

# 10 *The School of Australian Linguistics*

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## 1. Introduction

The School of Australian Linguistics (SAL) was an unusual institution that provided language and linguistic education to some two thousand speakers of about a hundred Australian languages and dialects between 1974 and 1989 (SAL Review panel 1989:4).<sup>1</sup> Although its establishment was officially justified as supporting the bilingual education programs that were then starting in the Northern Territory of Australia, undoubtedly it was also inspired by Ken Hale's (e.g. 1965, 1972; Alvarez & Hale 1970) stress on the importance of enabling such speakers to undertake linguistic studies of their own languages. Hale (1972:376) not only pointed out how "many important aspects of the structure of a given language are essentially beyond the reach of the scholar who is not a native speaker", but he was also quite open about the sociopolitical implications of the typical research endeavour:

Anthropological linguistics, no less than anthropology itself, is "a child of Western imperialism."... In effect, anthropology and anthropological linguistics became disciplines in which Westerners studied, published, and built teaching and research careers around the cultural and linguistic wealth of non-Western peoples. (Hale 1972:384)

Naturally Hale (1972:391) was not interested in bringing speakers of indigenous languages into such an imperialistic system, whose professionalism "had the effect of isolating the field of linguistics from the people, of making it increasingly difficult to see how their subject matter is in any way of potential service to the people". Instead, using Native Americans as an example, he maintained that:

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<sup>1</sup> We are especially grateful to Barry Alpher for supplying details of the early years of SAL, and also to Tina Black, Neil Chadwick, Bob Dixon, Nick Evans, Kevin Ford, Lys Ford, Patrick McConnell, and David Nash for their comments on drafts of this paper and/or other relevant information. Naturally we would not suggest that any of them shares all the views expressed in this paper; people's experiences at SAL surely varied considerably.

the people who can best decide its relevance to concerns of American Indian communities are the members of those communities. The distribution of linguistic talent and interest which is to be found in an American Indian community does not necessarily correspond in any way to the distribution of formal education in the Western sense. If this talent is to flourish and be brought to bear in helping determine the particular relevance of the study of language to the communities in which it is located, then ways must be found to enable individuals . . . to receive training and accreditation which will enable them to devote their energies to the study of their own languages. (Hale 1972:392–3)

The School of Australian Linguistics seemed to be such a way, though hardly a straight and narrow one. We'll return to this matter in the conclusion, so that we can draw on our account of what SAL was like and how it developed over the years. In providing this account we have tended to focus on the students and staff and their activities, mindful of how many were involved in the School over the years—in addition to the two thousand speakers of Australian languages, some two dozen linguists experienced teaching at SAL for a semester or more. McKay (1991) has also written about the School, with a focus on its educational program.

## 2. Getting Started

McKay (1991:38) described SAL as the result of a proposal by R.M.W. Dixon, David Glasgow, Sarah Gudschinsky, and S.A. Wurm to establish a College of Australian Linguistics to provide linguistic training for Aborigines in connection with bilingual education. As Glasgow (pers. comm.) recalls the meeting in Canberra in about April 1973, five or six others were involved as well, but he and Gudschinsky went to it with a proposal for establishing some sort of body to train speakers of Aboriginal languages in linguistic analysis, and they found that Dixon and Wurm came with a similar proposal that could be amalgamated with their own into one at the meeting. Dixon (pers. comm.) recalls a second meeting as well and notes that Peter Ucko, who was then Principal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, also played a significant role. Dixon (1983:281–2) essentially characterises the establishment of SAL as a means of meeting Hale's concerns about educating speakers to undertake studies of their own languages. In any case the proposed institution was to provide:

. . . training to produce preliminary materials for bilingual education programs, advanced linguistic training in the basic methodology and procedures of linguistic analysis, training to advise and assist Aboriginal communities on linguistic matters within the framework of the bilingual education program, and finally training to carry out sociolinguistic studies to assess the feasibility of bilingual education in particular languages. (Department of Education 1973:21, in McKay 1991:38)

O'Grady and Hale (1974:1) attended the inaugural meeting of the SAL Advisory Board. They saw an additional role for linguists at SAL and elsewhere in ensuring the adequacy of the linguistic analyses on which bilingual education was based (1974:3–4), and they also recommended that SAL “be approached about making a feasibility study of the use of linguistics as a means of teaching scientific method in bilingual schools” (1974:2). The latter proposal relates to an earlier suggestion by Hale (1972:391) that:

The subject matter of linguistics is perhaps uniquely amenable to use in education at secondary and primary levels as a means of teaching concepts and methodology of general applicability in scientific enquiry (for example, hypotheses, explanation,

empirical evidence, and the construction of supporting argument), and it seems to me entirely reasonable for linguists to explore the possibilities which this suggests for the future position of linguistics and of linguists in general education.

By August of 1974 SAL had been established as one of what eventually became six schools within the newly established Darwin Community College in Darwin. There is brief report in the *Handbook of Darwin Community College* (1976:144), but Barry Alpher (pers. comm.) reports in more detail that it started with Toby Metcalfe as Head of School, Alpher as Senior Lecturer, and Jeff Heath and Sue Kesteven as temporary lecturers, and it ran its first course from October to November in facilities provided by the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Berrimah, on the edge of Darwin.

