Language Variation and Change in the Australian Curriculum English: Integrating sub-strands through a pedagogy of metalogue

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Abstract: The Language Strand of the Australian Curriculum: English (Australian Curriculum, Assessment & Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2016b) includes the sub-strand of ‘Language Variation and Change’. This sub-strand is a marked space for discovery and discussion of the history and politics of language use. As such, this sub-strand points to an agenda of respect for different languages in use throughout Australia, including the means of communication between Indigenous Australians and those representative of multicultural Australia. We posit that this important sub-strand can be made more enduring by not being treated as a ‘singular’ (Bernstein, 2000) but integrated with Content Descriptions from other Language sub-strands. This integration of knowledge, called ‘regionalisation’ by Bernstein (2000), ‘implies challenges for pedagogic practice’ (Wolmarans, Luckett, & Case, 2016, p. 99). As a way forward, we consider the affordances of an instructive dialogue or metalogue (Bateson, 1972). To demonstrate how such a pedagogy might unfold in a class discussion, we introduce one stimulus text, ‘Old Cat’ (Aquilina, 2016), and consider the ‘Language Variation and Change’ sub-strand requirement for students to recognise that all languages and dialects are of equal value. We then document how integrating the Content Description from the ‘Language Variation and Change’ sub-strand with a Content Description from the ‘Text Structure and Organisation’ sub-strand using a pedagogy of metalogue provides for a deep appreciation about the historical and linguistic accounts of languages. Doing so offers productive discussion about the agenda of respect for the different languages in use between Indigenous Australians and throughout multicultural Australia.

Background to the ‘Australian Curriculum: English’
The establishment of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) in December 2008 was momentous in the history of Australian education. ACARA’s establishment was the impetus for the nation ‘to consider what all Australian children should learn, how their learning and progress should be assessed, and how Australian school education should be reported back to the community’ (ACARA Annual Report, 2009, p. 7). Informed by the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (Ministerial Council on Education Employment, Training & Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), 2008), ACARA’s mission was to develop a world-class national curriculum, and national assessment and reporting programs to enable all young Australians to become ‘successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens’ (ACARA Annual Report, 2010, p. v). Accordingly, the design of the Australian Curriculum involved enhancing ‘the school experiences that Australian students are collectively able to access’ (Hill in ACARA Annual Report, 2009, p. 7). To this end, the Australian Curriculum was conceived as a three-dimensional ‘living’ document comprising: (i) traditional discipline or content areas; (ii) three contemporary cross-curriculum
priorities (CCPs) which singled out areas such as ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures’, ‘Asia and Australia’s Engagement with Asia’ and ‘Sustainability’ as highly relevant to students’ lives; and (iii) seven general capabilities, for example, ‘Literacy’ and ‘Intercultural Understanding’, which represented the knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions considered necessary for students to function successfully in an increasingly complex globalised world (ACARA Annual Report, 2010). This design was hinged on the belief that each student, regardless of where they live, can achieve high standards provided they have sufficient time, resources and support which necessarily includes teachers who have appropriate training, and opportunities and support to improve their professional practice (ACARA Annual Report, 2010).

From the earliest English curriculum documents, integral to this design was the role that the Australian Curriculum: English (hereafter AC:E) would play in developing the understandings, attitudes and capabilities needed for students to engage effectively in contemporary Australian society. This emphasis recognised Australia’s linguistic and cultural diversity. This recognition manifested in the AC:E’s three interrelated strands namely, ‘Language’, ‘Literature’ and ‘Literacy’, which were intended to support students’ growing understanding and use of the English language (National Curriculum Board, 2009). Specific aims of the AC:E included supporting students to: ‘learn Standard Australian English to help sustain and advance social cohesion in our linguistically and culturally complex country’ and ‘respect the varieties of English and their influence on Standard Australian English’ (National Curriculum Board, 2009, p. 5). Such aims transcended the desire to ensure that the AC:E was accessible to all students, in particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) students, but stressed, as Exley and Chan (2014) observed, the ‘imperative for all young Australians to develop better understandings of the interconnected nature of cultures and identities’ (p. 61).

