

We'll take the pale one ...just make sure she keeps her mouth shut

Lonán Fiach Ó Lorgnáin

A tendency amongst the empire's Irish subjects – such as the 4,000 young orphaned females transported to Australia under the Earl Grey Scheme (Molinari, 2018) – to possess fair skin suited England's imperialist desire to gradually replace Australian peoples with persons who reflected their own physical & philosophical attributes for the usurpation of the Marege¹ continent's immense resources. Indeed, the ideology was formalised under the White Australia Policy laws and reiterated by rhetoric such as “Australia must [...] populate or perish” (Jupp, 2010, page 11), despite Australian peoples having inhabited the continent without the assistance of England's population policies for tens of millennia prior to Europeans' arrival. Fortunately, the racial prejudices which supported England's subjugation of Australia have been challenged in recent decades if the increasing ethnic diversity of the country's demographics be considered. That 53% of 1st generation immigrants reported speaking a *language other than English* at home yet this diminished to 20% and 1.6% of second and third generations respectively (Wilson, 2017) suggests that though we may now be comfortable to *look* diverse, our education, broadcast media and employment institutions do not support the more diverse ways of thinking associated with multilingualism unless a quick buck is to be made.



Dr. Val Noone & Debra Vaughan in 2014 commemorating the arrival of the 'famine orphans' from English-ruled Ireland (source: *Tinteán*)

The *Anglo-Celtic Australian*: an imperialist myth

Conflating the English and the Celtic peoples as one ethno-cultural identity distorts the inherent differences between the pair and feeds into the commonly-portrayed misconception of the latter representing mere demographic subsets of the former. The misconception which the term portrays, nonetheless, offered a degree of mutual convenience. For Celtic-Australians – historically considered as inferior to their more measured, 'Anglo-Teutonic' counterparts (McMahon, 2009, page 587) – it meant a chance to join the highest social strata within post-1788 Australia, whilst simultaneously consolidating imperialist aims that to be Australian meant having fair skin *and* that the Irish and fellow Celtic descendants abandon their defiance of English expansionism in their former and newfound homelands to instead join their ranks against the Empire's latest opponents - the 'Yellow Peril' and Australian 'flora and fauna', as well as other competing European colonisers. The term has served as a tool within England's broader 'divide and conquer' armoury to dissuade the various subjugated peoples who found themselves in Australia following its colonial appropriation from collectively challenging their common tormentor.

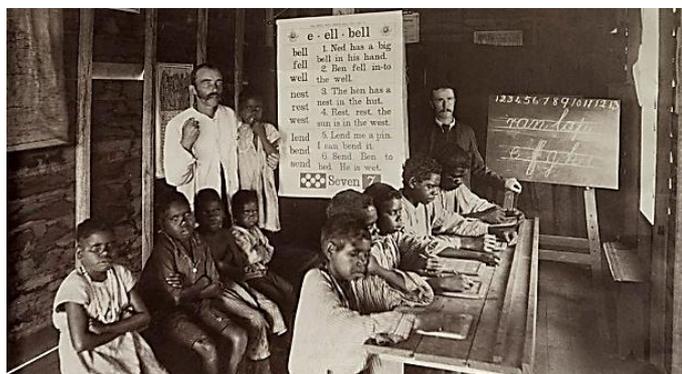
¹ Marege was the name given to Australia by fishermen from Makassar (now part of Indonesia) who came seeking trepang on the northern coast and were in contact with Aboriginal people before European colonisation.

Gaelic vs. Irish ... and the Scots red herring

Referring nowadays to the Irish tongue in English as *Gaelic* fails to reflect the socio-linguistic evolution experienced by its community of speakers more recently, having first arrived in Ireland approximately 2,500 years ago and represented the country's predominant language tradition until the early 1800s. Of particular relevance from an Irish historical perspective herein is its divergence in socio-political and orthographic terms from its Scottish counterpart in recent centuries following the likes of *Imeacht na nIarlaí* – and the consequent disappearance of widely-accepted literary forms of the language (Ó Murchadha, 2012, pages 32-34 & 39) – along with *Cogadh na Saoirse* ('the [Irish] War of Independence') and *Caighdeánú na Gaeilge* ('standardisation of the Irish language'). However, it is questionable that the older of the two enduring indigenous tongues of the Scottish population is referred to as 'Scottish Gaelic' – rather than simply 'Scottish' – yet the other, with a less ancient existence amongst the same demographic, enjoys the name 'Scots' – rather than 'Scottish Middle English' (indeed, the Irish online dictionary database *Teanglann* translates 'Scots' as 'Béarla na hAlban' or *Scottish English*; de Bhaldraithe, 1959). Perhaps a universally-satisfying compromise for both of these linguistic communities – though it would require England's civil servants to re-engage in multilingual diplomacy, as per Elizabeth I's Irish language primer (Crowley, 2002, page 19) – would be to redirect public resources away from continuing to promote English as *lingua franca* of contemporary Scotland towards, instead, standardising and re-embracing Scottish [Gaelic] and Scots as part of a united, bilingual State policy approach amongst all of its citizens.

