



Researching Child Language in Indigenous Australia: An ACLA2 Progress Report

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ACLA2 is the second phase of a longitudinal study into child language, and child-directed language, in Indigenous Australian communities. In this seminar we discuss the overall aims of this project and how these relate to current issues, and we also report on problems we have encountered in data collection. Finally, we discuss the various studies we have carried out in this area since ACLA1 (2003-2007).

The ACLA2 project is well timed in the sense that issues surrounding bilingual education in the Northern Territory have become increasingly complex, and politicised, over the previous year. Policy decisions are being made (i.e. the scrapping of bilingual education) with little regard for the actual language situation in Indigenous Australia. Amongst other research questions, the ACLA2 project aims to determine whether, and to what extent, the different codes that children bring from home, and the demands made of them in the school, affect their ability to manage and fully participate in the school environment. The outcome of this research question will be able to properly inform policy relating to the education of Indigenous Australian children.

While the timeline of ACLA2 has been delayed, we have been able to carry out some research relating to the experience of Indigenous children in schools, and we have also been able to more fully analyse the large database of child language collected through ACLA1. We will report on the work we have been carrying out, specifically:

- 1) Issues and problems with the “National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)” language assessments for Indigenous children in remote communities.
- 2) The design and use of a receptive test to determine children’s knowledge of their Indigenous language.
- 3) A longitudinal study of children’s language, and caregiver language, in one community.

4) A synchronic analysis of the ways interlocutors of four different age groups speak to children, and how children respond.

We will address implications of these studies, as well as discuss future directions for the ACLA2 project.

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| Time: | 4:30pm |
| Date: | Friday 11 December 2009 |
| Location: | Room 407, Babel Building, University of Melbourne |