WRITING ABORIGINAL ENGLISH & CREOLES: FIVE CASE STUDIES IN AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION CONTEXTS

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Texts in Aboriginal English (AE) and creole varieties have been created by Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers for a range of purposes. In this paper, we focus on materials created in and for five educational contexts, and investigate the orthographic or spelling systems developed in each setting. Choices about orthography are guided by linguistic and non-linguistic considerations. They are sensitive to matters of prestige and identity, and new orthographic conventions are subject to comparison with ‘correct’, ‘standard’ spellings. We explore the processes, motivations and rationale that drive choices for the orthographic conventions and the diverse outcomes in the five settings.

KEY WORDS: Orthography, creole, Aboriginal English, education, non-standard spellings

INTRODUCTION

Australian contact languages – varieties of Aboriginal English and creoles (AE/C) – have rarely been assigned official status which invites formal language planning and promotes literacy practices. However, texts in AE/C, including religious materials, language research, and increasingly, materials for education contexts, have been produced. In all cases, choices about the spelling system or orthography have been made. This paper focuses on these choices, driven by linguistic and non-linguistic factors within their given contexts. In particular, we examine the development of orthographies for AE/C varieties in education materials.
Orthography is a contested space in which socio-political, ideological, attitudinal and linguistic considerations are central (Mühleisen, 2005, p. 2). Tensions between these considerations play out in various ways, and the orthographic conventions that emerge are “shaped less by the phonological facts of the language concerned than by social and cultural factors in the context where the orthography is used” (Sebba, 2000, p. 926). In recent years, the development and use of orthographic conventions for contact and non-standard languages worldwide have been treated as a serious area for study (Jaffe, 2000; Mühleisen, 2005; Romaine, 1994, 2005; Sebba, 1998, 2007).

For speakers of contact and non-standard languages, writing can be a powerful expressive resource, achieving communicative goals, and challenging linguistic hierarchies, “for they make non-standard voices visible/audible in a medium that does not habitually recognize them” (Jaffe, 2000, p. 498). New orthographic conventions may depart from standard, etymological spellings and thus visually distinguish the ‘newer’ language from the ‘standard’. This can create both linguistic and social distance between the two codes, asserting and legitimising the status of the ‘newer’ language in its own right. However, innovations in spelling are subject to comparison with the ‘correct’, ‘standard’ convention, as “the new writing is set in relationship with other, already established ones” (Mühleisen, 2005, p. 2), in the minds of speakers of the standard and speakers of the newer language (Fenigsen, 1999; Romaine, 2005).

**CONTACT VARIETIES IN EDUCATION**

Contact and non-standard varieties are commonly unrecognised in education settings. According to Siegel (2005, pp. 144–146), the low prestige of contact and non-standard varieties is a key reason for resistance to their formal use, even in contexts where they are spoken by a majority of the population (e.g. in the Pacific, Africa and the Caribbean) or by a minority (e.g. Australia, USA, Canada, Netherlands). Negative attitudes include the perception that contact and non-standard varieties are deviant forms of their lexifier languages, with no grammatical rules and, by comparison with the ‘standard’, have no history, literacy, literature or standardisation. Siegel (2005, p. 146) observes that “even when [pidgins and creoles] are recognized as legitimate languages, some educators, administrators and even linguists still argue that using them in education would be both impractical and detrimental to students”, a concern not borne out by research (Siegel, 1999). Despite substantial pedagogical research advocating instruction, comparative language awareness programs and initial literacy attainment in a child’s first language, such attitudes exclude pidgins/creoles and non-standard varieties from educational contexts (Siegel, 1997, 2005, and the studies reviewed in Siegel, 1999).

Similarly, in Australia, widespread official support for the recognition and use of AE/Cs in education settings is lacking (see Sellwood & Angelo, this volume). However, some
educators, speakers, researchers and education departments have sought to include AE/Cs in education contexts. A number of motivations can be identified, and these impact on the orthographic choices writers make. One motivation is to promote students’ first languages/dialects (L/D1) as legitimate codes, part of a unique and valued Indigenous identity (Department of Education, Western Australia, 2000, 2002). A related goal is to raise awareness in educational settings that students are first language speakers of an AE/C variety, who learn Standard Australian English (SAE) as an additional language or dialect, and thus promote suitable pedagogies for this learning (Angelo, 2011; Department of Education, Western Australia, 2000; Malcolm, 2010).