There were five rather exceptional students in this first course. One was Ephraim Bani, who had already been collaborating with Terry Klokeid in the study of his language, Kala Lagaw Ya (Bani & Klokeid 1972 and 1976) and who went on to produce the first (and to date only) linguistic description in (and of) an indigenous Australian language in a refereed journal (Bani 1987). Two others were David Jentian and Gerald Robinson, both Ngalkbon speakers; Jentian was or became well known for his work in the bilingual program at Barunga, and he also made a crucial contribution to the understanding of the kinship basis of dual person-marking in Ngalkbon (see Alpher 1982:27, note 1). The remaining two were the Warlpiri speakers George Jampijinpa Robertson and Robin Japanangka Granites, who were subsequently very productive in linguistic scholarship in their community (Yuendumu). Granites subsequently visited Hale at MIT in 1975-76, helping provide the basis for a grammatical survey (Granites, Hale & Odling-Smee 1976) and some short grammatical essays in Warlpiri (see Granites & Laughren, this volume).

On Christmas Day 1974 Darwin was devastated by Cyclone Tracy. Alpher (pers. comm.) recalls that the students and temporary staff had already dispersed to their communities or centres of study, and the two permanent SAL staff, among thousands of others evacuated from Darwin, were relocated to Canberra. Nonetheless the School held a course in Alice Springs from April to June 1975 and one in Yirrkala in July and August (Alpher 1976, Courtenay and Alpher 1976). By the time of the latter course Karen Courtenay had joined the permanent staff and Gavan Breen and Ephraim Bani were employed as temporary lecturers.

SAL was then relocated to Batchelor, a small community some ninety kilometres south of Darwin. With Maria Brandl and later Barry Blake temporarily replacing Toby Metcalfe as acting Heads of School, SAL ran another course, with students from Oenpelli and Bathurst Island coming to Batchelor. Barry Alpher took on the job of acting Head at the beginning of 1976, and in that year the School conducted six courses, some of them offered on-site in Aboriginal communities (Darwin Community College 1977:27).

Batchelor was a pleasant location, and conveniently also home to two other programs for indigenous people, namely the Vocational Training Centre (VTC) of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Aboriginal Teacher Education Centre (ATEC) of the Department of Education (Duke & Sommerlad 1976:65-9); the latter soon became Batchelor College, which in 1999 became independent from the Department as the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education. Alpher (pers. comm.) notes that Batchelor was chosen as the new location for SAL because of the presence of ATEC and students who wanted to participate in both programmes, as well as because of the availability of housing for students and staff there and because of its proximity to the main campus of Darwin Community College. Duke and Sommerlad (1976:65, 134) also saw Batchelor as a less threatening location than Darwin, being less of a change from the home communities of the students.

SAL used ATEC facilities (reported as VTC facilities by Darwin Community College 1979:59) from October 1975 until its own were completed in August 1977. The latter included seven student residences and three large demountables that contained classrooms, offices, and a library. SAL linguists often ended up providing such support as driving the SAL bus, but support staff soon grew to include an administrative officer, student welfare officer, secretary, maintenance officer, and a part-time librarian.

By 1977 Alpher and Courtenay were joined by three other lecturers, namely Neil Chadwick, the late Gnani Perinpanayagam, and David Zorc. Kevin Ford was appointed Head of School at the end of 1977, Alpher left in July 1978 and was replaced in 1979 by Patrick McConvell, Perinpanayagam was replaced by Gavan Breen in late 1979, and Courtenay was replaced by Paul Black temporarily in 1981 and permanently from 1982. McConvell went on leave without pay in 1985 and did not return to duty at SAL, while Zorc left the program in about 1986. Graham McKay taught at SAL in 1982–85, Nick Evans in 1985–87, the late Steve Johnson in 1985–86, and Prith Chakravarti from 1988.

There were many others who taught at or for SAL for various shorter periods. An incomplete list of others who worked at SAL for at least a semester would include Felix Ameka, Anthony Cook, Tamsin Donaldson, Bronwyn Eather, Mark Harvey, Ian Green, Jean Harkins, John Hobson, Bill McGregor, Mari Rhydwen (then Maret), Anna Shnukal, Bruce Sommer, Nick Thieberger, and Melanie Wilkinson.

### 3. Programs

The programs of the School were at first quite loose and adaptable to the needs of the students. The 1976 handbook (Darwin Community College 1976:141) listed four linguistic units, three educational units, ten practical units, and seven electives, but these units were not necessarily to be delivered in any set span of time. Elsewhere (1976:144) it was noted that courses would run over four semi-semesters each year, and that students would cover only part of any particular unit within each semi-semester. It was nonetheless envisaged that the program would ultimately lead to an Associate Diploma of Australian Linguistics upon the completion of “a competent description of some part of his or her language” after “about two years of intensive, full time course work” (1976:144).

By the following year the list of units had changed somewhat—there were six linguistic, three educational, thirteen practical, and three ‘related’—and nothing was said about an award, but only that the course was to be submitted for accreditation.

