

Language and Spirit

“We never say it enough: Language cannot be ignored in trying to make sense of who we are as complex human beings. In this sensational volume, the editors convince us of the importance of multilingualism in our many and varied spiritual journeys. The structure of the book makes it a very original read, opening with beautiful personal narratives, and supplemented by stimulating research chapters. The book is already on my students’ list of compulsory readings!”

—Prof. Fred Dervin, *University of Helsinki, Finland*; Professor of Multicultural Education, Director of the TENSION Research Group (Diversities and Interculturality in Education)

“This is an extraordinary book addressing issues of language and spirituality, exploring beliefs, experiences and practices across languages and contexts. The book is the only one I have seen to work from indigenous languages to diasporic and community languages. Governments, researchers and teachers shy away from religious and spiritual aspects of language seeing language purely at a transactional level. But we learn and use languages to understand and express the ways we see the world. This volume is a ‘must-read’ for everyone interested in teaching or learning languages.”

—Prof Ken Cruickshank, Director, *Sydney Institute for Community Languages Education, University of Sydney*

“The intersections of language, religion and identity are of vital importance to questions of language maintenance and use in a multilingual world. Blending scholarly research studies with personal narratives, and diaspora voices with Indigenous voices, the editors and contributors to this volume have opened up an exciting new research agenda on the linguistic lives of those to whom spirituality matters.”

—Professor Phil Benson Professor of Applied Linguistics and Director of the *Multilingualism Research Centre, Macquarie University*

“This is a compelling volume. It successfully crosses boundaries in approaches to research and writing and invites readers to cross boundaries in relation to languages, cultures and faith. It focuses on language as that most powerful resource for discovering the world and the self. It offers voices which capture the

intercultural exchange of meanings – Indigenous people, non-indigenous people and those living in diaspora in Australia. Writers offer their reflections, indeed wisdom, as they engage to better understand others and themselves. The work provides a mirror with which we can reference our own stories as we too consider critically the way we live reciprocally with others to achieve a more equitable and peaceful world.”

—Angela Scarino 7 September 2021 Director, *Research Centre for Languages & Cultures, UniSA Justice and Society University of South Australia*

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Editors

Language and Spirit

Exploring Languages, Religions
and Spirituality in Australia Today

palgrave
macmillan

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ISBN 978-3-030-93063-9 ISBN 978-3-030-93064-6 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-93064-6>

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Cover illustration: Monica Bertolazzi/Getty

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG. The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Foreword

Language and Spirit is a substantial volume of living voices describing personal and collective experiences of the intersection of language, religion, identity and spirituality. It is very much today. This is not a history or the stories of others from far away in time and place. These are Australian stories from Indigenous, migrant, multigenerational settler and other voices. Voices come from recognisable religious traditions, others from less well known and some from no traditional religious affiliation, demonstrating the core intersections examined and displayed here in highly diverse socio-cultural locations. The editors are to be commended for the careful way they have curated what they have been given so as to protect authenticity and promote availability. In this Preface I offer some reflections on the intersection of language, religion and spirituality.

There is no community without language, and identities are formed through interaction requiring language. Differences among communities are marked by linguistic differences, identity markers, argot, and dialect. Identities grow out of, are expressed through, and celebrated in our storytelling. We develop our identities largely through hearing ourselves described by others, and in listening to our responses to those around us. These processes are language dependent.

We know we belong when we can understand others and make ourselves understood. Shared understandings are core to feeling part of the story of the family, group or society. Again, this requires shared languages.

Each religion has its own language and its own understanding of communication with the divine, or the spirit. Each has a language that both enshrines and makes available to the trained eye and ear the deep wisdom of each tradition.

Spirituality – our relation with that which is deeply within us, which accompanies us closely on our way, and is ever more than us – may occur in prelinguistic experiences of awe, or wonder, a sense of presence, or a deep welling of joy or love. However, we cannot share or validate such experiences without language. Even in just remembering such experiences we use language to form the memory, to tell ourselves our story. As I noted in 2006 (Bouma, 2006) whatever secularisation theories predicted, spirituality is not on the decline, and religion is growing in strength and presence in the public sphere increasingly in the twenty-first century.

Cultures vary greatly in the language provided to apprehend the spiritual. Post-enlightenment western language and thought have made decreasing room for such thinking and speaking. Part of secularisation and disenchantment has been the dismissal and denigration of language once used. The removal of language is a critically effective way to dismantle a culture and society. Witness the deliberate policies denying Indigenous children access to their languages.

It is possible to have an experience for which there is no language, but it is impossible to share it and it is difficult to retain the memory. Only when there is language can an experience, either group or individual, become part of culture, part of a group's story. I have had a number of profound experiences in my early childhood which I reappropriated much later when language about near death experiences became available. There is no doubt that I had certain experiences, but I had not been able to share them, or even describe them to myself, although I kept the image and feelings fresh in my memory. Language allowed a different mode of savouring experiences.

Every group has a story and those seeking to join a group will hear the story told in many different ways. Not all of them are explicit, many are

implicit, in phrases, references to events or persons, and explanations about why things are done in certain ways. Part of the process of becoming accepted is to learn the group's story, but also how to tell it, and to tell it in a way that the person is located in the group and its story.