Bi-dialectal programs, promoting language awareness of differences between AE/C’s and SAE often through an explicit contrastive approach, provide a bridge for learners of SAE, and have been advocated by some researchers. They have been taken up at various times by different jurisdictions in Australia (Department of Education, Western Australia and Department of Training and Workforce Development [DE WA & DTWD], 2012a; Catholic Education Office, WA, 1994; Malcolm, 2010). Similar bi-dialectal awareness programs are found in settings such as Hawai‘i (Sakoda & Siegel, 2003), Jamaica (Kouwenberg, 2002) and the Caribbean (Craig, 1999). Contact varieties are rarely used as a medium of instruction for initial literacy (Siegel, 2005, p. 149). However, this did happen in one school, Barunga, in the Northern Territory, where a Kriol-English bilingual program operated from 1977 to 1998. Here Kriol was used in the early school years for instruction and literacy development. It represents the only instance of a contact language officially mandated as a medium of instruction in Australia.

**MAKING ORTHOGRAPHIC CHOICES**

In making decisions about spelling, writers in Australian educational contexts grapple with the ‘phonological facts’ as they manage the complexity of speech variation and the interface between the AE/C varieties and SAE, while maintaining the integrity of the author’s voice. These factors are mediated by the motivations for using the AE/C in the specific context. Three types of choices can be seen, and these are common in other contact settings also (see Siegel, 2005). One is to take a phonemic approach. Here each sound is allocated an agreed letter or set of letters and this is generalised in each word, for instance, medisin ‘medicine’, ebriweya ‘everywhere’ in Roper River Kriol, which was developed for initial literacy development in Kriol. The second is etymological, that is, words are written using English spelling as in ‘kid leg get red’ (Alice Springs AE in James, 2010b). In the third approach, English spelling is used as the default system, and innovated spellings appear for features considered distinctive of AE/C, We bin jus come back from town in Yarrie Lingo. In this case, goals include raising the profile of this variety and providing opportunity to develop contrastive awareness.
In this paper we investigate the contexts, processes and choices educators and language speakers have undertaken and the diverse orthographic outcomes, in five settings in Australia. The paper is laid out as follows. In the next section, an overview of the varieties of Aboriginal Englishes and creoles in Australia and some of their phonological patterns is given. This is followed by five case studies of the orthographic choices made for writing AE/C varieties; Roper River Kriol in the Northern Territory (NT), Kimberley Kriol/Fitzroy Valley Kriol in Western Australia (WA), Aboriginal English in WA, Central Australian Aboriginal English in Alice Springs (NT) and Yarrie Lingo in Queensland. We conclude with a discussion of the approaches and outcomes.

ABORIGINAL ENGLISHES AND CREOLES IN AUSTRALIA

Many of the 455,000 Indigenous people in Australia speak a variety of Aboriginal English (AE) at least some of the time and a large number of children speak it as first (and often only) language (Butcher, 2008, p. 625). In addition, at least 25,000 of these are speakers of a Creole variety (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in association with the Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages, 2005) (see Wigglesworth & Billington, this volume, for further discussion of these terms). Here we do not seek a strict definition distinguishing Australian creoles from Aboriginal English, which range on a continuum of varieties close to SAE (acrolectal or ‘light’), to languages very distinct from SAE and with many similarities to local Traditional language(s) (basilectal or ‘heavy’). All varieties draw overwhelmingly on English lexicon.

There are a number of creoles in Australia. Some are well described, including Roper River Kriol or Ngukurr Kriol (RRK) in the Northern Territory (Sandefur, 1979, 1986), Fitzroy Valley Kriol or Kimberley Kriol (KK) in Western Australia (Hudson, 1983) and Torres Strait Island Creole (Shnukal, 1988). A growing body of literature is providing insight into distinct local AE and Creole varieties, and is providing terms to use for these distinct varieties (e.g. Alyawarr English, Dixon, 2011; Wumpurrarni English, Disbray, 2009; Yarrie Lingo, Angelo, 2011). ‘Aboriginal English’ (AE) (see Malcolm, this volume) is often used as a broad umbrella term and covers a range of sociolinguistic and geographic settings, and local linguistic varieties.