After Ford was appointed Head of School a suite of certificate courses was developed that would remain much the same through the 1980s. These included a four-stage course in literacy and literacy work introduced in 1979 and a course in interpreting and translation in 1980. For several years it also continued to announce plans for an Associate Diploma in Linguistics, but this never eventuated. With the 1979 accreditation SAL also clarified its aims as follows (Darwin Community College 1979:59); the first of these certainly echoes Hale’s concerns:

- (a) Education aimed at making Aboriginal and Island[er] people self-sufficient in linguistically related spheres.
- (b) The linguistic training of Aboriginal people to assist the development of bilingual education, and for other practical and scholarly purposes.
- (c) The development of creative language skills among Aboriginal people.
- (d) The training of Aboriginal translators and interpreters.

The literacy and literacy worker program consisted of four stages, each of which was taught over an eight-week period in Batchelor, with portions occasionally taught in indigenous communities. Students completing the last three stages received the following three certificates, one for each stage:

- CLA: The Certificate of Literacy Attainment, for basic literacy in the student's first language—graduates should be able to write anything they would normally say—coupled with introductions to linguistics and literacy work.
- CTS: The Certificate of Transcription, for more advanced literacy and other skills, including the ability to transcribe the speech of other speakers as well as one's own.
- CLW: The Certificate of Literacy Work, further literacy and linguistic development with more stress on the preparation of a variety of literacy materials.

A few changes were made when SAL reaccredited this program in 1985. Increasing numbers of students were well enough prepared that they did not need the first stage of the course, but a more generalised, less linguistic version of it was retained as the 'Preliminary Course' for those that did need it. At the same time the program was extended by the addition of a more advanced stage that led to a Certificate in Linguistics (CLN); this ran once in 1986 to produce eight graduates (SAL Review Panel 1989:12).

By 1980 an eight-week Certificate of Translation and Interpreting (CTI) program had been accredited both as a course and as a level II qualification by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI), and it was first run near the end of that year. This was an especially demanding program, and since students often had difficulty completing it, the 1985 reaccreditation broke it into a two-week segment that students could complete for a Language Aide's Certificate with NAATI level I accreditation, with just the stronger students going on to complete the full CTI through another seven weeks' work (SAL Review Panel 1989:35).

All of the SAL certificate courses had clearly practical ends, orientated to vocational purposes, but at the same time they could also be seen as vehicles for promoting the intellectual development of students by helping them explore the use of linguistics on their own languages. This might have been taken much further within an Associate Diploma in Linguistics, but having developed plans for this program, the School was never able to put them into operation.

#### **4. Teaching**

Teaching at SAL was a fascinating experience that required much rethinking of how education works—perhaps it's just as well that only a couple of the lecturers had any formal teacher training! As McKay (1991:38) put it:

The School was highly innovative in its original concept, without any parallel in the Australian Aboriginal field. Of necessity it had to break new ground in its teaching programs and, up until the time of its absorption into Batchelor College in July 1989, these were still developing in response to the very complex factors presented by Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal languages and their speakers.

One thing SAL did differently from many institutions was to bring modules of courses out to the communities on occasion, beginning with some of the earliest courses in 1975 and continuing through the life of the School. We'd like to believe that this influenced the development of similar practices within Batchelor College during the 1980s. At the same

time, the accreditation of the programs tended to confine the School to offering normal sorts of classroom instruction. Since much of the program was designed to prepare indigenous people to work as literacy workers and linguists, typically in school situations, classes filled most of the working week from 8:00 to 3:30 (later 8:30 to 4:00), but with Friday afternoons off. Just as in a work situation students were not expected to do homework, however, and thus the classes included time for students to complete projects and assignments.

In some of the classes students undertook language-specific study or project work in groups that shared the same or similar languages—the residential program in Batchelor could accommodate three or four such language groups at one time—but there were also combined classes for more general studies. Some of the classes were (rather informal) lectures, but others involved writing, data sharing, and project work that might occasionally take the students off campus, e.g. to collect samples of ‘bush tucker’, to videotape dances or, on one occasion, to videotape interviews of Batchelor College students.

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of the program was its potential for true two-way education (see e.g. McConvell 1994), with students contributing their knowledge of their own languages and lecturers contributing linguistic expertise and other skills. This tended to have several benefits, not the least of which was the value placed on the students’ backgrounds in what Cummins (1986) called an additive approach to cultural/ linguistic incorporation. Also, even though Aboriginal students tend to be stereotyped as passive and unresponsive in classes, it provided a basis for real dialogue between lecturers and students. To explain the concept of a pronoun, for example, the lecturer might elicit basic pronoun paradigms for each of the languages represented in the class, providing students with an opportunity to contribute information that their instructor may not already have known, as well as an opportunity for students to learn something about each other’s languages.

This teaching was not without its challenges, however. One was to find ways of unpacking linguistic concepts to make them both intelligible and useful to students who had the advantage of fluency in their own languages but whose academic English skills were often very weak. Since the typical SAL student had completed five or six years of primary education some years earlier, little could be taken for granted. For example, an explanation that suffixes are added to the end of a word might prove inadequate because students were not sure which end was meant. They had to learn that sticks and tables may have two ends, but that we speak of a word as having a beginning and thus just a single end. Indeed, even the distinction between a letter and a word was new to some students.

