

The Challenges to Language Education from the World of Work: To achieve Cosmopolitan Excellence or become the White Trash of Asia

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I Challenges

The challenges to Australian society have suddenly become more acute. Major political, social and economic changes occurred during the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s as the country turned from its traditional European obsession towards a more accurate representation of its geographical, political and social location in the world. For the most part, it faced those challenges with relative calm, with acceptance that its world had changed and that it had no alternative but to accommodate to a new understanding of reality; it did so with a willingness, at least at the policy level, to effect those changes in the society and its systems that were needed to accommodate that new reality. That reality was geographic, social, demographic and, not least, economic. Suddenly, however, as a result of an electoral mischance through which an individual has gained a level of national media attention that is inversely proportional to her sense of history, her compassion, her economic sense, and her intellect, Australia is at risk of failing those challenges, of ignoring the reality of its geography, history, and demography and, not least, of dismally failing its economic challenges. If Australia fails those challenges and heeds the MHR for Oxley and her acolyte, His Worship, the Mayor of Port Lincoln, it will confirm the pessimistic prediction of the former Singaporean Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, that Australians would eventually become the poor white trash of Asia. If we allow our social, economic and educational policies and our public debates to be led by what are already, in my view, the lowest of white trash, then Australia is sure to fail its challenges and will inevitably realise Lee Kuan Yew's prediction.

In fact, over recent decades Australia had moved rapidly towards accepting the reality of its history and geography, to recognise the value of the racial, ethnic and cultural diversity within its borders and the world, and to change its social and educational policies appropriately. The acceptance of this reality cannot sensibly or reasonably be debated: racial diversity is a basic human feature that cannot be denied without denying one of the inseparable essences of humanity; no less an essence of humanity since the first humans emerged from their first caves, has been human beings' desire to move around, to seek and explore new locations, to have new experiences, and to enrich their lives with new challenges and new relationships. Racial interaction and racial intermingling are no less a part of humanity, its history and its evolution than is racial diversity itself, they cannot be denied except, as at present, by the most

primitive of troglodytes. Equally, multiculturalism and multilingualism have been the only reality the Australian continent has known for tens of thousands of years and, rather than reducing in the most recent 200 years, multiculturalism, multilingualism and multiracialism have been deliberately, consciously and continuously increased by specific British and Australian government policies and practices since 26 January, 1788. Such diversity is not and cannot be a matter of serious debate as though primitive white Australian troglodytes can change the nature of humanity and their country's history. The only matter for debate is how we deal with that national and global diversity, what social, economic, cultural and educational policies and practices are required to enable us to deal most effectively with profit from that diversity. Diversity is the essence of humanity; we cannot ignore, deny or reject it.

Recognition and acceptance of Australia's and the world's diversity, the desirability within Australia of supporting ethnic, racial and linguistic diversity, and the vital necessity of enabling Australians to deal most effectively with the reality of global diversity have been reflected in many reports over recent decades. The 1970s had been marked by a widespread acceptance of Australia's multiculturalism and its ethnic and racial diversity. This acceptance and the policies required to reflect it were most systematically expressed in the Galbally review which became the blueprint for cultural and social policy in the late 1970s and beyond. In particular, the report stated:

Every person should be able to maintain his or her culture without prejudice or disadvantage and should be encouraged to understand and embrace other cultures. [Galbally Review 1978: 4]

In this context, the report also recognised the vocational relevance of language skills and, for example, recommended that funds be allocated to foster language skills amongst professionals and others in public contact positions who had to deal with persons of a variety of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.