According to Butcher (2008, p. 626) Aboriginal Englishes share a number of features with other non-standard varieties of English (particularly at the grammatical level), and with creole varieties. They also have “features (particularly at the lexical and phonological levels, but also at the pragmatic level) that derive ultimately from traditional Aboriginal languages and culture” (Butcher, 2008, p. 626). Some shared features are widely distributed across AE varieties; however, there are also distinguishing features particular to local varieties (Disbray, 2009: Malcolm, 2001; Shnukal, 2001; see also Malcolm, this volume).
SOUNDS OF ABORIGINAL ENGLISHES AND CREOLES AND ISSUES OF REPRESENTATION

The phonetics and phonology of AE/C are influenced to varying degrees by the sounds of Traditional Indigenous languages (TILs). In the heaviest varieties the phonology is almost the same as the local indigenous language, while in the lightest varieties only a few features of the sound system are distinguished from SAE (Butcher, 2008, p. 627). In addition, there is potential for variation in the sounds of a given variety, and indeed in the speech of an individual, as speakers may draw on heavier or lighter styles of the AE/C variety they speak.

Some sounds occur in TILs, AE/Cs and SAE and pose no issues for representation in writing. These include the sonorants \( n, m, ng, l \) and \( w \). Other sounds occur in AE/C, but variably in AE/C, and these may be problematic for representation. For example, the stop series in SAE is markedly different from those in AE/C with respect to voicing. In AE/C there may be no difference in the pronunciation of ‘pin’ and ‘bin’, or ‘pig’ and ‘pick’, with the \( p \) sound occurring somewhere between \( p \) and \( b \), the \( g \) somewhere between \( g \) and \( k \). A further difference between TIL, AE/C and SAE is the absence or variable occurrence of fricatives which occur in SAE (e.g. in \( \text{five}, \text{cars} \) and \( \text{pips} \)). Fricatives in SAE may occur in AE/C as stops; \( \text{shop} \rightarrow \text{chop} \), \( \text{three} \rightarrow \text{tree} \), \( \text{five} \rightarrow \text{bibe} \), or occur variably ‘seben’ seven.

The differences referred to so far are concerned with differences in the manner of articulation, but there are also place of articulation differences, of which AE/C have a greater number of contrasts than SAE. For example, AE/C has a dental stop, often represented in texts as ‘d’ or ‘j’. The issue for representation is whether spelling should reflect the way an individual word sounds in AE/C, or as it looks in SAE.

The vowel systems of AE/C and SAE also differ, with SAE using around 17 distinct sounds but fewer in AE/C. Butcher (2008, p. 630) has identified a three- and five- vowel system in heavier varieties of AE/C. The issue of representation in writing vowels in AE/C is further complicated by the range of spellings for vowel sounds in English, where there is no one-to-one sound-sign correspondence. Consider the sound in \( \text{kit} \) and then in \( \text{pretty}, \text{stomach}, \text{women, message, give} \) to name a few; or the sound in \( \text{store} \) and then in \( \text{north, thought, ball, warm, talk} \), for example.

ORTHOGRAPHIES IN AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION SETTINGS: FIVE CASE STUDIES

MAKING ORTHOGRAPHIC CHOICES: ROPER RIVER KRIOL

Roper River Kriol (RRK) is spoken in the Roper River region surrounding the township of Katherine, in the Northern Territory of Australia, which developed in the early part of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century at Roper River Mission (Harris, 1986). In 1974, a bilingual education program in Kriol and SAE was introduced at Barunga School, triggering the need for a standardised
Recognized as a significant shift in attitudes and policy, Kriol was highly stigmatized by both non-Indigenous and many Indigenous people. It had been banned from schools and there was no literacy in Kriol (Sandefur, 1986). However, by the 1990s more than 200 Kriol titles had been published in the school printery.