Another problem that became apparent was that some students were unable to access such things as dictionaries simply because they did not know how alphabetical order worked. This was easily remedied through teaching. A more subtle problem that one lecturer noticed a while after joining SAL was that students were progressing to higher levels without learning to classify things in terms of having ‘something in common’, e.g. to group things into sets so that one can give a reasoned answer to the question ‘Why is this one in this set and not in that one?’, or to arrange words in rows and columns on the basis of common features or aspects of meanings.

Such problems were exacerbated by the fact that students often varied considerably in their academic background and English ability, so that it was sometimes difficult to find a balance between moving too quickly for some students and too slowly for others. One approach used was to pitch the classes and materials at the students who needed the most support, but to include more advanced material, as options or asides, for the benefit of the students who were prepared to go further. In any case, maintaining interest in the subject

matter was not always easy; David Zorc did it so well that he developed a reputation of having 'magnetic eyes'.

Lecturers occasionally spoke of using linguistics as a basis for 'teaching concepts and methodology of general applicability in scientific enquiry', as Hale (1972:391) put it, but it's not clear to what extent they consciously attempted this or to what extent the linguistic studies, contextually embedded as they usually were, helped students master general principles of Western scientific enquiry. Our own experience suggests that even mainstream postgraduate students may not easily change entrenched ways of thinking (while Hale, of course, referred specifically to primary and secondary education).

Two anecdotes may illustrate the problem. One is of a student who had studied at SAL in the 1970s and returned to complete the certificate courses in the 1980s. The earlier study had obviously been extremely important to him, since he not only spoke highly of it, but in fact brought back with him work he had completed at that time, including phonetic description which he had written in his own language. He had certainly mastered some basic linguistic concepts, but at the same time it became clear that he had not fully embraced the spirit of scientific enquiry. If one of his current lecturers tried to deviate from what he had learned earlier, e.g. by using the term 'fricative' instead of 'spirant', he wouldn't accept it, saying that the other was right because Karen Courtenay had taught it to him.

A second anecdote suggests that it was not uncommon to place more faith in personal relationships than on logical demonstration. On one occasion an advanced class of Torres Strait Islanders was visited by a linguist working on their language, and he and the SAL lecturer took this as an opportunity to debate the merits of alternative solutions to problems of orthography. After the class the students did not refer to the logic of the argumentation, but instead they were quite outspoken and defensive about how the visitor had dared to 'attack' their lecturer. Of course, to be fair, we also know of some prominent academics who might also take a challenge to their theories as a personal affront.

To return to teaching, another interesting challenge was helping students develop writing ability in languages in which the instructors themselves were generally not fluent. A few lecturers developed lesser or greater fluency in one or more languages, but at some point all of us had to teach speakers of languages we were not yet familiar with. For the most basic literacy skills this was no problem; we simply learned the orthographic conventions that enabled us to determine how well students' spellings conformed to their pronunciations. We also asked students to help each other and encouraged them to become increasingly self-critical. For example, we might ask students to read their compositions aloud to the class. Even though others in the class typically would not be inclined to give critical comments, students became more conscious of the details of their own work as they read it to others, so that they might often stop to make corrections.

This involves a principle once pointed out by Gertrude Stein (1935:55-7) in her inimitable way. In writing we tend to lose sight of our audience as we focus on form, and in speaking we lose sight of form as we pay attention to our audience, but reading written material aloud tends to make us sensitive to how the form suits the audience. As Stein (1935:57) puts it, "In short you are leading a double life". A similar thing would happen when students were about to publish their work in the School newsletter or as a separate book: often they began to notice all sorts of things that deserved correction.

The Certificate of Translation and Interpreting involved a special problem in this regard: how could instructors without fluency in the languages ensure accuracy of translating and interpreting? For translation the principle of back-translation was used, and it was taught to the students as a useful technique for ensuring accuracy. One student would translate

something in one direction, such as from English to his or her own language, and then another student would independently translate the result back into the original language, so that the result could be compared with the original document.

For interpreting an analogous procedure was developed as part of the final examination. Listening to a tape in a language laboratory, students would have to make an oral translation of an English monologue delivered a sentence at a time. For each language group half the students would be working with one English monologue and half with another. Their oral translations were then copied onto another tape without the English, which had been recorded on a separate channel. The two groups then exchanged tapes so that each group could do an oral back-translation of the work of the other. Where the back-translation deviated from the original, instructors studied the tapes to see whether the problem was in the original translation, the back translation, or both.

Such oral back-translation was too cumbersome to be used in the teaching of interpreting skills, but this did not matter since interpreting difficulties usually became fairly obvious in the classroom situation. Much of the practice involved role play that was in part videoed, and when students made mistakes they tended to be so obvious that no one had to point them out when the videos were reviewed. More generally stress was on 'getting the right reaction', and students were made conscious of problems that might even survive back-translation. Something like 'take this medicine twice a day' might well survive back-translation, but in the wrong sense in the student's first language: the hearer may wonder where the medicine is supposed to be taken to.

As these brief notes may suggest, however useful SAL teaching was to the students, it certainly provided the lecturers with valuable insights into the natures and practicalities of language and education.