Newspeak, Thoughtcrime and the English language hegemony down under

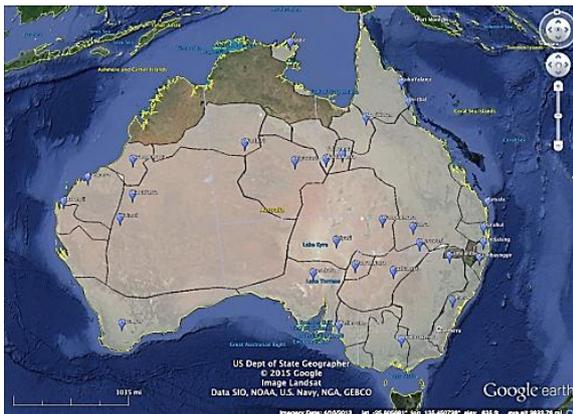
Citizenship Minister Alan Tudge was correct when he previously asserted (Benson, 2018) that having shared means of communication is important in maintaining social cohesion in ethno-culturally diverse societies like Australia. Assuming that English alone serve this purpose for us in the heart of Australasia, however, is undemocratic and smacks of imperialist England's expansionist ideology. Indeed, according to the now dominant *Westminster*-descended legal system which has all but obliterated its Australian predecessors, our nation has no official languages. In spite of this, innovative anglicisation tactics in both monolingualistic and ideological terms targeting those who wish to be accepted as 'Australian' are pervasive and relentless, being reflected in everything from Northern Territory MP Kezia Purick's accusation that Local Government Minister Bess Nungarrayi Price had engaged in disorderly conduct merely because the latter spoke Warlpiri rather than English in parliament in 2016 (Robinson, 2016), to Tudge's proposed new English proficiency immigration test (Acharya, 2018). They help to reinforce mere propaganda that Englishness underpins 'Australianness' – reflected not only linguistically but in



'Indigenous children are seen at a Church of England mission school in Yarrabah, north Queensland, in 1893. Indigenous students were often forced to learn English and forbidden from speaking their own languages' (Girffiths, 2020; original image source: *State Library of New South Wales*)

institutional, literary, curriculum and ethnic terms, too – rather than acknowledging that by measuring one’s adherence to an Australian identity through reference to phenomena originating from English and Anglophonic society, the linguistic, perceptual and cultural features truly unique to this part of the world continue to be subjugated and are vanishing. Refraining from ostracising Australians who speak a tongue other than that originating from England – including Australian languages – is likely to provide all living in Australia with opportunities to revise frequently-repeated untruths, such as Tasmanian Liberal Senator Eric Abetz’s assertion in 2014 that questioning the appropriateness of opening parliament by reciting the [Christian] Lord’s Prayer constituted an “ongoing attempt to rewrite our history and deny our heritage” (Ireland, 2014), and being further reflected in the development of policies such as *The National School Chaplaincy Programme* which continues to operate in *public* schools (Budget 2018: School chaplains program made 'permanent', 2018 ; also Rojas, 2018). Were public figures of *both* major political parties – quick to recall Australia’s Christian foundation – to spend as much time brushing up on their proficiency in an Australian language, like Yolngu, as reading their King James Bibles, they may have encountered the likes of ‘Walitha’walitha’, a significant spiritual figure in parts of Australia’s north and adapted from the Muslim phrase ‘Allah ta’ala’ (*God, the exalted*) of Indonesian traders who arrived some centuries prior to King James’ contemporaries (Ganter, 2013).

Athbheochan na Pamaniúngáinise - a challenge to the current order?