In the early phase of the bilingual program (1974–1976), Kriol-speaking trainee teachers and literacy workers studied teaching and linguistics, and were involved in orthography planning alongside Summer Institute of Linguistics linguist John Sandefur (1979, 1983). In planning the orthography, Sandefur (1983, pp. 16–17) observed “five major factors involved in the development of a writing system: linguistic, sociological, psychological, pedagogical and practical,” observations which are echoed by Mühleisen, given in the introduction above. Guided by these five factors or criteria, Sandefur concluded that “[i]n practice of course what we strive to do is find the balance between the various factors” (Sandefur, 1983, p. 17).

The first factor was ‘maximum representation of speech’ and to satisfy this, the orthography was to closely reflect the sound system of Kriol. The second criterion was ‘maximum motivation’, wide community acceptance of the orthography. This acceptance, by both minority language speakers and speakers of the majority language (such as education and language planning authorities), would satisfy sociological considerations. The third criterion, ‘maximum transfer’, acknowledged the importance of transfer between orthographies in other languages, English and other Traditional Indigenous languages. The fourth criterion was ‘maximum ease of learning’, aimed at ensuring that the orthography was easy to teach, covering pedagogy. Finally, practical concerns meant that special symbols were avoided, to achieve ‘maximum ease of reproduction’.

To satisfy all conditions, Sandefur worked with language speakers to draft a phonemic orthography. While an etymological orthography might have proven easier to read for non-Kriol-speakers, such an approach would have obscured differences between Kriol and English, and also carried over the inherent irregularities of the English spelling system into Kriol. Further, a “phonemic orthography reduces negative socio-political implications by not making Kriol appear as if it were a broken English” (Sandefur, 1983, p. 9).

Sandefur and the community language workers also wrangled with the question of speech variation. They considered the questions “what segment of the population should the orthography be slanted toward? What point on the continuum should be considered the ‘standard’ or the ‘norm’?” (Sandefur, 1984, p. 10). In collaboration with Kriol speakers developing their Kriol literacy skills, it was decided that the orthography would indeed allow for variation along the continuum, as well as between dialects (Sandefur, 1983, pp. 11–12).
Writers were free to represent words as they hear and say them. Thus acceptable spellings for ‘sleep’ could include jilip, jilib, silip, slip.

In the early 1980s, Sandefur recommended that Kriol spelling be standardised, at least partially but still allowing variability as an expressive device, to accommodate other dialects, as the orthography was intended by this time to be used in the Kimberley.

The following text, Ringwerk Medisin Tri Ringworm medicine tree was written for the school program (Galmur, Brodie & Oenpelli, 1994). It is an instructional booklet on a bush medicine plant for treating ringworm, accompanied by photographs and has an English text in the back of the book.

Example 1
Ib yu gedim ringwem so wal yu gin yusim jad ringwem lif en rabum ebrweya la so, im gudwan medisin tu.

If you get sores from ringworms, you can use the leaves from this tree. Rub them on the sore; it’s good medicine.

Here fricatives are used, in so, yusim, lif, for instance, but then also ib (‘if’). The approach to orthography allowed these items to be represented in various ways, for example as jo, yujim, or lip, liip respectively.

The bilingual program was closed down in the 1990s and so school no longer provides a context for Kriol literacy planning, instruction or use. The most prominent site for Kriol literacy now is the church, with various song-books (St. Matthew’s Anglican Church, 1988 and the Kriol Holi Baibel, launched in 2007. Kriol is also used for community notices and to a limited extent, personal correspondence and use in social media, such as Facebook (Greg Dickson, personal communication, 2013; Kral, 2010, see below).