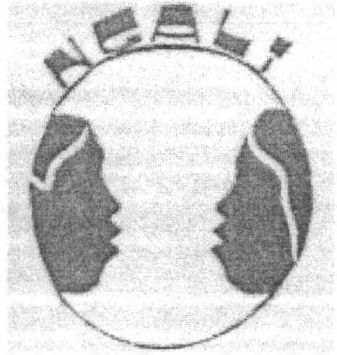
## **5. Into a new decade**

The late 1970s and early 1980s have been characterised by Gale (1997:118) as "almost a boom period" for bilingual education in the Northern Territory, and so it was for SAL as well. Into the 1980s courses continued to be offered both on campus and on-site, and in 1981 Gavan Breen established a separate branch in Alice Springs (see §6). In addition to their own programs SAL linguists regularly provided instruction on language and linguistics to teacher education students at Batchelor College, and they also ran occasional short courses for both indigenous and non-indigenous students.

In accord with its aim of "making Aboriginal and Island[er] people self-sufficient in linguistically related spheres" SAL made some attempt to employ indigenous lecturers. With the help of such lecturers McConvell was able to run the entire first-stage course on Saibai Island in 1980. In 1983 Black followed his lead by running the same course on Thursday Island, with SAL graduates Ron Day and Gloria Kabai respectively teaching Meriam Mir and Kalaw Kawaw Ya literacy, with Ephraim Bani and Imasu Aragu teaching more general classes on linguistics and language and culture, and with Black mainly teaching English as a Second Language. Thursday Island High School kindly provided what facilities it could; one of the main venues was the sloping ground under one end of the school library.



SAL students and graduates were also employed to teach short courses on their languages to non-speakers, with SAL lecturers providing more general sessions on Australian languages that dealt with such practical matters as how to pronounce words written in their orthographies. This became a yearly event through much of the 1980s. Black recalls how David Lalambarri Yunupingu introduced students to Gumatj by teaching them entirely in the language. By the end of the first hour he was able to use Gumatj to get students to stand up, walk to the door, say *djutjtjutjnha* ('goodbye'), and step out.



Another measure of SAL activity was its students' publications. As early as 1974 its students had produced small books in Ngalkbon, Kala Lagaw Ya, and Warlpiri which were eventually printed by the Darwin Community College printery. By 1979 students had produced materials in eighteen different languages, and in the 1980s reliable photocopying equipment made reproduction (if not their creation) even easier. Many of the books were readers like those used in bilingual programs in the Northern Territory, but sometimes with more linguistic sophistication.

SAL students included some exceptionally talented writers and illustrators. Among the latter, Patrick Whop, who had previously spent years working on railways around Australia, went on to further studies in graphic design at Darwin Institute of Technology (as Darwin Community College had been renamed). As for the writers, there is a story that can be told about the late Kathy Trimmer. For a creative writing class she wrote a sad story in English about having lost a younger sister. The other students felt very deeply about this and expressed their sympathies until Kathy pointed out that it was just creative writing and never actually happened.

Students also published in the SAL newsletter, which was called *Ngali* after a widespread form for the first-person dual inclusive pronoun, thus 'you and I'. This meaning was also encapsulated in a standard cover design consisting of a circle containing silhouettes of two faces facing each other, designed by Thomas Maywunydyjwuy Gaykamangu. The eleven issues that appeared between 1979 and 1987 changed with the technological development of the School, the earlier ones being typed and mimeographed while the later ones were prepared on word processors and photocopied. The content consisted of various reports, short stories, poems, puzzles, and brief linguistic studies in English and/or the students' own languages. The linguistic studies included such contributions as Trimmer's (1983) evidence for an unusual contrast between dentals and palatals in a Western Desert variety as well as descriptions of language use (Language Situations 1982 and 1987) that have subsequently been used in courses at Northern Territory University.

The tenth anniversary issue of *Ngali* included a summary (SAL's tenth year 1984) of SAL's activities in 1983. By the end of the year SAL had taught over a thousand students in 122 courses of one to eight weeks in duration and it had awarded 195 certificates. During 1983 alone seven full-time staff and 27 part-timers (including seven indigenous lecturers) taught 250 students (or 213 full-time and 60 part-time enrolments) in 18 courses of one to 24 weeks duration in nine locations, including Alice Springs, Batchelor (within Batchelor College as well as SAL), Elliott, Maningrida, Nguiu, Thursday Island, Turkey Creek, Uluru, and Waruwi. The Maningrida course was part of SAL's first solid external program, designed to enable students to complete much of their studies without leaving their home communities. By

the end of 1983 external programs had also begun in Areyonga, Lajamanu, Ngukurr, Willowra, Yirrkala, and Yuendumu.

During 1983 language-specific instruction was offered in thirty different varieties, including Eastern and Western Arrernte, Anmatyerr, Gurindji, Kalaw Kawaw Ya and Kala Lagaw Ya, Kija, Kriol, Luritja, Maung, Meriam Mir, Mudburra, Ndjébbana, Pitjantjatjara, Rembarnga, Tiwi, Wangkatha, Warlpiri, Warumungu, Wik-Mungkan, and the following Yolngu Matha varieties: Dhalwangu, Djamparrpuynu, Djapu, Gälpu, Liyagalawumirr, Manggalili, Marrakulu, Marrangu, Wangurri, and Warramirri. The course at Uluru was run on behalf of the Conservation Commission, and staff also taught in a Darwin Community College course for teacher linguists and provided some instruction to police recruits and to students in a pre-health workers course.