Australia's multiculturalism continued largely to be the motivation for language policy development in the early 1980s though, by the late 1980s and dominantly in the 1990s, it has been the fact of regional and global diversity and their implications for economic development that have driven language policy. The Senate's terms of reference to its Standing Committee on Education and the Arts in 1982 requested it to consider, *inter alia*,

(c) the present use of languages in Australia including use in the community, in the media ... and in the arts and to extend equality of access to services and to the institutions of Australian society. [SSCEA 1982: 234]

In one section of its report discussing the need for a language policy, the overwhelming emphasis is placed on community language needs with no reference to trade or other economic factors. Similarly, the report's 117 recommendations encompass the domestic demographic reasons for fostering language development but make no reference to the economic significance of language skills though there is reference to their usefulness in contexts of governmental "international relationships". Even the 1987 national language policy makes little reference to trade and other economic issues. The section on "Australia's role in the region and the world", for

example, says nothing at all about trade or the enhancement of economic development [Lo Bianco 1987: 60 - 62] though elsewhere it does draw attention to the desirability of business's being able to use the languages of the countries to which it seeks to sell and to the need to match products to markets.

It has, in fact, been only in the last half-decade that the economic challenges of global diversity have been seriously addressed in official policies and the implications for language education drawn out. Undoubtedly the major stimulus for this was not a conscientious recognition of human diversity and global multilingualism but pragmatic concerns with Australia's declining economic performance, its large balance of trade deficit, a market share well below those of our major competitors and declining, and a national growth rate far inferior to most of the Asian countries with which we deal. Policies have recognised that, if Australia is to reverse its economic decline and improve both its level of economic performance and the quality of life of its people, it is essential that it become more competitive and that it take advantage of every marginal difference that can be derived from such factors as effective communication, cultural understanding, and the establishment of good personal relationships with potential clients. In this context, the current race debate is severely damaging of Australia's economic performance since it denies national, global, and human reality. It plays down the value of the language skills and cultural understandings that many Australians have, and it undervalues and even destroys the personal ties with potential markets whose maintenance and development most reports on Australian-Asian trade advocate [see ALLC 1994: 11 - 12]. Worse, as a result of the gross and stupid implication that white Australians are superior to persons with different skins to whom we crassly say, "Your skins are inferior to ours but your dollars are as good", we alienate the very markets to which we wish to sell. In brief, economic factors and hence issues of vocational preparation and development have come to provide an overriding challenge to language education directly through the contribution of language skills and cultural knowledge to better product development and marketing and indirectly through their contribution to international understanding and inter-cultural attitudes.

II The Economic Challenge

Economic development with emphasis on the contribution that language skills and cultural understanding can make to more effective trade has become the principal stimulus for language policy in Australia since 1990 and has provided a double challenge to language education: to accommodate our programs to industry's needs and, more fundamentally, to convince it that language skills are relevant to its needs. While acknowledging the broader reasons for language learning and *the potential of language skills to contribute to individual, community and national development* [DEET 1991a: 1], the Australian Language and Literacy Policy, for example, stated in 1991:

Australia must develop proficiency in languages other than English... to enable Australia to strengthen its international trade position....Selling value-added products is dependent, among other things, on the careful articulation

of the products' benefits in ways which are comprehensible to our potential trading partners. It also depends on the formation of effective networks. We have "got by" in the past with English, but in a more sophisticated and competitive global market-place and with the shift in our trading partners away from countries where English is spoken as a first language, this is no longer adequate in bilateral trading negotiations. Advanced secondary and tertiary economies are characterised by a greater preparedness to invest in human resources, including training the workforce in the major trading languages. [DEET 1991a: 23]

In his Foreword to the policy, the then Minister for Employment, Education and Training, stated:

We must increase our strength in languages other than English in order both to enrich the intellectual and cultural vitality of our population, and to help secure our future economic well-being. [John Dawkins in DEET 1991: iii]

The National Asian Languages/Studies Strategy for Australian Schools had as the first of its terms of reference:

...the importance of the development of a comprehensive understanding of Asian languages and cultures through the Australian education system if Australia is to maximise its economic interests in the Asia-Pacific region... [COAG 1994: i]

