

R. M. W. Dixon, *The Languages of Australia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980. Pp. xxii, 400, maps, glossary, references, index. Cloth \$69.50, Paper \$19.95.

This is one of a new series, Cambridge Language Surveys, which will provide general accounts of all the major language families of the world. While most volumes are to be organized on a purely genetic basis, some, like Comrie's recent treatment (1981) of the languages of the Soviet Union, will deal with a geographical area. In the case of Australia, grouping on a genetic basis happens to coincide with the geographical area.

While most Australianists have tended to agree that the languages of Australia are genetically related, Dixon rightly points out that this *conjecture* awaits adequate proof. The main contribution of this work, he suggests, is to furnish the beginnings of a proof that all of Australia's approximately 200 languages (with two or three exceptions) are genetically related.

Apart from the more specialized interests of Australianists and comparative linguists, the book is intended for a general audience. In fact, three kinds of reader are distinguished: the lay person, for whom very little knowledge of linguistic matters can be assumed; the general linguist with little or no acquaintanceship with Australian languages, and the spe-

cialist in Australian languages. In each case explicit directions are given on how the book may be best used. In this respect and many others, the work is a model of clarity, being both compellingly written and well indexed and cross-referenced. One can enter the book at almost any point.

The general reader will find the first five chapters the most accessible. They deal in turn with introductory matters such as the nature of Australian languages and the history of research on them. A subsequent chapter, "Tribe and Language" treats such matters as dialect vs. language, problems of labeling communities of speakers and patterns of social organization of such communities. There follows a brief account of speech and song styles found among Australian languages, including special styles used just for kin in an avoidance relationship with the speaker; Among the sociolinguistic aspects of Australian languages dealt with are the role of English-based pidgins and creoles; the emergence of bilingual education using English and the local Australian language, and, more generally, the role of language in binding together Aboriginal communities. A fifth chapter on vocabulary looks at the nature and structure of the lexicon.

From here on the book becomes increasingly technical with chapters on phonology, phonological change, the classification of Australian languages and word classes. There are separate treatments of nouns, pronouns and verbs and a brief but instructive coverage of syntax. Interspersed through much of this material are Dixon's attempts to go some way towards reconstructing proto-Australian.

While some readers might have liked to have seen a fuller treatment of such areas as sociolinguistics and semantics, it should be borne in mind that in many areas of Australian linguistics there is relatively little detailed information yet available. Indeed, Dixon regards his survey as premature, believing that a work of this kind might have waited another ten years or so when much more information on Australian languages had been published. Certainly the last decade has seen a relative flood of publications in the field of Australian linguistics, and we can confidently anticipate very much more being 'known in another ten years' time. However, *Languages of Australia* is a remarkable achievement, packing an enormous amount of authoritative information into a small space. It is likely to become a classic in its field.

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