The ways language, identity, religion and spirituality work together and intersect vary across societies. What is true in Azerbaijan is not true in Australia, neither are Britain and Australia the same (Bouma, 2016). Australia is one of, if not the most diverse nation in the world, and is unique in the degree, composition and history of its diversity (Bouma & Halafoff, 2017). According to the 2016 Census, Australia has six substantial religious communities maintaining distinctive places of worship shops and schools – Muslims and Buddhists at 2.5%, Hindus at 2%, Sikhs and Jews at 0.5%. Only Catholics at 23% and Anglicans at 13% are more numerous than these. A plethora of other religious communities from Indigenous, to Lutherans, to Mormons, to Scientologists increase the nuance and diversity of the religio-spiritual offerings. Even when taken together, Christians failed to form a majority in most Australian States and Territories. Each of these communities uses and maintains different cultures, languages, histories, stories, rituals and associations. Australia's multicultural policies and practices facilitate respectful interaction among communities enriching the parts as well as the whole.

Many social and political theories ignore these underlying diversities in the search for universally applicable understandings or 'best practice' policies. Any approach that does not start with careful attention to the diverse personal realities in place is doomed to mislead. Australian attachment to religion and spirituality is often compared with that of the United States, in discussing for example, apparently low church attendance. Such comparisons incorrectly make the situation in one society somehow normative for another, a vestige of colonialism. While inequalities and dissonance still mark the society, much local writing suggests that Australians are moving towards pleasure, if not occasional pride in being part of one of the most successful multicultural societies in the world.

The ties between language, culture, religion and identity are as delicate and nuanced, as they are diverse. They are held close to the inner quiet of a person, even when subject to reflection. Seldom are they trumpeted about. They become 'shy hopes held tenderly in the heart' (Bouma, 2006)

to paraphrase Manning Clark. This is one of the best definitions of the personal 'sacred'. It is protected from scrutiny and critique, due to its vulnerability and profound uniqueness to each. Old notions of totalising identities, or mass conformity probably never accurately described Australians, but they certainly do not do so now.

Personal accounts like many in this book, of navigating life and diversity, especially among Australian teens, reveal myriad ways of making meaning, ethical judgements and seeing the world. Two research projects (Singleton et al., 2021; Halafoff et al., 2020) of which I have been part depict this rich diversity, this process of negotiating the welter of choices, challenges and opportunities. Only a few are traditionally religious, and they are discerning their choices not being defined by denomination or religious identity. Most, including many of the 52% who declare they have 'no religion' are open to and/or practice forms of spirituality.

This book testifies to the rich diversity of the religio-spiritual domain. It resists deconstruction of what is encountered, experienced and then expressed. It resolutely avoids reductionism, and is largely clear of the binaries that have for so long burdened and blinkered careful examination, acceptance of what is there and language about it. The book is largely free of imposed theories and ideologies.

This book is full of research, reporting, personal stories and recounting of the roles that language plays in shaping identity, navigating intercultural relationships, travel, growing up, learning to listen intently to others. Our use and management of language forges relationships, defines how we sit with others and either builds connection and respect, or walls of difference and disrespect. A confident grasp of one's own story sets a foundation for openness to diversity, to others' ways of being. Intercultural literacy rising from respectful resting with and listening to others is the basis for a successful society.

Language and Spirit: Exploring languages, religion and spirituality in Australia today takes the reader into the wonderful world of today's Australia. Let no one say that religion is dead, spirituality is vacuous, or language is withering. This book provides rich evidence to the contrary. Enjoy.

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Acknowledgement of Country

The contributors to this book, from many origins, have written in homes, schools, offices and coffee shops in cities, rural towns, on the Traditional Country of many First Nations across Australia. In the spirit of Reconciliation, we acknowledge and pay respect to all past, present and future Traditional Custodians and Elders of the lands on which we have gathered and of this nation, and the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Acknowledgements Page

All material in this volume has been blind peer reviewed. Further readings and reviews were conducted by many colleagues, both fellow contributors and from the wider field. We would like to acknowledge and thank all who acted as reviewers for the volume: Professor Lesley Harbon, Honorary Associate Professor Susan Oguro, Dr Kevin Lowe, Dr Anya Lloyd-Smith, Dr Cathy Bow, Dr Sally Denshire, Penelope Sewell, Philip Moloney, Beth McLeod, Zohra Aly, Dr Jim Forrest, Dr Lisa Gilanyi, Professor Ingrid Pillar, Dr Yining Wang, Dr Chantal Crozet, Dr Yona Gilead, Professor Suzanne Rutland, and Dr Kevin Lowe. For their overview of the manuscript, thanks to Professor Fred Dervin, Professor Ken Cruickshank, Associate Professor Angela Scarino and Rev Simon Hansford, Moderator of the Synod of NSW and the ACT in the Uniting Church in Australia. We are grateful for the assistance of Willoughby and Northbridge Uniting Church in supporting costs. We would like to thank Dr Susan Poetsch of the University of Sydney for her help in facilitating narrator contacts. We thank Donald Moloney for assistance with graphics. We are also grateful for the input of Rev Dr Erica Mathieson and Rev Dr Ray Williamson, President of the New South Wales Ecumenical Council.