It would be easy to look at Australian industry and say that it is largely unaware of the values and real economic benefits to be drawn from the use of relevant language skills and cultural knowledge. Surveys of Australian industry and interviews with industry leaders reveal a profound ignorance of such benefits and even a denial that any such benefits exist or are possible [cf. the interviews in ALLC 1994: 51 - 94; Stanley *et al* 1990]. Such views as those conveyed by many industry leaders in the interviews reported in *Speaking of Business* [ALLC 1994] seem to be predicated on the assumption that English is the language of international business and most educated Asians speak it fluently. Some critics have said that *Speaking of Business* was unduly harsh in its assessment of industry's attitudes to language skills but, in recent weeks, the present writer has written to the published list of 1996 export award winners to ask their language policies. Not quite but almost without exception, they responded that they don't have a policy, generally do not use language skills and, where they need interpreters, their trading partners or clients provide them. In any case, most said that the people with whom they deal all speak English. However, knowing some English, speaking it fluently, and identifying with propositions put to them in English are all very different things. A recent survey reported in *Education Australia* but taken from the *Kyoto Newspaper* in April 1996 indicated that only 60% percent of Japanese university students believed that they could handle any more than introductions or greetings using English, only 3% had confidence in their understanding of English, and only 11% felt that they could conduct business in English [*Education Australia*, Issue 1, 25 June, 1996: 2]. In such circumstances, which are probably little different in many Asian countries, any Australian company that thinks it can "get by" in

English will be at a serious disadvantage compared with competitors who employ staff able to communicate in the language of their target market.

Furthermore, surveys have shown that Australian industry is characterised by timorousness when it comes to new markets, a timorousness that belies the belief that Australian industry can “get by” in English. Many surveys have shown that Australian companies, when asked where they see their future export development occurring, claim to see their main expansion occurring in their established markets and, very frequently, in the English-speaking world, even though, in many cases, surveys had shown that these markets had the lowest growth potential. Thus, for instance, a survey by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry [1995], found that a substantial majority of Australian companies trading with APEC believed that their company’s future expansion would be with the English-speaking countries in APEC even though the ones with the greatest growth (and hence import) potential were the non-English speaking “Asian tiger” economies.

Nevertheless, there are signs that Australian business and industry are becoming more aware of the benefits derivable from language skills and are seeking to employ people with those skills. This provides a further challenge to language education to ensure that the skills our students exit with from language courses are relevant to the needs of industry. In recent years, for example, the inbound tourism industry has several times sought government approval to bring in some 5,000 Japanese tour guides, a most retrograde step if it had been approved because of its effect on Australians seeking to use their Japanese skills but one that does indicate that the operators were anxious to have staff able to use Japanese and one that undoubtedly indicates a scepticism as to whether Australians leaving our Japanese programs had the skills needed to meet the tourism needs. Furthermore, surveys of newspaper job vacancies from 1980 to 1992 have shown a 4000% increase in the number of advertisements for jobs outside of education seeking people with skills in languages other than English, together, in the vast majority of cases, with other vocational skills (Tables 1 to 3 and Figure 1 provide more information on the advertisements surveyed, the languages sought, and the jobs advertised) [ALLC 1994: Appendix 3]. Despite such striking figures and the dramatic increase in industry language provisions in countries such as Britain, one can ask why opinion surveys amongst Australian industry suggest that it remains unconvinced and whether language policy that has been supportive of the role of languages in industry is not breaking down at the implementational level. The rest of this paper will briefly consider a very few issues pertinent to these questions.