Behind this drive were broader moves in Australia toward reconciliation between Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous Australians and a new and increasing wave of multiculturalism in Australia that had resulted from complex processes of globalisation. Despite some policy changes that served to promote a transformation among Australia’s population toward equality for all people, much needed national discussions about contested issues such as sovereignty, constitutional recognition, power relationships, racism, conflict and acceptance mean that latent tensions that would impede an agenda for reconciliation and multiculturalism persist. This backdrop of continual dynamic social, cultural and political flux in twenty-first century Australia highlights the difficulties faced by the AC:E writers in curriculum development. Simultaneously, it underscores the significant challenges for AC:E teachers to develop student understanding and use of the English language. This challenge amplifies an inherent tension created by the AC:E’s silence about how the curriculum should be taught – leaving decisions about pedagogical enactment for teachers to make given the requirements and needs of their school contexts and individual students.

Continued politicisation of the Australian Curriculum however, has led to notable changes in the documents. Indeed, successive Commonwealth governments with opposing ideological views has meant that even before a complete set of curriculum documents could be finalised for trial implementation, existing documents underwent a review in 2014. And even before the formal review began, in his three and a half minute televised announcement of the review, Education Minister Christopher Pyne (2014) identified a number of criticisms of the Australian Curriculum, including questioning the ‘necessity’ to have ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures’ as a CCP. The controversial curriculum review by Donnelly and Wiltshire (2014) subsequently saw many references in earlier versions to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders deleted and in other places references to Australia’s Judaeo-Christian heritage inserted (see Adoniou, 2015).

This situation demonstrates that:

who decides what is taught in and through education, how that learning is organised and the evaluative criteria for students and teachers is the site of intense struggle at the macro level of state policy formation, the mezzo level of syllabus committees and the micro level of face-to-face or virtual teaching and learning practice. (Vitale & Exley, 2016, p. 7)

Such a reality creates challenges for AC:E teachers seeking to enact a curriculum which respects and advances an agenda of reconciliation and multiculturalism. These challenges are exacerbated by innovation and implementation fatigue given the number and rate of change to curriculum documents that teachers
have experienced over the past several years. New challenges have also emerged which concern the lack of knowledge and understanding of beginning and experienced teachers about the politics of reconciliation and multiculturalism – not just concerning Indigenous Australians but people of all races, religions and cultural groups. In a national study on the education of Indigenous students, The Stronger Smarter Learning Communities Project, for example, Luke et al. (2013) noted that despite significant community support for the embedding of Indigenous knowledges in the curriculum, the reality in practice suffered because of ‘significant problems with non-Indigenous teacher knowledge and intercultural sensitivity’ (p. 120). In writing about tensions between policy and practice in reconciliation agendas in the AC:E, Exley and Chan (2014) drew further attention to the complexities involved given Trudgen’s (2010) research of living in a remote Aboriginal community in Arnhem Land, Australia. They wrote that Trudgen found that ‘after living, working, laughing and crying with a proud and functional Aboriginal clan for more than a decade [there was] no definitive list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives or worldviews’ (Exley & Chan, 2014, p. 61). The point is that the continual intersection of environmental and historical factors meant that people’s world views continually changed over time and place (McLaughlin & Whatman, 2011). However, Associate Professor Tracey Bunda, Chair of Indigenous Studies at Deakin University and a Murri woman from Queensland, Australia, noted that raised awareness of such complexities has meant that many teachers actively avoid important cultural teaching. Speaking at the 2013 Social Educators’ Association of Queensland (SEAQ) conference, she stated that this is because: ‘They are fearful of not “getting it right”, asking themselves, “Am I entitled to talk about cultural matters?” and “Am I regarded as a perpetrator because of past actions?”’ (Bunda, 2013).

In the sections that follow, we consider this backdrop of complexity in light of the work that is demanded of AC:E teachers, specifically in reference to the Language Strand.

The Language Strand of the ‘Australian Curriculum: English’
The Language Strand of the AC:E is ‘based on concepts drawn largely from historical and linguistic accounts of the English language’ (ACARA, 2016b). The Language Strand is made up of five sub-strands, as noted below:

- Language Variation and Change
- Language for Interaction
- Text Structure and Organisation
- Expressing and Developing Ideas
- Sound and Letter Knowledge.