The light grey-shaded areas of this map show where Pama-Nyungan has been spoken, in various forms, over millenia until at least 1788 (source: Bowern, 2015)

Athbheochan na Gaeilge of the late 19th century – a social movement challenging the marginalisation of the Irish language & communities from public spaces & institutions (e.g. street signage, school & university classrooms, name registries, legal proceedings) in their homeland (Mac Giolla Chríost, 2004, pages 102-103) – led to the creation of *Conradh na Gaeilge*, followed by other indigenous language protection laws & publicly-funded bodies in the 20th century, including *Foras na Gaeilge* in Ireland, *Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori* in New Zealand, *la loi Touban* in France, הָאָקָדֶמְיָה לְלִשׁוֹן הָעִבְרִית (‘Academy of the Hebrew Language’) in Israel and the *Inuit Language Protection Act* in Canada. A common precursor to

these has been an increased understanding amongst language communities of the integral link between ensuring their ongoing visibility across public spaces in their homeland and enjoying an equitable influence upon matters of social, educational and economic significance in their lives. Linguistic scholarship, in turn, often foregrounds an understanding of this nexus.

Relatedly, research published in early 2018 demonstrated that over 90% of the languages spoken across Australia prior to 1788 had evolved from a single ancestor language – [Proto-]Pama-Nyungan (Bouckaert, Bowern & Atkinson, 2018). Further, through analysis of descended languages, linguistic experts have already pieced together several of Pama-Nyungan’s lexical and phonological characteristics. Meanwhile in 2015, the *Framework for Aboriginal Languages and*



Torres Strait Islander Languages was introduced into the national school curriculum, representing a significant step towards centrally recognising and positioning the formal study of Australian languages by Australian students. Nonetheless, with it currently stating ‘[t]here are at least 250 distinct Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages, many having several dialects’ (ACARA, 2018), the prospect of all Australians learning an Australian language during their schooling is likely to prove much less appealing and practically beneficial. What if, instead, the Framework were to read *whilst there are at least 250 distinct Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages (with many having several dialects) which can be studied as an elective, literacy in Standard Pama-Nyungan – in addition to English – is taught across all Australian schools?* The white elephant in this country’s languages policy room that Australian languages are of little practical worth in contemporary, federated Australia requiring a nationally-intelligible *lingua franca* would be no more. In light of the findings of the aforementioned research, the Federal Government ought to commission, by 2025, a permanent consultative Pama-Nyungan body tasked with further developing its standardisation and providing educational materials & training to public education, health and broadcast media organisations. Prematurely, my submission thereto would be that standardised forms of the ancient logograms found in indigenous Australian art traditions – perhaps in combination with the Lontara script of the Indonesian peoples who historically interacted with Australian language communities, to produce a logo-alphasyllabic writing system – be considered for the efficient visual representation of Pama-Nyungan. Should this occur, further, Australia would be one of but approximately four locations globally in which a writing system began in isolation (Schmandt-Besserat, 2010, Introduction).

Conclusion

Whilst one needs only to look around the streets of Australia’s major cities to attest to our increased ethnic diversity and collective successes in dismantling earlier racially-prejudiced policies, progress in acknowledging and representing our equally diverse *linguistic identities* and associated perspectives has been less promising. There is no doubt that the diversity of the languages we speak shapes the extent of our collective diversity in perceiving reality (Boroditsky, 2011) and, even, in forming decisions. Unfortunately, unlike the many linguistic traditions immigrant communities have brought to Australia from abroad over the past 250 years, speakers of Australian languages do not enjoy similar diasporic support. It is time for Australian languages and their communities to be centrally represented in Australian schools, broadcast media, parliaments and other public spaces. Recent developments in our understanding of the earlier, widely-spoken Pama-Nyungan language represent exciting possibilities for uniting all Australians under a bilingual, bicultural identity alongside the country’s significant English heritage. Relatedly, indigenous, Celtic language communities of the British Isles – with *British* itself originating from the term ‘Pritani’ of one of the region’s earlier Celtic languages (Koch, 2003, page 8) – ought to be proportionately represented in Australia’s multicultural broadcast media, interpreting and translation services and as elective subjects in our educational institutions, as is already so for dozens of other language communities originating from abroad. Indeed, these latter tend not to be associated with the still sensitive historical relationship which arose between the former and Imperialist England and of which the assimilationist practice here of referring to minoritised yet sovereign peoples from that region, like the Irish, as ‘Anglo-Celtic’ smacks. More broadly, a national, democratic dialogue extending beyond the Federal Government’s immigration policy-makers is overdue. As our understanding of Australians’ diverse

backgrounds becomes more sophisticated, it is timely to also consider how we wish our collective linguistic identity to look and how this could be reflected in the likes of our Constitution.