Some staff produced issues of a second SAL-based newsletter in 1986 and 1987. This was the *Language Maintenance Newsletter*, edited by Nick Evans, Steve Johnson, and Patrick McConvell. Four issues provided English notes and news on language maintenance issues, with the last issue announcing that it had become necessary to charge a subscription fee of \$3.00—the death knell of the publication?

SAL staff and students were involved in various other professional activities as well, including meetings of the Aboriginal Languages Association (ALA). At the inaugural meeting in Alice Springs in 1981 three SAL lecturers presented papers (Black 1982 (presented in absentia), Breen 1982, and McConvell 1982). In 1982 SAL and Batchelor College jointly hosted the second meeting of the Association in Batchelor. In 1984 SAL took a bus load of students to the third meeting, in Alice Springs; student reports on the third conference were published in issue 9 of *Ngali* in December 1984. (For later ALA developments see Aboriginal Languages Association 1991.) SAL also concerned itself with issues in interpreting and translating, including the yet unresolved problem of providing Aboriginal language interpreting services in the ‘Top End’ of the Northern Territory. It hosted a national meeting on interpreting and translation in Batchelor in about 1982 and another meeting on the Top End situation in 1989.

Since 1976 staff in Batchelor also participated in meetings of the Top End Linguistic Circle (originally the Linguistic Circle of Rum Jungle) with linguists from such other organisations as the Summer Institute of Linguistics and the Department of Education. Alice Springs staff were similarly involved in the Central Australian Linguistic Circle, and also in the organisation of the annual conference of the Australian Linguistic Society in Alice Springs in 1984. In 1987 SAL staff and students were involved in a conference on “cross-cultural issues in educational linguistics” held jointly by Batchelor College and what had now become the Darwin Institute of Technology (Chadwick 1990; Green 1990; Walton & Black 1990).

Working at SAL was taxing, and in their devotion to helping students produce their own publications lecturers tended to find less time for their own. They nonetheless managed occasional scholarly publications, and perhaps it’s worth noting some of them here. Some documented SAL experience (e.g. Zorc 1982; McConvell, Day & Black 1983; Black 1991) and a few were published by SAL itself: McConvell 1980 (jointly with the Strelley Literacy Centre), Black 1983 and 1986, and Zorc 1986. Lecturers and indigenous linguists also co-authored work (e.g. Turner & Breen 1984; Ford & Ober 1991), became embroiled in a debate on code-switching and domain theory (McConvell 1984, 1985, 1988, 1991 and 1994; Black 1990a and 1993), and wrote on issues of linguistics in education (Chadwick 1984a and 1990), language maintenance (e.g. Chadwick 1984b and Johnson 1987) and language planning (Black 1990b).

## 6. The Alice Springs Branch

Gavan Breen joined the staff of SAL in November 1979 on the understanding that after spending a year at Batchelor he would move to Alice Springs and start teaching courses in Central Australia. He had been employed temporarily on two previous occasions: the second time to develop an orthography for the Central Australian language Arrernte (then spelt Aranda).

The first course began on 2nd February 1981 at Yipirinya School, an Aboriginal-run school that was then struggling to gain recognition and support from the Northern Territory government. Yipirinya was in its early stages and was trying to get bilingual programs in the local languages established, and the bulk of the courses during the first three years were directed toward that end. However, work for other Central Australian communities began in a small way in the same year; the second course, starting in May, included two students from Santa Teresa, and the first on-site course was held at Yuendumu in July. The three major courses that year were all level 1 (the first stage of the literacy worker course) and involved a total of 22 prospective Yipirinya teachers or literacy workers, the two from Santa Teresa, and four Anmatyerr girls who had heard about the courses by word of mouth. The first course for non-speakers of an Aboriginal language was also held in 1981. The first level 2 (CLA) courses were held in 1982 and the first level 3 (CTS) course in 1983.

After the first three years the pressure on and from Yipirinya had eased and it was possible to do more for others. During 1983 a full CLA course was given to senior Yirara College students, followed later by twice-weekly literacy lessons. Beginning literacy courses were delivered to school students or groups including school children in such communities as Alpururulam (Lake Nash) and Artitjerre (Harts Range). In 1983 a course for the Wangkumara language was run in Bourke, NSW, as the first interstate course run from Alice Springs and the first SAL course in a language no longer spoken.

For six months in 1984, Breen was on study leave (working on the Arrernte Dictionary project) and was replaced by Patrick McConvell, who ran a number of courses including the first in South Australia (at Ernabella). During 1985 it was possible to employ two temporary lecturers for extended periods because of an unfilled position at Batchelor and because Breen was (at least nominally) on partial leave without pay; Jean Harkins was employed for six months and John Hobson for nine months. That was perhaps the high point of SAL in Central Australia; the branch ran thirty courses, including a series of three one-week courses in each of six communities with bilingual education programs. Also that year Hobson ran the first on-site course from Alice Springs in Western Australia, at Punmu. Another first was a course run in Alice Springs entirely for students from bush communities.