The first of these sub-strands, ‘Language Variation and Change’, focuses on students learning that ‘languages and dialects are constantly evolving due to historical, social and cultural changes, demographic movements and technological innovations’ and understanding that ‘these factors, along with new virtual communities and environments, continue to affect the nature and spread of English’ (ACARA, 2016b). This sub-strand has received very little attention in the research literature to date. It is thus prudent to review the full complement of Content Descriptions for the ‘Language Variation and Change’ sub-strand of the AC:E from Foundation to Year 10 (see Table 1). A notable feature of this complement is that each year level is represented by a single Content Description that presents a topic related to the form or spread of language use. The discernible topics include: many languages (Foundation), Auslan (Year 1), genre and mode (Year 2), historical overview of languages (Year 3), historical overview of English (Year 4), historical overview of pronunciation, spelling and meanings (Year 5), dialects within Australia (Year 6), evaluation of language in an era of new technologies (Year 7), dialect between English and other languages (Year 8), language as living (Year 9) and language as continually evolving (Year 10). The specific learning of each Content Description is not provided; it is assumed that teachers’ and students’ different social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds will enable them to engage with these Content Descriptions in different ways.

We also see the ‘Language Variation and Change’ sub-strand as the place where the politics of language use meets the politics of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and multiculturalism within the Australian population more generally. The point needs to be made that the AC:E is focused on disciplinary English, so the teaching of Indigenous languages and Languages Other Than English is outside its ambit; that is the work of the Languages learning area (ACARA, 2013). What the AC:E does provide however, as suggested by Exley, Davis and Dooley (2016) ‘are opportunities for involvement in practices through which the social order is changed, for example, through partnerships with local
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to develop language awareness activities to meet AC:E indicators’ (p. 37).

Another important consideration of this complement of Content Descriptions is that their topics should not be seen as silos. Bernstein (2000) calls knowledge that addresses only themselves ‘singulars’ (p. 52). In our reading of the AC:E, we prefer not to trap understandings from ‘Language Variation and Change’ within its singular. The viewpoint to which we subscribe treats knowledge, understandings, skills and processes about the nature and spread of languages as a dialectic that evolves from, is situated in, and contributes to active participation within a social arena (Halliday, 1978). We thus prefer to open possibilities for what Bernstein (2000) refers to as ‘regionalising knowledge’ (p. 52) across the sub-strings of the Language Strand. The remit of the AC:E is that the knowledge, understanding, skills and processes form ongoing dialogue across the years of schooling. The AC:E explains that ‘learning in English is recursive and cumulative, and builds on concepts, skills and processes developed in earlier years’ (ACARA, 2016b). An implication of regionalisation, or what Stavrou (2011) refers to as a ‘rupture’ of knowledge categories (p. 145), is the expectation that more than one inferential path exists through a students’ career in subject English.

We conceive of language as being dynamic and complex and also needing to be considered in relation to one or more of the other sub-strings such as ‘Expressing and Developing Ideas’, ‘Language for Interaction’ and ‘Text Structure and Organisation’. These three sub-strings have been recontextualised by the AC:E writers from the three bundles of language functions or *metafunctions* identified in contemporary educational linguistics (see Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) – one bundle for construing experiences in the world (the ideational metafunction), one for enacting interpersonal meanings (the interpersonal metafunction) and a third bundle for organising these into coherent texts (the textual metafunction) – into Year Level Content Descriptions in the AC:E (see Derewianka, 2012; Exley, 2016; and Exley & Mills, 2012 for a more detailed explanation).

A suggested pedagogy for the language strand

As noted in this manuscript, another remarkable feature of the AC:E is that it ‘does not prescribe approaches to teaching’ (ACARA, 2016b). Guidance about possibilities for enactment may be gleaned from the seven general capabilities which include ‘Personal and Social Capability’, ‘Ethical Understanding’ and ‘Intercultural Understanding’. Together these general capabilities may be called upon to assist students to become responsible young citizens who are able to successfully participate with others in a variety of different local, national and international contexts.

