

EDITORIAL

An ongoing educational concern that is generally worldwide is that of the ways in which languages decline and become extinct as fewer and fewer people use them or appear to need them to cope with day-to-day living. When a language dies, not only is linguistic diversity reduced but the culture that was dependent on that language is lost too. As the world is the poorer for the loss of genetic diversity through lack of conservation of species and eco-systems so too does the world suffer when the richness of humanity is reduced with the loss of languages and the cultures they hold.

As languages of dominant cultures evolve and change "naturally" with time and events, it is difficult to identify the principal factors that contribute directly to that change and to develop a theory or theories of how the factors function. If there is to be effective maintenance of non-dominant languages it is critical to understand how minority languages function over time (especially where the number of speakers is declining. Insights gained from cross-cultural study as well as from detailed observation of language change in Australian society are particularly valuable in providing the background material from which hypotheses concerning language change may be both developed and tested.

Dawn Muir

Dawn Muir - Honorary Editor

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