MAKING ORTHOGRAPHIC CHOICES: KIMBERLEY KRIOL/FITZROY VALLEY KRIOL

Fitzroy Valley Kriol, now also known as Kimberley Kriol (KK), is spoken in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. Initially, the orthography devised for RRK was also used for KK and occurs in the key reference work on KK by linguist Joyce Hudson (1983). However, RRK texts were not widely used in the Kimberley. Speakers did not accept the orthography for the variety of Kriol they use (Joyce Hudson, personal communication, 2012), highlighting the importance of local acceptance and motivation in language planning (c.f. Sandefur, 1983). No bilingual programs ran in the Kimberley, offering fewer contexts for language planning and literacy; however, KK was and is used at times in some school programs, in particular in the bi-dialectal awareness program Fostering English Language in Kimberley schools (Berry & Hudson, 1997; Catholic Education Office, WA, 1994) and texts were created for use in schools in this orthography.
In the early 2000s, with renewed attention to the bi-dialectal situation in Kimberley classrooms and interest in KK literacy for first language/dialect literacy development, Indigenous school staff and community members proposed a revision of the orthography to better reflect KK. In 2003 and 2004, two 2-day workshops took place, supported by the WA Department of Education and the Kimberley Language Resource Centre, resulting in the creation of a sound chart to provide a basis for the new orthography (see http://klrc.org.au/kimberley-kriol/overview for the pictorial version of this sound chart). The content appears in Table 1 below. Joyce Hudson (personal communication, 2012) reports that participants were emotional in expressing their dissatisfaction with the RRK orthography and keen to create their own spelling system. In the workshop, they were given words and sounds to represent, and time to discuss how and why they should be spelt in a particular way. Hudson noted that participants’ literacy in SAE influenced their approach to KK. However, they also grappled with the ill-fit that English spelling offered KK, due to differences between the two codes, and indeed due to the inconsistent English spelling system. Thus, in a very practice based way, these Indigenous educators worked from phonological facts and the pressures of etymology, to come up with spellings for sounds and for words, to generalize for a new Kriol orthography.

The facilitators took the common patterns that emerged from participants’ proposals and developed two options. One was narrowly phonetic, assigning one sign to one sound, with little reference to the conventions of English spelling. The other was largely phonetic, but incorporated some English orthographic conventions, such as generally following the spelling of the voiced and unvoiced stops marked in SAE, while allowing flexibility (e.g. toiyodu toyota). The principles of the second approach won out.

While phonological facts were important, so too was the need for distance from the RRK orthography. Though choices for the KK orthography were made about very similar sound patterns, the outcome is different. This is mainly due to the representation of vowel sounds.

Table 1 shows the sound chart created in 2003, and published in 2004.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>SAE gloss</th>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>SAE gloss</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>apool</td>
<td>apple</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>booloomun</td>
<td>cow</td>
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<tr>
<td>ai</td>
<td>rain</td>
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<td>d</td>
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<td>ar</td>
<td>kard</td>
<td>card</td>
<td>dd</td>
<td>munguddee</td>
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<td>e</td>
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<td>f</td>
<td>famlee</td>
<td>family</td>
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<tr>
<td>ee</td>
<td>eemiyo</td>
<td>emu</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>gwanu</td>
<td>goanna</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The orthography developed for Kimberley Kriol includes a rich inventory of letters/letter combinations to represent vowels and diphthongs. It is here that it departs most markedly from the English orthography as the KK orthography seeks a one sound-one sign correspondence. A significant shift to note in this orthography is the use of ‘u’ to represent /ʌ/ (‘ununeet’, underneath) and ‘oo’ to represent /ʊ/ (‘book’). In the orthographies for Traditional Indigenous languages of the Kimberley, and the RRK orthography, ‘a’ is used for the former, and ‘u’ for the latter.\textsuperscript{iv}

The following extract from a story, developed in schools to teach literacy to young children, provided by Lola Jones, Kimberley Education Office (personal communication, 2012) shows the orthography in use:
Example 2

Wun lilwun boi bin goa hunding blu gwanu. Ee bin fiendim wun bigijun gwanu lungu hoal en ee bin poolim brom tail en kilim.

One little boy went hunting for goanna. He found a big goanna in a hole and he pulled it out by the tail and killed it.

MAKING ORTHOGRAPHIC CHOICES: ABORIGINAL ENGLISH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Aboriginal English in educational settings has been a focus in WA since the 1970s (Eagleson, Kaldor & Malcolm, 1982). Ongoing partnerships between the Education Department, Indigenous staff and community members, and academics has resulted in substantial research into Western Australian Aboriginal English (WA AE), and the promotion of bi-dialectal education approaches (Malcolm, 2010; Malcolm & Sharifian, 2002; Oliver, Rocheouste, Vanderford & Grote, 2011).