Table 1. Content Description from the AC:E Version 8.2 (ACARA, 2016a)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Level</th>
<th>Content Description from the AC:E Version 8.2 (ACARA, 2016a)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundation ACELA1426</td>
<td>Understand that English is one of many languages spoken in Australia and that different languages may be spoken by family, classmates and community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 1 ACELA1443</td>
<td>Understand that people use different systems of communication to cater to different needs and purposes and that many people may use sign systems to communicate with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2 ACELA1460</td>
<td>Understand that spoken, visual and written forms of language are different modes of communication with different features and their use varies according to the audience, purpose, context and cultural background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3 ACELA1475</td>
<td>Understand that languages have different written and visual communication systems, different oral traditions and different ways of constructing meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 4 ACELA1487</td>
<td>Understand that Standard Australian English is one of many social dialects used in Australia, and that while it originated in England it has been influenced by many other languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5 ACELA1500</td>
<td>Understand that the pronunciation, spelling and meanings of words have histories and change over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 6 ACELA1515</td>
<td>Understand that different social and geographical dialects or accents are used in Australia in addition to Standard Australian English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 7 ACELA1528</td>
<td>Understand the way language evolves to reflect a changing world, particularly in response to the use of new technology for presenting texts and communicating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 8 ACELA1540</td>
<td>Understand the influence and impact that the English language has had on other languages or dialects and how English has been influenced in return</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 9 ACELA1550</td>
<td>Understand that Standard Australian English is a living language within which the creation and loss of words and the evolution of usage is ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 10 ACELA1563</td>
<td>Understand that Standard Australian English in its spoken and written forms has a history of evolution and change and continues to evolve</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
This ability requires students to develop knowledge and understanding about the interconnectedness of their identity not only with their culture and language use but also with the culture and language use of others. As noted by Wolmarans et al. (2016), a shift from singular knowledge to a regionalisation of knowledge ‘implies challenges for pedagogic practice, especially if the shift remains implicit and invisible to students’ (p. 99; see also Millar, 2016).

Willis and Phillips (2016) posit that such strategies may be developed in subject English through the use of quality texts. For example, teachers can choose texts which enable them to assist students to examine the more obvious aspects of their own and others’ cultures (e.g. clothing) and to interpret the less obvious aspects (e.g. values) with greater understanding. Such texts may enable students to see how their behaviours, words and dispositions are influenced by their languages and cultures and how different interpretations in meaning by different cultural groups may be connected to unequal power relationships. The use of quality texts can also enable students to compare their experiences with others by looking for commonalities and contrasts in ways that cultivate empathy, foster mutual respect, celebrate diversity and encourage critical thinking about bias and stereotypes (Willis & Phillips, 2016). Using the combined lenses of the general capabilities to teach about identity and cultural diversity in the English classroom also presents multiple challenges for teachers such as: choosing texts that represent cultural perspectives beyond narrow, tokenistic or touristic ways; recognising possibilities for student misunderstandings; and equipping students with the skills to critically engage with texts by asking questions, seeking clarification and working collaboratively as they interact with people, histories, stories and one another (Willis & Phillips, 2016). Equipping teachers with effective strategies for using quality texts can therefore assist to cultivate reflection in students who in turn can contribute to and benefit from a curriculum of reconciliation and multiculturalism.

In the next section, we use one quality text, the poem, ‘Old Cat’ (Aquilina, 2016), as stimulus for how teachers may consider regionalising Content Descriptions from across the Language Strand of the AC:E. We consider ‘Old Cat’ a quality text because it offers teachers opportunities to go beyond tokenistic or touristic ways of thinking about linguistic and cultural differences to enable students to connect deeply with complex issues like reconciliation and multiculturalism. Our demonstration of practice uses metalogue (Bateson, 1972) – a pedagogical strategy that we have used previously in our work individually and together (e.g. Willis & Exley, 2015; Willis, Kretschmann, Lewis, & Montes, 2014; Willis & Menzie, 2012). Bateson describes metalogue as ‘a conversation about some problematic subject’ (p. 12). In this article, metalogue allows our readers to metaphorically ‘eavesdrop’ as we engage in dialogical conversation about how aspects of the poem such as language features and their effects invite teachers and students to talk about the way that language works. Bateson elaborates that metalogue ‘... should be such that not only do the participants discuss the problem but the structure of the conversation as a whole is also relevant to the same subject’ (p. 12). As presented in this article, metalogue encourages participants to adopt an open disposition to learn with and from one another about different interpretations of the poem and the possible effects of these aspects. Hence, our metalogue affords readers deeper understandings and explanations of the poem yet shows we, qua participants, engaged with one another in a form of conversation where: each voice is respected (e.g. through equal turn taking and not talking over one other); ideas are shared and built upon; judgement is suspended; debate without necessarily reaching consensus occurs; and differences are valued. These characteristics reflect the knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions considered necessary for students to develop such general capabilities as ‘Personal and Social Capability’, ‘Ethical Understanding’ and ‘Intercultural Understanding’ in order to function successfully in an increasingly complex globalised world (ACARA Annual Report, 2010). Metalogue thus provides a means to emulate ways English teachers might advance the regionalisation of language knowledge to promote an agenda of reconciliation and multiculturalism in their English classrooms.