Despite the number of courses that year, Breen was not fully occupied in servicing requests and was able to actively recruit students for the first time since the branch opened. In April he visited seven Alyawarr communities, with the result that he was able to organise three on-site literacy courses later in the year for a total of over forty students. Over the next few years something like ten per cent of the thousand-odd Alyawarr speakers attended at least part of an SAL course.

In 1986 Breen made a similar tour of Anmatyerr communities; the results were less spectacular, but still pleasing. In July of that year the first course on behalf of the Barkly Region Aboriginal Language Centre (now Papulu Apparr-kari) was held in Tennant Creek. Later courses organised by them or at their request were held at Mungkarta (McLaren Creek), Murray Downs, Alekarenge, and Borroloola. The first courses run in the Centre for

Batchelor College were held in 1983. These too were held in many bush communities, where they were also opened up to local people who were not Batchelor College students.

A number of students in courses in Central Australia were later employed temporarily to teach literacy in their languages in later courses. Other part-time teachers were employed as needed to teach such units as ESL, graphics, language and culture, and applied linguistics.

Throughout the 1980s, office accommodation was supplied by the Institute for Aboriginal Development, mostly for no charge. In return Breen rendered certain services to the Institute, including teaching their weekly evening Arrernte courses for some years and taking on certain duties during periods, one quite long, when their own linguist position was vacant. He also instituted and for some years was principal researcher for the Institute's well-known and very productive Arandic Languages Dictionaries Program (now Central Australian Dictionaries Program).

The Institute was, however, not able to make teaching space available, apart from a couple of short periods, and the branch relied on the generosity of numerous other bodies, including, at various times, the Aboriginal Health Worker Training Centre, Congress Farm (the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress alcohol treatment facility), Yirara College, Centre for Appropriate Technology, Community College of Central Australia, the Catholic Church, and the Alice Springs Education Centre. On one occasion the lecturer and students arrived at the classroom only to find that the furniture had been removed and the room was no longer available, and they had to find another place before they could start. On-site courses were held in some odd places—once in a tent that the lecturer had borrowed from Tangentyere Council and brought with him from Alice Springs.

Student transport was a constant problem and often had to be provided by lecturers; other help was received from Congress Farm, the Commonwealth Education Department, the St Vincent de Paul Society, and most of all, Yipirinya School. As well as teaching, the lecturer's responsibilities included research, course development, recruitment, administration and driving, student welfare, money-lending (delays and inefficiency in the payment of Abstudy living allowances being chronic), and even at times child-minding.

The most problematical procedure of all was bringing students from bush communities to town for courses. It was only in the 1990s that many remote communities have obtained reliable telephone services; communication during the 1980s was at times almost impossible. One could never be sure who would arrive, or when or how, or with how many children. The accommodation situation in town was often desperate, for one reason or another. The inefficiency and irresponsibility of some people upon whom the lecturers and/or students relied at times was most frustrating. Breen's normal feeling at the end of such a course was "Never again!"

For several years, there was a desire on the part of some persons in authority for the Alice Springs operation to be transferred to the Community College of Central Australia (now part of Centralian College). When this possibility was first raised in 1983 the College decided it did not want it and could not afford it. Another attempt in 1986, in the name of 'rationalisation of resources' (and with a note saying "As usual let us transfer the bare minimum of funds") got as far as being approved by the Minister for Education before the lecturer heard of it. In reply, a memo from Kevin Ford to the relevant Dean referred to "fabulous statements" made to the Minister about the expense, difficulty of administration, and nature of the courses offered by the branch and stated that the branch was "the most cost-effective part of SAL". After Breen supplied the College with details of the operations of the branch and the support received from Batchelor and from organisations in Alice

Springs, and after the Institute for Aboriginal Development expressed its concern, the move was dropped.

## 7. The last years

The final years of SAL began at the end of 1985, when the Northern Territory Government replaced the administration of SAL's parent institution, Darwin Community College, and renamed it the Darwin Institute of Technology. This heralded an era of 'belt tightening' that also affected bilingual education programs in the Northern Territory, whose senior and support staffing were gradually reduced. SAL soon lost its 'school' status to become the Department of Linguistics within the Faculty of Arts, although it continued to be known informally as the School of Australian Linguistics. A 1989 review (SAL Review Panel 1989:4) summarised the effect on SAL by noting that in 1985 it had eight full-time staff teaching 541 students (the equivalent of 43 full-time students) and producing 68 graduates, but in 1988 it had only five full-time staff teaching 143 students (19 ETFSU) to produce 23 graduates, even though the demand for SAL's services had been increasing.

In mid 1989 control of SAL was transferred to Batchelor College as the Darwin Institute of Technology was incorporated into the new Northern Territory University. The transition into the College was not smooth: it seemed that every positive suggestion for integrating SAL and its staff into the College was met with a slap in the face, whether because of a general College policy or simply due to the personality of a key member of the College management. An apparent source of friction was the fact that most SAL lecturers had doctorates and all were working under higher-education conditions, which were quite different from Department of Education conditions in the College.