References

ACARA (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority), (2018). *Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages*. Retrieved from <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/languages/framework-for-aboriginal-languages-and-torres-strait-islander-languages/what-is-the-framework/>

Acharya, M. (2018, March 7). Australian Citizenship: Migrants to face tougher English language test. *Special Broadcasting Service (Hindi Program)*. Retrieved from <https://www.sbs.com.au/language/english/australian-citizenship-migrants-to-face-tougher-english-language-test>

Benson, Simon. (2018, July 20). Citizenship Minister Alan Tudge flags values test for migrants. *The Australian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/citizenship-minister-alan-tudge-flags-values-test-for-migrants/news-story/46c47502b81dc76d9bb8a88866ee25ec>

Boroditsky, L. (2011). How language shapes thought. *Scientific American*, 304(2), 62-65.

Bouckaert, R. R., Bowern, C., & Atkinson, Q. D. (2018). The origin and expansion of Pama–Nyungan languages across Australia. *Nature ecology & evolution*, 2(4), 741-749.

Budget 2018: School chaplains program made 'permanent' (2018, 8 May). SBS (Special Broadcasting Service). Retrieved from <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/budget-2018-school-chaplains-program-made-permanent>

Bowern, C. (2015). *Explorations in Pama-Nyungan Phylogenetics*. Retrieved from <https://www.pamanyungan.net/2015/10/explorations-in-pama-nyungan-phylogenetics/>

Collins, S. (2017, February 17). Greens, some Labour MPs call for compulsory Maori language in schools. *NZ Herald*. Retrieved from https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11792412

Crowley, T. (2002). *The politics of language in Ireland 1366-1922: A sourcebook*. Routledge.

de Bhaldraithe, T. (1959). *English-Irish Dictionary*. City: An Gúm. Retrieved from <https://www.teanglann.ie/ga/eid/scots>

Ganter, R. (2013). 4. Histories with traction: Macassan contact in the framework of Muslim Australian history. *Macassan history and heritage: journeys, encounters and influences/Marshall Clark*, 55.

Griffiths, J. (2020, July 21). Indigenous Australians had their languages taken from them, and it's still causing issues today. *CNN World*. Retrieved from <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/07/20/australia/australia-indigenous-language-rights-intl-hnk/index.html>

Ireland, J. (2014, January 14). Time to scrap Lord's Prayer in Parliament: Greens. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/time-to-scrap-lords-prayer-in-parliament-greens-20140114-30src.html>

Jupp, J., 2010. *From White Australia To Woomera*. Cambridge, GBR: Cambridge University Press.

Koch, J. T. (2003). Celts, Britons and Gaels: Names, peoples and identities. *The Transactions - The Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 41-56. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/7142081/Celts_Britons_and_Gaels_Names_Peoples_and_Identities

Mac Giolla Chríost, D. (2004). *The Irish language in Ireland: from Goidel to globalisation* (Vol. 3). Routledge.

McMahon, R. (2009). Anthropological race psychology 1820–1945: a common European system of ethnic identity narratives. *Nations and Nationalism*, 15(4), 575-596.

Molinari, V. (2018). "The Emigration of Irish Famine Orphan Girls to Australia: The Earl Grey Scheme". In *International Migrations in the Victorian Era*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill. doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004366398_020

Ó Murchadha, N. (2012). *Idé-eolaíocht agus Daonteangeolaíocht na Gaeilge: aird ar éagsúlacht teanga na Gaeilge*.

Robinson, N. (2016, February 18). Aboriginal minister Bess Price denied request to speak Indigenous language in NT Parliament. *Australian Broadcasting Corporation News*. Retrieved from <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-02-18/nt-warlpiri-minister-denied-request-to-speak-indigenous-language/7178298>

Rojas, R. (2018, August 27). Scott Morrison Is a New Kind of Australian Prime Minister: An Evangelical Christian. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/27/world/australia/scott-morrison-evangelical-prime-minister.html>

Schmandt-Besserat, D. (2010). *How writing came about*. University of Texas Press.

Tinteán (2014, November 17). *Irish Famine Orphans Commemoration Day*. Retrieved from <https://tintean.org.au/tag/irish-famine-orphans/>.

Wilson, C. (2017). *Multicultural but monolingual, where is Australia heading?* Retrieved from <http://www.culturebridge.com.au/papers--insights/fasdfa>