**Demonstration of metalogue to explore another language/dialect**

In this metalogue, we hone in on two Year Six Content Descriptions from the Language Strand of the AC:E, namely ACELA1515 and ACELA1518 (see Table 2).

To begin our metalogue, we both read the stimulus text, ‘Old Cat’ (Aquilina, 2016, p. 5). We shared what we knew about Jude Aquilina, the South Australian poet, and about our separate contextual experiences with being ‘owned’ by a family cat. We realised we
each had connections to this topic, with Linda’s being more pronounced in her childhood and Beryl’s being both in her childhood and through her family members who are all still ‘owned’ by various family cats. We discussed our recounts as emotional experiences, shared experiences and connecting experiences, thereby giving licence to ‘storytelling’.

We then considered the poem (see Figure 1), one ‘utterance’ at a time as presented by the poet. We consider an utterance to comprise the words between the beginning and end of each slash. We asked ourselves focus questions drawn from the ACELA1518 elaboration, in particular the use of language features, including pathos (mentioned in the elaboration). Pathos is a language resource that ‘creates a unity of feeling that builds allegiances’ (Humphrey, 2010, p. 12) and is one part of the three forms of rhetorical appeal (persuasion) conceived by Aristotle (in Kennedy, 2007). The three forms of rhetorical appeal include:

- **Ethos** – an unemotional statement that highlights the trustworthiness of a character
- **Logos** – a logical argument/statement
- **Pathos** – the emotional effect a text has on a reader (which often includes the pairing of emotions such as ‘happiness’ and ‘sadness’).

(Aristotle in Kennedy, 2007)

Rather than being definitive language elements focused on form (such as nouns, verbs and adjectives etcetera), ethos, logos and pathos are interpretations of how language is functioning in a particular instance of use. Ethos, logos and pathos have to be ‘read’ into and from the text, by the ‘active’ reader. Ethos, logos and pathos do not always have clearly defined boundaries; rather they are woven into the text as a subtle form of persuasion. To better highlight the expertise of the language user (in this case the poet) and the sophistication of this dialect of English, we discuss the language features most present in the text, including evidence of ethos, logos and pathos and ‘how it works’ (ACARA, 2016b, p. 7). Unlike the systematic work of a linguist parsing this text to examine its grammatical form, we are responding to the regionalisation of knowledge of the Language strand of the AC:E. Our metalogue, as it occurred, is presented in written form below.

Is poem about old cat I once had /

Linda: From the opening utterance, I see Aquilina introducing the reader to a new language dialect that she uses throughout the poem. In Standard Australian

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**Table 2. Linking Two Content Descriptions from the AC:E (ACARA, 2016a)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Strand Sub-strand</th>
<th>ACELA Content Description</th>
<th>Elaboration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language variation and change</td>
<td>Understand that different social and geographical dialects or accents are used in Australia in addition to Standard Australian English (ACELA1515)</td>
<td>recognising that all languages and dialects are of equal value, although we use different ones in different contexts, for example the use of Standard Australian English, Aboriginal English and forms of Creole used by some Torres Strait Islander groups and some of Australia’s near neighbours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text structure and organisation</td>
<td>Understand how authors often innovate on text structures and play with language features to achieve particular aesthetic, humorous and persuasive purposes and effects (ACELA1518)</td>
<td>examining different works by an author who specialises in humour or pathos to identify strategies such as exaggeration and character embarrassment to amuse and to offer insights into characters’ feelings, so building empathy with their points of view and concern for their welfare</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Figure 1. ‘Old Cat’ by Jude Aquilina (2016, p. 5). Used with the generous permission of the poet.

Is poem about old cat I once had / I call old one Stinkrat / he live to shaggy twenty / is poem of purr-engine cat / the sort that sit and rub and rub and nibble till you give ear-rubble then he roll on back / if no scratch / he scratch / you must tummytickle rough and round and up and down and he purr and purr / and when you stop he stand up and head-butt / purring louder / louder / if no more come he swipe leg or he clamber up and bite pen / no more writing he say pushing big skull up under my chin / he bad old ankle-nipping cat when food take too long / he hiss-snake cat when tread on tail / he sneak and steal from table cat but when I look he just clean paw beside empty pie / he bad and he old / and I’ll be that one day / so I open can for toothless yowl and pat scruffy head.
English (SAE), the opening might otherwise be written as, ‘This is a poem about an old cat that I had once’. To me, the dialect has an almost ‘rap’ feel. I’m also seeing language such as ‘old cat’ used to evoke pathos in the audience and to connect with them through a personal yet common relatable experience of losing a pet cat.