[Insert about here Tables 1 to 3 and Figure 1: ALLC 1994:113, 114, 116]

III The Response from Language Education

In responding to the opportunities that the relevance of language skills and cultural understanding provide to language education, there are many major challenges that must be confronted. Here we shall focus on just four, what I shall call

1. The challenge of information;

2. The challenge of quality;
3. The challenge of limits; and
4. The challenge of attitudes.

III.1 *The Challenge of Information: Identifying and Articulating Language Needs*

If industry is to be able to make use of language skills to improve its performance, it must, first, be able to identify and articulate its needs and communicate them to language educators. One of the striking features of surveys of industry's language skill requirements is that, where language skills are called for, the expectations seem to be very high. The inbound tourism industry's call for 5000 native speaking Japanese tour guides illustrates the problem since it is virtually certain that a proper needs analysis would suggest that the range of tasks that tour guides of different sorts carry out could be performed by personnel at a range of different proficiency levels, in many cases well below native speaking proficiency. In other words, the problem seems to be, especially as one tries to interpret job advertisements, that industry lacks the ability to identify its actual needs and lacks the tools by which to articulate those needs. For this reason, the Australian Language and Literacy Council in *Speaking of Business* recommended that some exemplar audits of representative industries or enterprises be conducted, that, where appropriate, vocational competency specifications include specifications for language and culture skills, and that a framework of language competencies be developed for Australian industry analogous to the British *National Standards for Languages* produced by the Language Lead Body in 1992 [ALLC 1994: 96-7, 20].

In addition, there is need for people to be trained with the skills to assist industry to identify its needs and to assess the skills of the employees. Thus, the Australian Language and Literacy Council recommended in *Speaking of Business* that a system of accredited language assessors be established (more or less analogous to the NAATI system for interpreters and translators) which would ensure that industry could draw on appropriately trained personnel for the conduct of language audits, needs analyses and skills assessments [ALLC 1994: 96-7]. The response from the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages at Griffith University to this challenge has been to prepare and accredit a Graduate Certificate in Language Assessment that would be available to trained language teachers and to some categories of industry personnel with language skills and which would provide significant competence in language assessment, including not only language testing in general and language proficiency assessment in particular, but also in the conduct of language audits and needs analyses. It is hoped that some authority, perhaps Language Australia, might take steps to provide accreditation for graduates of such a program as accredited language assessors in the same way as persons with interpreting and translation training can become accredited translators and interpreters. Such a proposal would go some way to making available more trained and certified personnel but there is also need, at least on an interim basis

until more such personnel are available, for more language-in-industry centres or “export language centres” to be available as reference points to which enterprises may turn to obtain assistance with language audits, needs analyses, and advice or training on the language and culture issues to be considered in entering new markets.

III.2 *The Challenge of Quality*

Quality of Outcomes: If industry is to recognise the value of language skills and employ persons with them, a further challenge to language education is to produce people with practically useful language skills and to provide a means by which other persons who have acquired their language outside the formal education system are able to have their proficiency and specialist skills assessed, certified and accredited for vocational and educational purposes [cf. ALLC 1994: 96]. The latter need would be facilitated by the system of accredited language assessors just referred to. The implications of the former, ensuring that the education system produce people with usable skills, are far-reaching and include, as the five most fundamental requirements:

- the need for courses to be proficiency-oriented, to set practically and vocationally useful proficiency goals, and to attain them;
- the desirability of having at least some courses that, in addition to being proficiency oriented, are focussed on the attainment and reporting of specific vocational competencies, sometimes in general but also in relation to particular vocations (e.g., for categories of tour guides);
- the need for some courses that focus on developing proficiency in specific vocationally relevant domains of the language, in other words that some “language for specific purposes” (LSP) courses in vocationally relevant areas be available;
- the need for students to be able to include the attainment of high levels of relevant language proficiency in their vocational training whether that be at the TAFE, undergraduate university, or graduate degree levels: this requires that the education system more systematically allow for students at all levels, in all vocationally oriented programs to include extended systematic language training in their award programs; and
- the fundamental need for language teachers themselves to be proficient, with good language teaching skills, with expertise in developing and teaching LSP courses, with an understanding of and ability to incorporate in their teaching the concept of vocational competencies, and, in at least some cases, with experience in using the language in business and industry.

