

WRITING ABORIGINAL ENGLISH*

The Use of Aboriginal English in the Written Medium in Publications of Aboriginal Oral Narratives such as Bill Neidjie's *Story About Feeling* (1989)

Meiki Apted 108365, University of Melbourne

*This time White-European must come to Aborigine
listen Aborigine and understand it.*

Understand that culture, secret, what dreaming. (Neidjie 1989: 78)

Aboriginal English (also referred to as Aboriginal Australian English) developed in response to the invasion/colonisation of what is now known as Australia and is spoken by the majority of the Indigenous Aboriginal people of Australia¹ (henceforth Aboriginal people), many of whom no longer use their traditional heritage languages (Eades 2006, and elsewhere). Aboriginal English encompasses heavy and light varieties, and differs systematically from Standard Australian English at all levels of linguistic structure (Eades 1996: 134; Malcolm and Kosciielecki 1997: iii). While recognition of Aboriginal English as a distinct language variety remains poor in mainstream Australian society, some improvements have occurred in the education and legal systems (see Eades 1996; 2006, and Malcolm and Kosciielecki 1997), and a small amount of Aboriginal English literature has begun to be published. This research report discusses the use of Aboriginal English in Bill Neidjie's *Story About Feeling* (1989), an Aboriginal oral narrative transcribed orated by Neidjie, transcribed and edited by Keith Taylor, and published by Magabala books. Drawing from current research on Aboriginal English, particularly the findings of Eades (1996; 2006) and Malcolm (1994a; 1994b; 2002), the use of Aboriginal English features in *Story About Feeling* (1989), including phonological, lexical and lexico-semantic features, grammatical features, pragmatic and discourse features, and genre related narrative structure features, will be identified and discussed. The ways in which the use of Aboriginal English is framed will be discussed, and the implications of the use of Aboriginal English in the written medium will be considered, including issues related to Aboriginal culture, authorship, and autonomy; the development of Aboriginal English as a distinct language variety; and the potential for publications such as *Story About Feeling* (1989) to facilitate greater cross-cultural awareness and understanding.

¹ This includes people of mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal descent.

*Originally Developed for *World Englishes 175-536, Semester 1 2006 (Co-ord. by Dr. Jean Mulder)*