Here we focus on the professional learning package Tracks to Two Way Learning, which comprises a Facilitator’s Guide, 12 Focus Areas (or learning modules) and a set of books in Aboriginal English (DE WA & DTWD, 2012a). Following from the ABC of Two-Way Literacy and Language Learning Project, Tracks to Two Way Learning is underpinned by three principles: A, for Acceptance of Aboriginal English; B, for Bridging to Standard Australian English; and C, for Cultivating Aboriginal Ways of approaching experience and knowledge. We focus on the literature and the discussion of orthographic matters in this substantial professional learning program. The books were developed to provide linguistically and culturally familiar material for Aboriginal English speaking students, and materials for all learners to “generate discussion about Aboriginal experience, history and culture, including language practice and narrative themes and structures” (DE WA & DTWD, 2012b, p. 8). The research team weighed up a number of issues in deciding how to render the stories in print. Every effort was made “to preserve some of the spoken qualities of Aboriginal yarning”, balancing the representation of the author’s original style with orthographic consistency across the books (DE WA & DTWD, 2012b, p. 11).

In contrast with the orthographic choices made in the two previous cases, the spelling is largely etymological. Distinctive is the developer’s attention to textual aspects to highlight the distance between WA AE and SAE, beyond graphemic and lexical representation, such as linguistic features and cultural schema underpinning the content of the stories.

We wanted to apply the standing conventions of spelling and punctuation without compromising the story-tellers intended meanings. The spelling sometimes deviates from that of SAE to represent the sounds that are typical of Aboriginal English, and the sentence breaks and punctuation are based on the structure and rhythms of spoken language. […] Line length has been used to as a device to emphasise rhythm or to
serve as a punctuation mark separating grammatical (and conceptual) units (DE WA & DTWD, 2012b, p. 11).

Example 3, from ‘Grandfather’ by Daniel Brooks, illustrates this attention to text form, which relies on visual presentation similar to that of poetry.

Example 3
E would take em
mostly down
the river.
E used to
tell em….
Wait ere
I come back
soon
maybe
couple of months.

Ten guidelines are provided to learners, teachers and trainers, intended “not for the purposes of teaching how to write in Aboriginal English, but to help learners make decisions about spelling and punctuation and to explain how they have done it and why” (DE WA & DTWD, 2012c, p. 12). The first point stresses that choices about spellings must be determined locally and may differ from place to place (e.g., ana/una, feller/fullah). The other points reveal the push and pull forces in choosing how to write in AE, allowing for flexibility (point 2), while promoting internal consistency in a text (point 9). The guidelines suggest that phonemic accuracy may be kept to represent Aboriginal pronunciation and grammatical forms, e.g., ‘gotta’ (points 4 & 5), but also state that “preference may be given to forms that help the transfer to SAE” (point 8). A survey of the texts reveals that overwhelmingly the authors used SAE spelling, with some non-standard but fairly conventionalised spellings, which are frequently found in casual dialogue in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous texts. This includes the omission of ‘g’ on -ing (walkin, lookin), as well as other common omissions, such as an’ (and), ‘bout’, ‘jus’, ‘ere’, along with spellings such as ‘gunna’, ‘ya’ (you). The final point in the guidelines raises the issue of perceptions of innovation in spelling: “Avoid negative stereotyping with the oversimplification in words. For example, don’t use unnecessarily simple spellings like skool for ‘school’, as they can be stereotyped as childish” (DE WA & DTWD, 2012c, p. 51).