Regrettably, too many language courses fail to produce graduates with practical language skills and, not only in Australia but also in the United States, university language departments have been slow to change, slow to recognise the centrality of proficiency, and slow to develop and offer proficiency-focussed courses that integrate language learning with vocational programs. In the United States, one result of this

phenomenon has been that, while some major business schools such as Thunderbird in Glendale, Arizona or Wharton in Philadelphia, have excellent language programs, many business schools have abandoned their fellow university departments and have opted for courses from such commercially oriented schools as Berlitz [see Ingram, in preparation, for further discussion].

Thus, if Australian industry is to benefit from a supply of useful skills in other languages and cultures, the fundamental challenge of quality demands a dramatic re-focussing of language education policy and practice onto quality, interpreted, especially, as the attainment by language learners of useful levels of language proficiency. Whatever else language courses may also seek to provide, the fundamental aim of language education has to be seen as the attainment of practically useful levels of language proficiency in all and every language course that is offered. This goal, however, will not be achieved without major changes to the way in which languages are offered and taught in the education system. In this context, it is worth noting what Rodney Cavalier stated in his Preface to the Australian Language and Literacy Council's recent report on language teacher quality and supply, *Language Teachers: The Pivot of Policy*:

Nothing short of wholesale reorganisation of schools to support language learning will move Australia's schools toward an adequate teaching of language proficiency. Students and teachers in language classes require the support of the school organisation. From the Principal down, the school administration needs to recognise that language teaching is wholly different. The classroom experience cannot succeed in isolation. The whole school has to foster a language learning experience...

The mandated hours set aside for language learning are ludicrously inadequate. The quantum guarantees failure...

There cannot be, there will not be, language learning in Australia's schools until and unless our schools possess a critical mass of language-proficient teachers. Those teachers will need to be teaching a curriculum which demands proficiency in the students and ultimately awards the equivalent of a Pass only to those students who reach useable levels of proficiency in demonstrating their knowledge of the language in its many contexts.

This happy decade will not arrive until the organisation of the school supports language learning beyond those periods when the language subjects are taught...In-country experience will be common, as will classroom use of computers and satellites and television and cinema and travellers - plus the rich resources available in so many school communities through Australians born in other lands. [ALLC 1996: xiii]

Quality and Supply of Teachers: If, for industry to want and to utilise language graduates with high quality language skills, language courses have to be re-focussed, it is also essential, as Cavalier noted in that quote, that the quality of the people teaching language courses be addressed. *The Pivot of Policy* [ALLC 1996] highlights the issue

of language teacher quality and supply as one of the great deficiencies in Australian language policy-making and implementation. The Council accumulated a massive amount of data (in excess of 700 pages of it) but had to conclude that basic information on enrolments, teacher numbers and teacher quality was not available in any form that enabled the Council to gain an accurate picture of the state of language teaching in Australia. Using and reviewing the numerous reports available and extrapolating from its own and the other available data, the Council was forced to conclude that the teacher quality and supply situation was catastrophic, that there had been no effective attempts to comprehensively address the teacher supply problem, and that, to match teachers to the student target numbers in the various national, State and Territory language policies, a five-fold increase in language teacher numbers would be required from 1995 to 2003. Even this highly conservative but desperately frightening estimate was built on an assumption, anecdotally believed to be wrong by some 80%, that all language teachers in 1995 were language proficient and had specialist language teacher training. In reality, there is no likelihood that such immense teacher supply targets could be reached, that this immense challenge to the teacher recruitment mechanisms in education could receive an adequate response, and the quality implications of this inevitable failure for language courses are depressing. It is also not surprising if industry is sceptical about the usefulness of the skills generated by the education system.

