Challenging the monolingual mindset

Thursday 23rd February, 2012

RUMACCC 10th anniversary Colloquium and Michael Clyne Lecture

Colloquium Abstracts

1-1.30pm   **Kate Burridge:** 'Matter out of place': public perceptions of and reaction to language use

In this talk I explore popular perceptions of language, in particular linguistic prescription. I focus not on formal acts of censorship such as might be carried out by a language academy, but on the attitudes and activities of ordinary people in, say, letters to newspapers or comments on radio. In these contexts, language users act as self-appointed censors and take it upon themselves to condemn those words and constructions that they feel do not measure up to the standards they perceive should hold sway.

I argue that people's concerns about language and the kind of linguistic censorship and puristic activities that accompany them belong to our tabooing behaviour generally. Prescriptive practices are part of the human struggle to control unruly nature — in this case, to define language and to force the reality of 'the boundless chaos of a living speech' (as Samuel Johnson expressed it in his Preface) into neat classificatory systems. As with tabooing practices generally, linguistic purists (or verbal hygienists, to use Deborah Cameron's label) see a very clear distinction between what is clean and what is dirty — in this case, what is desirable and undesirable in a language. Linguists who challenge these prescriptions are challenging their 'cherished classifications'. Small wonder there is such a schism between linguistics and the wider community.

However, there are signs of change. The relationship between standard and nonstandard usage is clearly transforming with changes in educational practices heralding the end of years of institutionalized prescription. Colloquialization, liberalization and the effects of e-communciation now mean nonstandard language 'is achieving a new presence and respectability within society' (Crystal 2006: 408). So will this spell the end of linguistic purism?

Crystal, David 2006. Into the Twenty-first century. In pages 394-413 of Lynda Mugglestone (ed) The Oxford History of English. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Douglas, Mary 1966. Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

1.30-2pm   **Margaret Gearon:** Becoming a Community Languages' Teacher: The perceived role of professional learning programs

Learning to become a second language teacher through formal training which includes theoretical principles and practical application is considered essential for those wanting to teach in mainstream schools. This is not generally the case for teachers in community (heritage) language schools in Australia. These teachers, with varying bilingual competence in their first language and English, currently must undertake a minimum thirty hour course focussed on the teaching of language and culture in their particular context. This is to ensure that they have a basic understanding of second and bilingual teaching and learning principles and practices, and of the Victorian government's curriculum framework for teaching and assessing languages. A number of Community Languages teachers involved in an initial professional learning course completed two open –ended questionnaires, one to seek their views about language teaching and learning in a community language school, and the extent to which the basic methodology course influenced these, and the other to obtain their response to proposed new units for the course. The results of this small study will be presented here by drawing on the participants' responses and relating these to the views of Freeman & Johnson (1998) and Velez-Rendon (2002, 2006) concerning the knowledge base of languages' teacher education programmes.

2-2.30pm   **Hui Huang and Marisa Cordella:** Interactions with Second Language and Culture: An Intergenerational Intercultural Experience

This project is an initiative to utilise Australian rich multilingual and multicultural community resources to enhance upper secondary school students' second language learning and intercultural communication experience. Year 11 and 12 students of Chinese, German or Spanish from three Melbourne schools conduct fortnightly conversations with senior people speaking the language as their L1. In particular, the study examines the effect of such intergenerational and intercultural conversations on intercultural communications. The analysis of data in three languages found evidence that the benefits of intercultural and interpersonal communication are mutual and such benefits are not confined at the cognitive level but more importantly at the behavioural level.

2.30-3pm   Afternoon tea

3-3.30pm   Heinz L. Kretzenbacher (on behalf of John Hajek, Michael Clyne†, Heinz L. Kretzenbacher, Catrin Norrby and Jane Warren): Meet and greet: address and introductions in intercultural communication at international conferences

In this paper we examine forms of mutual address and of introducing third persons within one particular setting for intercultural communication: international conferences. The findings of or empirical study indicate substantial cultural variation in perception and expectations of address norms and usage, as well as a level of uncertainty in how to introduce and address others in an intercultural context. Also, the (in)appropriate use of first names is frequently brought up by respondents – both as a source of irritation and satisfaction.

3.30-4pm   Lin Zheng: Anglo-Chinese Business communication and miscommunications

While there is growing economic integration between China and world markets, it brings with it ever more demanding requirements to develop trust and flexibility. This requires effective communication. A lack of some shared cultural values sometimes leads to hidden assumptions thwarting or distorting communication. A visible example was the Stern Hu case.

4-4.30pm   Howard Nicholas: On the relationship between second language acquisition and bilingualism (in Australian applied linguistics)

Michael Clyne was a key figure in both second language acquisition (SLA) and bilingual acquisition research. Yet bilingualism and SLA research have developed largely separate trajectories – perhaps more in Australia than elsewhere. SLA research dominantly assumes that it builds on the (more or less) complete acquisition of a 'first' language. Bilingual acquisition research focuses on incomplete acquisition in one or more languages. The deployment of two or more languages occupies an uncertain position in relation to developmental approaches. What does this lack of a connection between traditions of language resource research tell us about 'Australia's language potential'?

4.30-5pm   Break

5-6pm **Keynote address**

Catrin Norrby: Good evening Stockholm! English in Scandinavia – monster or mate?

Travellers to Scandinavia are often struck by the generalized high level of English proficiency in most of the region. According to the Eurobarometer language survey (2006) the overwhelming majority of respondents in Denmark, Finland and Sweden speak at least one if not two languages in addition to their mother tongue. There is no doubt, however, of English's privileged place in all this: 89% of Swedes claim to be able to speak English. This knowledge of English has long been identified as an important factor in Scandinavia's successful economic development and international engagement.

Focussing our attention mostly on Sweden, we discuss how such a situation of English predominance came to be the norm, and consider different aspects such as: (1) recent trends in attitudes to English as seen in official language planning nationally as well as in language policy and reality in Swedish universities; before turning our attention to (2) use and attitudes re English amongst the general public – including in the city streetscape. We aim to show that there is a significant tension between contrasting trends of accepting and controlling the role of English in Swedish society.