MAKING ORTHOGRAPHIC CHOICES: ALICE SPRINGS ABORIGINAL ENGLISH

An etymological approach to spelling can found in the Honey Ant Readers, a set of graded readers developed and produced for the commercial market, by Margaret James, an ex-teacher at Yipirinya School, Alice Springs. Though research was carried out in the 1980s on the AE spoken by students at the Indigenous independent school in Alice Springs (Harkins, 1994), AE
had not been incorporated into the teaching program. The *Honey Ant Reader* program has 20
colourful, levelled books designed to provide young readers with meaningful texts through
stories, themes and images that reflect the children’s lives (James, 2010a, p. 28). The language
content is staged so that children see familiar vocabulary and forms in the early books, with
SAE forms progressively introduced in the later books in the series (James, 2010a, pp. 30–31).
The language “gradually changes from the ‘language in the playground’ in the early Readers
[...] into SAE in the later Readers” (James, 2010b, p. 50), so the language is not an accurate
representation of Alice Springs Aboriginal English. Some markers of Aboriginal English occur,
like ‘gotta’ and ‘camp’, and others, such as ‘im’ are not used.

James chose to use SAE spelling throughout the books to provide a bridge to SAE literacy
(personal communication, 2012). Some colloquial features, such as ‘gotta’ are rendered in
non-standard, though conventionalised forms, as can be seen here in Example 4.

Example 4
Mother, Grandmother and the 2 women get the little baby. Mother talking, “Gotta go to
the camp. Gotta get my little baby to husband, big sister and big brother at the camp.”
(…)
The women see 9 birds, 3 kangaroos, a big goanna and a long, long snake. No time to
get it. Gotta get to the camp.
(James, 2010a, p. 16–17).

**MAKING ORTHOGRAPHIC CHOICES: YARRIE LINGO**

The final example, Yarrie Lingo (YL), is spoken in Yarrabah, Far North Queensland (see
also Sellwood & Angelo, this volume). The system provides an example of a mixture of
innovated and etymological spellings. YL has not been used as a language of instruction or
literacy development, but since the 1990s it has been represented in print in the school, in
transcriptions, translations and scribing students’ utterances. This has mainly been in the
context of contrastive language awareness programs and practices, designed to assist students
to separate codes (home language from School language) and inform educators about the
differences between Yarrie Lingo and Standard Australian English.

In the early 2000s, Queensland Education English as a Second Language support staff began
a project to research the varieties of AE/C spoken across QLD, gathering data to raise
language awareness among students, staff and communities and provide professional
development to school staff. The project took an action-research approach, with students and
educators recording local language and analysing the data themselves. Cartooned posters
were created by participants to show and celebrate local language varieties. We draw on the
poster ‘At da Crick’ developed in Yarrie Lingo spoken at Yarrabah. It is made up of stick
figure characters, mostly children, in short dialogues, such as the following:
Example 5

A: We bin jus come back from town.
B: Wat yufulla bin do dere?
A: Wim go swim…En den wim go shop, buy lolly!

A: We’ve just come back from town.
B: What did you do there?
A: We went swimming…and we went to the shop and bought lollies.

Example 5 shows that some spellings are shared (SAE & YL), and others are innovated. The innovated spellings do not necessarily follow a phonemic principle, e.g. jus, yufulla.

Educator Bernadine Yeatman and support officer Denise Angelo identified three motivations for the orthographic choices (Denise Angelo, personal communication, 2012). The first was to help the reader to pronounce words as Yarrie Lingo words, assuming the reader would apply an understanding of SAE spelling conventions. The second was to make distinctions in the spelling that clearly differentiate Yarrie Lingo from SAE. These two goals were difficult to reconcile, and on reflection the project facilitators considered that the poster might not emphasise the differences between YL and SAE enough, and that had they been “less kind” to SAE speakers, they might be forced to recognise how different YL is from SAE. The third motivation also involved using spelling to mark distinction. The YL spelling was intended to distinguish it from related creole varieties, e.g. -fulla’, which occurs in other northern creoles use -fla, -pla or -bala. This is particularly interesting; such pan-regional features might invite conventionalised and shared spellings (like ‘cuz’, ‘bro’, ‘bin’), or, as in this case, be drawn on to mark a boundary between varieties.

The participants in the YL language awareness project discussed issues around the development of a standardised spelling, drawing on the examples of RRK and KK. The Yarrie Lingo speakers who participated in the poster project felt that it was too early to focus too much on a writing system, which would require consideration of the key issue: ‘who would decide?’ (Denise Angelo, personal communication, 2012).