Thus, if we are serious both about the value of language skills in general and about the usefulness of language skills to industry, it is essential that urgent attention be given to the challenge of teacher quality and supply and that high quality language teachers be attracted in sufficient numbers to match the inevitably (if regrettably) reduced student target numbers set by present national, State and Territory language policies. Teacher education institutions will also need to become much more flexible in the structure of language teacher training programs to enable a greater variety of people to train as language teachers, including more native speakers from the community and more people with industry experience, since there is no conceivable way in which the present reliance largely on Year 12 exiting students to train and enter language teaching can meet the projected needs.

In seeking to improve the quality and training of language teachers, it is essential to identify more specifically the skills that they require both so that pre-service training programs can be designed more adequately and so that employer and training authorities are more strongly encouraged to provide on-going teacher development facilities and better informed on the nature of the on-going training that is required. Again, the ALLC's *Pivot of Policy* is worth noting, again at some length:

Crucial to any policy of quality assurance with respect to teacher recruitment, professional development, and a significant lift in the quality and supply of language teachers is the need to identify language teacher competencies. These should refer not only to classroom teaching expertise but also to the more administrative and structural aspects of the language teaching career such as head of department, regional language teaching coordinator, advanced skills teacher, advisory teacher or supervisor of teaching practicum. Employers and education systems should therefore consult with the language teaching profession, the higher education sector and other relevant bodies in

order to set minimum competencies for language teachers. The registration requirements should recognise the special needs of language teachers, rather than group them with other teachers as general teachers. [ALLC 1996: 170 - 171]

The ALLC goes on to *affirm the central importance of language proficiency* and recommends ASLPR Level 4 as the desirable minimum level though it concedes that ASLPR 3 may have to be accepted and then it lists some of the features of a good language teacher that will have to be considered. It states:

To achieve the supply of proficient teachers, education systems will need to consider at least the following matters:

- *the need to have all language teachers*
 - *possess a rational understanding of, and expertise in, language teaching methodologies and the fundamental sciences upon which the methodologies are based;*
 - *demonstrate the flexibility to apply principles of language teaching to actual teaching practice in different situations, with different purposes, with different students, and in both general purpose and vocationally-oriented courses;*
 - *able to design courses and work programs that meet the needs of their students, whether they be in general or specific purpose language courses;*
 - *possess a thorough, deep and balanced knowledge of, and attitude towards, the target culture and its peoples;*
 - *able to accept responsibility for their own ongoing professional self-development;*
 - *demonstrate attitudes appropriate to life in racially and ethnically diverse communities and in interaction with people of many different cultural origins; and*
 - *demonstrate tolerance towards other races and cultures.*
- *the need to have some language teachers*
 - *able to teach their language and other subjects in immersion and partial immersion programs; and*
 - *with industry experience so that they can more readily appreciate the relevance of languages to industry and industry needs, and be able more effectively to develop courses to meet those needs. [ALLC 1996: 172]*

III.3 *The Challenge of Limits*

No matter how relevant language teachers and applied linguists may believe that language skills are to industry, there are several severe limitations that need to be confronted. It was noted earlier that there are severe, if declining, limits on the extent to which industry is presently aware of the value of language skills and cultural understanding. Second, we have noted that any realistic assessment of the contribution that language skills can make to business and industry in Australia over the next decade has to be attenuated by the overwhelming teacher quality and supply problem. Hence there are severe limits on the capacity of courses to change to meet real industry and other needs and on the diversity of needs that can realistically be met by the formal education system. Furthermore, the nature of Australia's predominant exporting sector means that there are definite limits on the capacity of many companies to be able either to train their own staff in language skills or to exercise enough speculative flexibility in their employment policies to take on significant numbers of people with language skills. This last limitation arises from the fact that a large part of Australia's export earnings comes from small and middle-sized companies that do not have the resources to take staff out of their regular work for the extended period required to develop useful levels of proficiency in any language, let alone in Japanese, Chinese or Korean. For all these reasons, as a result of all these limitations, it is necessary to turn to other possibilities to persuade companies that there is value in using language skills and to provide them with economical means by which to do so. One such possibility is the notion of a telephone interpreting service more or less modelled on the AT&T Language Line service in the United States. This proposal has been discussed in more detail elsewhere [Ingram 1996]; suffice it to say here that Language Line is a highly efficient, economical and hugely successful telephone interpreting system, initiated in 1982 by Jeff Munks when he was a member of the San José police force in California. Munks's idea was taken over in 1989 by AT&T and is now generating more than \$25 million annually with a 20% annual growth, and caters for more than 140 different languages.