In late 1989 Batchelor College arranged for a review of SAL to be undertaken by an independent panel of twelve, including seven indigenous members (from the Aboriginal Languages Association, Batchelor College, Feppi (the Aboriginal advisory group of the NT Department of Education), the Barkly Language Centre, and an Aboriginal teacher) and five nonindigenous members (from the Department of Education, Batchelor College, and the newly formed Northern Territory University). The panel was quite complimentary about SAL's work and ended up making nineteen constructive recommendations (SAL Review Panel 1989:5-9). In summary these were that:

- (1 and 2) SAL continue as a school within Batchelor College, retaining the same name, and having its own advisory committee;
- (3) It assist the College in developing preliminary studies and access courses;
- (4 and 5, 7) Literacy training be provided in communities as far as possible, with support and encouragement for indigenous teachers of literacy, and using SAL lecturers only when indigenous teachers are unavailable;
- (6, 8 and 9) SAL extend and improve its external programs and review and reorganise its certificate courses so that much of them can be taught in communities;
- (10) The Certificate of Translation and Interpreting be continued and offered to students in other Batchelor College programs;
- (11) SAL develop an associate diploma in linguistic studies;

- (12) Batchelor College's School of Education Studies place greater stress on preparing all students as language teachers and researchers for TESL, LOTE, literacy, and language research and curriculum development;
- (13 and 14) "SAL be recognised and acknowledged as the appropriate centre for linguistic research related to Aboriginal languages" (1989:7), provide training to indigenous people to ensure cooperative and participatory research, liaise with various other organisations, and report its results to indigenous communities;
- (15 and 18) Staffing include a Head of School, a senior lecturer and lecturer based in Alice Springs, a lecturer based at the Barkly Languages Centre, and positions in Batchelor including a senior lecturer in TESL, five lecturers covering Northern Territory areas and the Kimberley and the Pilbara, and two indigenous tutors or lecturers-in-training specialising in north-east Arnhem Land and northern Queensland respectively, all having duties including research, teaching, and administration;
- (19) Suitable positions be filled with indigenous staff over the next five years.

The first recommendation was ignored, as SAL became the Centre for Australian Languages and Linguistics (CALL) within a School of Community Studies. Some of the other recommendations were heeded, e.g. as CALL developed an associate diploma and later a full diploma. In any case the situation at the College did not encourage SAL staff to stay with the new program: Black left at the end of 1989 and Ford, Chadwick, and Breen followed within a year or two, leaving Chakravarti as the only SAL lecturer to continue with the centre. CALL seems different enough that it is better thought of as a new program, with its own strengths and weaknesses, rather than as a natural continuation of SAL. It may change even further now that Batchelor College has become independent of the NT Department of Education as the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education.

## 8. Conclusions

What conclusions can be drawn from our experience with SAL? It was an innovative program in a number of useful ways, but still constrained by the administrative necessity of running classes and trying to fill them with many students, the number of 'bums on seats' gaining increasing importance into the late 1980s. SAL tended to lack the advantages of the on-the-job training that was often carried out within bilingual and other language programs, although the more formal studies it did provide had their own value.

In any case SAL seems to have been a worthwhile experience for many of its students and graduates. Certainly it inspired student enthusiasm and loyalty. As one SAL student president put it:

S.A.L. is a fantastic, brilliant school which opens the minds of language speakers to teach, read, write and do phonetics and various other skills of linguistics. (Whop 1984:1)

A few graduates had some prominence in matters relating to indigenous languages. For example, Mariana (or 'Marina') Babia went on to teach her language, Kalaw Kawaw Ya, at Thursday Island High School and then, while completing the Batchelor College Diploma in Linguistics, worked at Northern Territory University developing and teaching units on indigenous languages (Babia & Black 1996 and Walton & Babia 1996). Other graduates of note include Daudai Brown, the late Marlene Cousens, Ron Day (honoured as the top

graduate of the whole of Darwin Community College in 1984), Veronica Dobson, Elizabeth ('Lizzie') Marrkilyi Ellis, Frank Ger, Mario Mabo, Florence Ngalawurr Mununggurr, the late Kathy Trimmer, Lorna Wilson, and Charles Nawungurr Yunupingu. Graduates of the much longer Batchelor College teacher education program have often become more prominent, but SAL also contributed to that program to some extent.

With regard to Hale's idea of using linguistics to teach general scientific principles, it's not clear that SAL made much real headway with its adult learners. Probably this hardly mattered for many, since they had little use for the culture of Western science in their daily lives and employment. At least the School was able to use linguistics to help them become better prepared to deal with their own languages.

Hale's (1972:393) ideal of an education that leaves speakers free to 'determine the particular relevance of the study of language to [their] communities' involves a dilemma. Such educators as Paul Ramsden (1992:66) stress that adult learners learn best when they can see the relevance of what they are studying. If this relevance is supplied by their lecturers, however, how are they going to be left free to find it for themselves? On the other hand, to the extent that they are left to determine the relevance for themselves, will curiosity alone be enough to sustain their learning until they can achieve this? Undoubtedly the solution is somewhere between these extremes, and SAL staff probably varied considerably in how they saw the balance between theory and application.

Perhaps some of the SAL lecturers got as much out of the School as their students. It was a tremendous opportunity to help indigenous language speakers apply the normally esoteric concepts of linguistics to various practical concerns, and to learn a great deal from our students as we did this.

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