DISCUSSION

Our investigation of these five educational contexts illustrates how linguistic and non-linguistic considerations come into play in different ways in choices about orthography in Australian education contexts. Linguistic considerations centre on representation of the sound system in the orthography, while factors such as marking local identity, and with it a distinction from other varieties, provide non-linguistic drivers. Attention to prestige and stigma are also significant, though how this concern is realised differs. In the case of RRK, a distinct spelling system was preferred to avoid negative comparisons with English, while in WA AE, etymological spellings are preferred for the same reason.

Ensuring community acceptance has guided the development of the orthographies, through the collaboration of educators, speakers and linguists, in forums such as workshops in the
cases of RRK and KK, and YL. The developers of the WA AE materials, on the other hand, provide the 10 guidelines for speakers and writers to guide their own answer to the question, ‘who decides?’

Rendering AE/C in text is a shared goal in the five settings. However, the role of AE/C and literacy differs across the sites. This interacts with orthographic choices, wider community acceptance and literacy practices outside of the school setting. In the bilingual program at Banyjili, RRK was the language of initial literacy development, couched in a wider community uptake of Kriol literacy at the time. The role of AE/C literacy, by contrast, in KK and YL is largely restricted to raising language awareness in bi-dialectal school programs, with little context for AE/C literacy outside of this. The orthographic choices in the case of WA AE and, in particular, the Honey Ant Readers are explicitly intended as a bridge to SAE literacy for AE speaking students. Thus acceptance for and the effectiveness of the orthographic choices must be understood in the purpose for literacy in the given setting.

The orthographies and indeed the contexts for their use examined in this paper are all fairly new. Moves to adapt and change orthographic conventions will only come with use over time. As AE/C literacy is generally not a goal in itself in education or in the wider community, the use and review of the orthographies discussed is likely to be limited to local school settings. The case is somewhat different from RRK, which has been used for a wider range of literacy practices since its development in the 1970s. Recent research by Inge Kral (2010, p. 11) on technology use by young Indigenous people provides a window into the use of Kriol literacy in texting by young speakers. These writers draw on standard and innovated Kriol spellings, alongside SAE spellings (underlined) and texting conventions.

**Example 6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RRK</th>
<th>SAE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I bin <strong>try call</strong> la baba phone</td>
<td>I tried to call to my brother’s phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Em der na indid?</td>
<td>He’s there now isn’t he?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mimi just bin txt me n em bin say that em der?</td>
<td>Mimi just texted me and she said that he was there?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A txt u 2morrow bcuz</td>
<td>I will text you tomorrow because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dis mob bin cum bek from town ba mumy</td>
<td>this mob came back from town for mummy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whether and how young AE/C speakers in the case studies discussed here incorporate their first language/dialect literacy into their later literacy practices is worth investigation into the future. The use of home language varieties in Indigenous education settings is a controversial issue (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012), and discussions of language in education tend to neglect contact varieties (Sellwood & Angelo, this volume). Whether and how contact languages will feature in Australian education contexts into the future is yet to be seen.
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ENDNOTES

i Though in Traditional languages more contrasts are found than in SAE.

ii In 1974 the School of Australia Linguistics was established as part of the Darwin Community College, with its main goal “to train Aboriginal people as linguists, and thus to provide much needed support to bilingual education programs” (Department of Education, 1974, p. 5).

iii Communities represented in these consultations included Frog Hollow, Yakanarra, Nookenbah, Fitzroy Crossing, Bayulu, Wangkatjungka, Muludja, Halls Creek Aboriginal English - Broome, One Arm Point, La Grange, Derby, Wyndham, Kununurra, Oombulgurri, Kalumburu, Dawul, Jundranung (Lola Jones, personal communication, 2013).

iv Sandefur proposed that this as a change to the original RRK orthography but it does not appear to have been taken up (Sandefur, 1983, p. 59).

v This technique emerged earlier for Aboriginal English/Kriol in Western Australia. Thanks to a reviewer of this paper for drawing our attention to this and the reference *Gularabulu: stories from the West Kimberley* by Paddy Roe (edited by Stephen Muecke, published by Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, W.A in 1983), which pioneered this.