restricted functions now. Another reason why it is unusual is that it distinguishes different genders, and the pronunciation of stressed syllables – unlike other Aboriginal languages- is similar to that of English. There are many dialects of the language; word lists and descriptive grammar about some of them was published in the late 19th-early 20th century (Sharpe 75).

Fewer and fewer people use this language on a daily basis; nevertheless, it is still taught actively. According to Sharpe, there can be various reasons for teaching an Aboriginal language (78-79). Firstly, there are still some people who used to speak this language before the British conquest. As they were discouraged to use the language at that time, they would like to learn more about it now. Other Aboriginal people who do not speak the language would like to know more about their past, and to learn more about the inheritance. Secondly, non-Aboriginals learn because they are interested in the language as many place names in the area come from this language. Thirdly, there was a teacher in a Victorian school, who wanted to teach an Aboriginal language that does not have many speakers, hoping that children would become interested in the revival of not only this, but of other Aboriginal languages, too.

Bilingual education and indigenous language courses were not the only topic that Australians started to be interested in; they also wanted to get to know about the culture of Aboriginal tribes. For this reason, Aboriginal-run Language Centres have been set up in the new millennia all over the country. The intention was to collect information about Aboriginal languages and culture, to look for words from indigenous languages and write them up in dictionaries, and to “support local education and cultural revival initiatives” (Sharpe 79).

8. Conclusion

Australian Aboriginal people had to suffer a lot because as a result of colonisation, which entailed the loss of part of Aboriginal culture. A great deal of research was conducted on Aboriginal languages of Australia which pointed out that the number of languages spoken is decreasing gradually. After the colonisation of the land, among the main reasons for the decrease of the population, and therefore the languages were the introduction of diseases, against which Aborigines were not immune, and the massacre of the indigenous people. Following that, languages further decreased in number, as English ousted Aboriginal languages from everyday use.

Due to these facts, the exact number of languages, from the more than two hundred languages present at white contact, only about seventy have remained, and even less is spoken on a daily basis. Most indigenous languages have already become extinct, and there are many more that are severely endangered, because they are spoken by only a couple of people. It is not uncommon that a language has 1-10 speakers, who are usually quite old. The fate of these languages is already decided: sooner or later they will die out.

Indigenous languages did not get the necessary attention for a long time, and now it is too late to save many of them. Unfortunately, the number of people whose first language is an Aboriginal Australian language is also becoming fewer and fewer, and it is sad to see how such culturally colourful a country is declining.

The loss of the majority of Aboriginal languages was a result of battles for where the colonists prevailed and the Aborigines lost. Not only did they lose the land where they lived for thousands of years, but the settlers totally altered the way Aborigines lived their lives and reserved their cultural practices. Indigenous people could not defend themselves, as the Europeans outnumbered them, who also had more developed technology and weapons.

It can clearly be seen that Australian Aboriginal languages, after white impact, have declined rather than improved. Despite the smaller or bigger changes in the vocabulary, grammar and phonology of indigenous languages, not everything concerning traditional legacy was lost. Some languages – although their number is very few – are still being taught and learned actively. For most of the languages it is already too late to be saved; the twenty or thirty that remain today try to bring back part of the culture that was thought to be sentenced to death.

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