Beryl: I see pathos evoked through the use of the word ‘once’. She uses this word to draw on her own experiences as valid, making an appeal to the audience through logos. At the same time, the word ‘once’ shows logos. It gives the poem its narrative structure; as the audience, we think we know what to expect since we’ve all had a pet that is no longer here.

I call old one Stinkrat /
Linda: ‘Stinkrat’ combines ‘stink’, an unflattering word, and ‘rat’, where rats are regarded as the enemy of cats, to produce a compound word that is powerful for the way it conjures an image for the audience that includes how the cat might look and smell. And yet Aquilina uses ‘one’ which the audience might recognise as a diminutive term of endearment rather than dismissive language. The careful juxtaposition of ‘old one’ and ‘Stinkrat’ is where I see a kind of playful respect since in Australia it’s common to use nicknames as a way to playfully engage others.

he live to shaggy twenty /
Beryl: If you took out the word ‘shaggy’ we would have a declaration about the cat’s age – an appeal to the audience through logos. ‘Shaggy’ also appeals to pathos. It stirs our emotions because it delivers a realisation that two decades for a cat is a phenomenal age and that Stinkrat has survived on ‘borrowed time’. And when we’re talking about authorial choice, Aquilina could have said ‘ratty’ or ‘bedraggled’ which conjure up different emotions for the reader. There is also an appeal to the audience through ethos: the fact that Aquilina kept the cat alive for twenty years means that she is a trustworthy cat owner. Cats don’t live that long by accident!

is poem of purr-engine cat /
Beryl: Logos is created around the declaration that: ‘this is a poem about a cat’ but pathos is carried through the adjective ‘purr-engine’.
Linda: Aquilina has used text structure here in a similar way to utterance three: taking a statement – logos – and injecting pathos through careful word choice. As with ‘shaggy’, if we were to remove the adjective ‘purr-engine’, the effect of the words would be quite different.

the sort that sit and rub and rub and nibble till you give ear-rubble then he roll on back /
Linda: Aquilina uses poetic devices such as onomatopoeia with the use of double letter words – ‘nibble’ and ‘rubble’ – and alliteration – ‘rub’ , ‘rubble’ and ‘roll’ – and repetition – ‘rub and rub’. The conjunction ‘and’ is used to extend the length of the utterance, perhaps to convey the time over which the action takes place. The poet engenders pathos through the use of discursive devices such as ‘the sort that’ which we might recognise in SAE as: ‘you know the sort’. This has the effect of appealing to the audience’s experiences.

It’s difficult to separate ethos, pathos and logos. There is the appeal to ethos that convinces us that Aquilina knows what she’s talking about; pathos as the poet recollects memories similar to those we each might have of pets; and an appeal to logic as the poem accords with audience expectations in terms of our knowledge of (1) cats and (2) poetry.

if no scratch /
Beryl: For me, that word ‘if’ is so conditional; I’m seeing an emotional effect, that if Aquilina dares to withdraw the ‘right’ of scratching, it would mean denial or neglect.
Linda: Yes, the word ‘if’ does the work of appealing to pathos but also logos as it’s almost like: ‘if you don’t pay attention to me, then Aquilina can expect a negative response’.

he scratch /
Beryl: We have the most typical (logical) negative response: old cat scratches back.
Linda: But how clever is authorial choice here, since ‘scratch’ in utterance six and seven is used in two different ways. In six, the scratch is friendly but in seven, it’s more retaliatory.

you must tummytickle rough and round and up and down and he purr and purr /
Linda: Here again Aquilina uses poetic devices such as onomatopoeia – ‘tummytickle’, alliteration – ‘rough’ and ‘round, and repetition – ‘purr’ and ‘purr’. ‘Round’ and ‘down’ provide a sense of rhyme and the use of the conjunction ‘and’, without any interruption as seen in utterance five with ‘till’ and ‘then’, serve to convey the extended length of time over which the action takes place.
Beryl: I see the language as giving us a game; it's the language of a game. And all of the things you've said make an appeal to the audience through logos: it's the rules of the game.