The essence of Language Line is efficiency (callers are connected to an interpreter on average within 50 seconds and never more than 3 minutes), economy (calls average about \$45.00 but one major utility, the Pennsylvania Gas Works, cites an average cost of \$16.63), and quality of service (interpreters have to meet specified proficiency standards, be assessed in telephone interpreting and attend regular training sessions). Individuals can use Language Line with calls charged on their credit cards while companies can take out a modest subscription which is credited against their call charges. Jeff Munks provides evidence that confirms the usefulness of Language Line not only as a valuable service in itself as companies, emergency services or individuals try to deal with people who speak a different language, but also that shows the profoundly educative effect Language Line has. Even in companies that were reluctant to subscribe, Munks has shown that usage figures grow steeply, drop off slightly when it becomes more economical for them to employ their own in-house interpreters, and then go on growing again as their business diversifies and they enter new language areas (see Figure 2).

[Insert Figure 2 about here.]

In brief, there is a strong case for the provision of a self-funding, commercial service such as Language Line in Australia, either as a new service or, desirably, by reforming and combining existing telephone interpreting services to make them more commercial in orientation, more efficient, with higher quality control in regard to both interpreting itself and the efficiency of the service, and focussing not only on the domestic needs but also on servicing the needs of export companies and the huge potential market for such services in the linguistically diverse Asia-Pacific region. A Language Line service would thus be an economically sound investment in its own right but also would serve to overcome the limits on the provision of language skills to industry imposed by the need to reform many language programs, the need for a greater supply of highly proficient teachers, and the need to educate industry as to the real values to them of making more use of people with language skills and cultural knowledge.

III.4 *The Challenge of Attitudes*

This paper started by referring to the current race debate in Australia and its relevance to industry. Report after economic report has emphasised the need to develop an export culture in Australia if this country is to become economically strong, to overcome its present economic deficiencies, and, not least, arrive at a balance of trade situation that reflects Australians' lifestyle and quality of life aspirations [cf. ALLC 1994 and Stanley *et al* 1990]. We have already noted how fundamental in responding to this challenge are such issues as inter-cultural attitudes, an understanding of the nature and needs of the target markets, and, perhaps most of all, the establishment of close personal relations between Australian companies and their trading partners especially in Asia. In this regard, the present race debate is exceedingly damaging because it seems to reflect a disdain by white Australians for people of other races and other cultures. Whether or not attitudes are as negative as the current debate suggests, this emphasises, nevertheless, a challenge that is very much in the domain of language education, the challenge to so design language programs that they seek to foster in each generation of Australians attitudes that are conducive to good inter-cultural attitudes, to an understanding and unquestioning acceptance of all people irrespective of the colours of their skins, the languages they speak, or their cultural background. That is not to say that it is inappropriate to judge other peoples and their actions but those judgements should be based on fundamental human values, an understanding that those values underlie all cultures, and a realisation that skin colour is irrelevant to them.