Linda: The word 'must' is interesting too. The modality is the strongest possible; it indicates the described interactions are non-negotiable.

and when you stop he stand up and head-butt /

Beryl: We see that if Aquilina doesn't engage in the rules of the game, there is a consequence. The structure of the utterance to focus on the conjunctive 'when' sets up the responsibility of the human: if the human makes the choice to 'stop', then the human needs to expect that the cat is almost obligated to offer a 'head-butt'.

Linda: That is the nature of what cats do; it's predictable.

Beryl: Aquilina is appealing to the audience through logos.

Linda: And I think there is an appeal to ethos given that her knowledge of how cats and humans interact is convincingly represented.

purring louder /

Beryl: In this next utterance, I'm actually feeling a bit overwhelmed by pathos because the rhythm of a purring cat has an emotional effect on a cat owner, or one who has been 'owned' by a cat.

Linda: It's the way they connect with their owner and, in this case, the use of modality (louder) communicates that Stinkrat is making some form of demand.

Beryl: It's almost like: 'serf' (Aquilina) please 'thy master' (Stinkrat).

Linda: The next utterance, a repeated single word, shows the cat's demands are escalating. The use of text structure with two short utterances in quick succession creates a metaphoric crescendo which makes me wonder about how the tension between cat and owner will be released. I think Aquilina uses these techniques to appeal to the audience's ethos (we know cats can be demanding) and logos (if you ignore this cat, the situation is only likely to worsen).

if no more come he swipe leg or he clamber up and bite pen /

Beryl: The focus here again is on the conditional word 'if'. 'If' serves to structure the utterance and give meaning to the text. I'm also seeing a lot of prosody.

Linda: Prosodic elements in written texts are not often spoken about. I can see elements of prosody through the use of 'if' which creates stress for the audience through the repeated use of certain text structures. So too, repetition of words like 'louder' that creates a pattern so that the audience assigns more emphasis to the word each time it's used. I'm also seeing the logical release of tension in the cat's actions. Aquilina combines action verbs and repeated long vowel sounds in the words 'swipe' and 'bite' to convey these actions as swift and predictable.

no more writing he say pushing big skull up under my chin /

Linda: This is the first time I'm seeing personification of the cat. That hasn't happened before. It's almost like a point in the interactions between Aquilina and the cat has been reached that Stinkrat has to say: 'you really need to pay attention to me'.

Beryl: It's the word 'say', isn't it?

Linda: That's what I'm seeing: we're hearing from the cat now, through the poet's voice. It's such a strong emotional connection between the cat and owner that we actually gain the sense that Aquilina knows the cat so well that, if the cat could talk, this is what he would say.

he bad old ankle-nipping cat when food take too long /

Linda: I'm feeling different emotions. I'm thinking of the context of a twenty-year relationship. We know that as people age they seem less tolerant and patient and I imagine that also happens with animals. You might not accept such behaviour from a younger cat, but the poet's decision to put the word 'bad' before 'old' in the noun group 'bad old ankle-nipping cat' suggests that Aquilina understands Stinkrat's behaviour in the context of their long relationship. It's like the cat has been anthropomorphised.

he hiss-snake cat when tread on tail /

Beryl: The focus here again is on the conditional word 'if'. 'If' serves to structure the utterance and give meaning to the text. I'm also seeing a lot of prosody.

Linda: Calling Stinkrat 'he hiss-snake cat' is very powerful. If we were to ask students how they might express this idea in SAE, I wonder how much meaning might be lost. For example, is Aquilina saying that the cat hisses like a snake when you step on his tail? Or, do the words 'he hiss-snake cat' operate like a noun group to develop Stinkrat's character for the audience? I see this utterance as providing another example of the potency of Aquilina's dialect given the different possible meanings she captures by the words she chooses.
There are also appeals to emotion to justify the less desirable character attributes of old cat. Having a tail stepped on is not altogether too pleasant, so pathos is invoked as I start to feel sorry for the cat and concerned for his welfare. It’s really quite an emotional roller coaster this poem.

**he sneak and steal from table cat but when I look he just clean paw beside empty pie/**

Beryl: So the noun group ‘he sneak and steal from table cat’ is actually doing the character work here; the power of contrast. It’s almost as though Stinkrat has gone from cat burglar to innocent cat. Appeals by Aquilina to logos and pathos achieve this effect.