There is no time in this paper to discuss at length the role of language education in fostering cross-cultural understanding and acceptance though there is no doubt that most language policies target such understanding and the development of more favourable cross-cultural attitudes as prime goals. It is also the case that the most powerful tool that a society has to influence the attitudes of its new generations is the formal and informal education system and, within that, it is language education that is demonstrably the most effective element [see, for example, Ingram. 1978, 1979]. In other words, even putting aside moral values, if Australia is to be effective in its

dealings with non-English speaking countries inhabited by people of different races and cultures, it is essential that Australians be characterised and be seen to be characterised by their acceptance of people of any race or culture or language and by their unquestioning acceptance as equally worthy as themselves. It is language education that has possibly the greatest responsibility in confronting this challenge, undoubtedly the most fundamental of all the challenges and the one which, if failed, will ensure the failure of all the other challenges. That is the challenge which, more than any other, will determine whether Australia achieves cosmopolitan excellence and realises its full economic potential or whether it sinks back into complacent, ignorant and increasingly impoverished chauvinism as the white trash of Asia.

IV Conclusion

This paper has attempted to touch on some important responses that language education must make to the challenges it confronts from a recognition of the vocational or workplace relevance of language skills and cultural understanding. It has stressed the need for more attention to the practical skills that students going through the education system acquire, the need for urgent attention to the supply of teachers capable of teaching to the high proficiency goals required if industry needs are to be met, the need for industry to receive the tools and personnel assistance it needs to identify and articulate its language needs, and the desirability of providing alternative ways of making language skills available to industry and of better utilising the substantial skills that already exist in the Australian community.

Perhaps, as was noted earlier, the most fundamental challenge to language education is to ensure that it addresses those fundamental attitudes that the current race debate in Australia has highlighted. If Australian industry is to be successful, if it is to be able to serve the markets that are available to it, it must realise that it has to understand those markets and respect the people who compose them. It must realise that to be successful, it is not enough to have a good product, to view the people in other countries as objects, as money-boxes who will pour forth on their command as the old imperialists made the colonies pay two centuries ago. The clients are people who must be understood, who demand to be understood and to be accepted as equally worthy as those people who are trying to sell to them, they are people with whom relationships must be created before they will buy, and they are people whose needs must be met or they will not buy. For this to occur, Australian industry must ensure that its people understand the clients, that they accept them as equal human beings, that they understand their culture and, necessarily, that they accept the need to speak their language. Australian industry needs to learn from Pocahontas, the young American Indian woman, who, in Disney's version of the story, introduced John Smith to her culture and her Virginia environment. In the film, she sings that exquisite song *Colours of the Wind* uttering these words:

*You think I'm an ignorant savage
And you've been so many places
I guess it must be so.
But still I cannot see,*

*If the savage one is me,
How can there be so much that you don't know you don't know?*

*You think you own whatever land you land on;
The earth is just a dead thing you can claim.
But I know every rock and tree and creature
Has a life, has a spirit, has a name.
You think the only people who are people
Are the people who look and think like you
But, if you walk the footsteps of a stranger,
You'll learn things you never knew you never knew.*

*Have you ever heard the wolf cry to the bluecorn moon
Or asked the grinning bobcat why he grinned?
Can you sing with all the voices of the mountain?
Can you paint with all the colours of the wind?
Can you paint with all the colours of the wind?*

Pocahontas describes some of the beauties of her world and goes on:

*The rainstorm and the river are my brothers.
The heron and the otter are my friends.
And we are all connected to each other,
In a circle, in a hoop that never ends.
How high does the sycamore grow -
If you cut it down then you'll never know.
And you'll never hear the wolf cry to the bluecorn moon.
Oh! whether we are white or copper-skinned
We need to sing with all the voices of the mountain,
We need to paint with all the colours of the wind.
You can own the earth and still,
All you'll own is earth until
You can paint with all the colours of the wind.*

Australian industry that thinks it can dispense with language skills, rest in its monolingual, monocultural complacency and still sell to others acts as if it thinks that the only people who are people are the people who look and think like it. But, success will come only when it accepts the rights of others to be different, when it accepts that it can learn from people of other cultures, other races and speaking other languages; it will be successful only when it learns from Pocahontas that

*.. if you walk the footsteps of a stranger,
You'll learn things you never knew you never knew.*

The challenge to language education is to help industry to learn those things and to provide the graduates who can meet industry's resultant needs.

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