**he bad and he old/**

Beryl: This utterance also uses contrast. Stinkrat’s character is one of perplexing contrasts.

Linda: The repetition of ‘bad’ and ‘old’ together with the juxtaposition of these two ideas sets up that contrast.

Beryl: And in the structural pairing we feel empathy.

**and I’ll be that one day/**

Linda: These words are a powerful declaration. Because getting old and passing away are inevitable for all living things, the connection between Aquilina and Stinkrat is incontestable. So too, the connection Aquilina makes with the emotions of her audience for whom these ideas also hold true. Here again we’re seeing careful weaving of ethos, pathos and logos.

**so I open can for toothless yowl and pat scruffy head.**

Linda: I’m really struck at the movement in the poem toward the end. I see this occurring through Aquilina’s use of tense. In the first utterance, Stinkrat is introduced as a cat Aquilina ‘once had’ (past tense). As the poem concludes, Aquilina speaks as if the cat is still there: ‘so I open can’ (timeless present tense). It’s as if her memories have meshed with the present and she is affectionately reliving the relationship she had/has with her cat.

Beryl: So the audience is able to pick up on the way that the poet is referring to someone who is dearly departed in the present: this is an emotional reaction to grief. And here’s an opportunity to reconnect to the pathos of the text. I’m seeing Aquilina’s style of offering those many opportunities to connect to ethos, pathos and logos, and you and I have done that differently, but what is unexpected is Aquilina’s provision of so many choices throughout her poem. Some of her words are mundane but used effectively; other words are neologisms yet we can appreciate their intent. It’s almost as if you have to pause at the end of the poem to allow the surge of emotions to wash over you and be absorbed into your consciousness.

**Conclusion**

At the outset of this manuscript, we offered several ideas about how we think about the sub-strands of the ‘Language’ strand of the AC:E and the possibilities of regionalising their knowledges, as well as the affordances of a pedagogy of metalogue for advancing agendas for reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian and the greater agenda of multiculturalism throughout Australia.

The first point we make is that the ‘Language Variation and Change’ sub-strand of the AC:E is a marked space for discovery and discussion of the history and politics of language use. In this manuscript we demonstrate how a dialect of English can become known as robust and substantial in and of itself. We resisted the colonising discourses of labelling difference as deficit, or trying to translate the text into SAE, instead examining the different levels of the dialect and possibilities of meaning Aquilina made available to each of us as an active reader. We respected the language as it is and the way it is shaped and the authorial choices that have been made.

Our second point is that including a Content Description from another sub-strand gave our work with ACELA1515 (ACARA, 2016a) more substance. Using ACELA1518 (ACARA, 2016a) and its inherent reference to language features and the grammar of rhetoric, provided the framework for our discussion about a stimulus text that is marked by a different dialect. We contend that the ‘transformation’ (Stavrou, 2011, p. 144) of the singulars permitted us to bring a lens that is integrated with other knowledge about language from another sub-strand of the Language strand. There is something symbolically powerful about the ability to appropriately combine a range of disciplinary discourses in a manner evoked by a particular piece of text in order to analyse that text. Bernstein (2000) contends that the possibility of regionalising knowledge – such as regionalising agendas of reconciliation and multiculturalism with a version of linguistic analysis – points to the ongoing currency of both knowledge sets.

Our third point concerns the affordances of metalogue as a pedagogy for enabling a rich discussion of
the identifiable language features and their effects. Our example of metalogue showed how two teachers worked within a pedagogy of metalogue. Such a demonstration might offer students a way to develop conscious, cumulative knowledge about language to position them as researchers of language in use. In using a pedagogy of metalogue, we implicitly advanced an agenda for reconciliation and multiculturalism. The tenor and processes at work, for example, showed how the strategy afforded each of us ‘permission’ to maintain our own voice as we talked about difference as being substantial and intellectual. In doing so, metalogue allowed us to show respect for each other’s ideas and perceptions as well as for the intellectual complexity of different languages and dialects. Hence, metalogue affords the reader (and participants in the dialogue) a new lens for looking at difference as a resource, not difference as a deficit. The academic label of metalogue gives credibility to the multiple layers of ‘talk pedagogy’. Doing so validates this process as something other than a regular conversation; we were informed by the experience of conversing but also operated within a regionalisation of knowledges about language.

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