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Aunty Louise Campbell is from Gumbayngirr country, northern New South Wales, and is part of the Stolen Generation. Her grandmother and mother spoke a number of languages fluently. As a child she understood and spoke language but when she and her brothers were removed, they lost it. She trained and worked as a teacher, and then gained a Law degree at the University of New South Wales. She used that study to work for the NSW Aboriginal Land Council in the 1980s. She now works for the Catholic Education office, in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.

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now. Swati speaks three languages and understands a couple more. Though Gujarati is her mother tongue, she loves and respects all languages. She also works as a Project Officer with (SICL) Sydney Institute for Community Languages and Education, through the University of Sydney. Swati serves the community as a volunteer coordinator of the Indian Cultural Group at the Mosaic Multicultural Centre, in Willoughby City Council, and is also a member of the Management team of an organisation working for the differently abled.

Jaroslav Duma OAM is currently the Honorary Consul of Ukraine in Sydney, and an active member of the Australian-Ukrainian community to which he has devoted most of his life through a myriad of “volunteer” positions in various community organisations. He is committed to his family, especially to his wife Mary, and has two married sons, all of whom are also active community members. Jaroslav places much emphasis on the importance of mentoring young people in values of community – espousing that “it takes a village to raise a child”, not just an education.

Craig Duncan is a proud Gamilaraay man and works at the Catholic Education office, in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, working on Aboriginal Education policy and content. He has completed the Masters of Indigenous Language Education at the University of Sydney, and is planning PhD study. Craig believes that the value of Indigenous languages is now being increasingly recognised, and is an opportunity for all Aboriginal people who are interested in language, to revitalise and to speak language.

James Forrest is an Honorary Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Geography and Planning at Macquarie University, Sydney. For two decades, he has been researching racism in Australia as a member of the Challenging Racism project based at Western Sydney University. More recently, he has focused on the integration of Australian immigrants, most recently refining that focus to one aspect of immigrant integration: to geolinguistics, the geography and sociology of multilingualism in Australia. Here, he contributes towards extending this research into a hitherto neglected area, the role of religious involvement in heritage language maintenance.

Ounas Gerges is a teacher and advocate for the Coptic language. Since his childhood he has been taught Coptic language by a renowned Coptic language scholar. Coptic language is his first spoken language. He has taught it for over 30 years in churches to deacons, priests and the Coptic community and is a senior lecturer at St Cyril's Coptic Orthodox Theological College. He is a member of an online forum whose purpose is to revive and teach the language, and also to form Coptic words that may not be found in the Coptic vocabulary. Ounas is an avid skier.

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John Hajek is Professor of Italian Studies and Director of the Research Unit for Multilingualism and Cross-cultural Communication (RUMACCC) at the University of Melbourne. He was born and raised in an ethnically mixed family in the western suburbs of Melbourne, where few spoke English at home and life for migrant families centred around the extended family – with little interaction outside it or their ethnic communities. Through his academic work, he remains committed to supporting and understanding all aspects of multicultural life in Australia.

John Harris has had a lifelong interest in Aboriginal people and holds a PhD in Aboriginal languages. He retired as Director of Translation in Bible Society Australia. He continues working with Indigenous people in translating the Christian Bible, particularly into endangered languages. These new texts model the way the language was spoken, thus becoming a tool for their revival. John is the author of *One Blood*, his award-winning study of Christianity in Aboriginal Australia. He was awarded the prestigious Lambeth Doctor of Divinity by the Archbishop of Canterbury and Her Majesty the Queen for his ‘advocacy on behalf of Aboriginal people’.

Harumi Hayakawa is a teacher and writer. She teaches Japanese language and culture. She writes for Japanese media. She was born and bred in a suburb of Tokyo. Her childhood hero was Robinson Crusoe. After traveling to many places, she settled in the Blue Mountains, New South Wales. She enjoys living there and spending time in natural settings. She describes herself as spiritual rather than religious. For a long time, she felt there was conflict between science and spirituality. However, after her mother passed away, this conflict dissolved. Truth can be expressed in different ways.

Abdullah Ibrahim is presently an Indonesian teacher at the New South Wales School of Languages where he has taught for 15 years. Born in New Zealand to monolingual parents he has spent most of his life in Australia working in both Brisbane and Sydney. He has an Indonesian wife and four children and is constantly busy with school work.

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Rabbi Zalman Kastel AM is National Director of the multi-faith based Together for Humanity Foundation that fosters Intercultural Understanding in Schools. Rabbi Kastel was raised in the “ultra-orthodox” Chasidic tradition in the racially divided Crown Heights area of Brooklyn New York. He saw the world through the lens of his absolute tradition and the narrative of his community. This changed in 2001, when encounters with Christians and Muslims transformed him. He has embraced others as he learned their stories and cultural terminology, while engaged in helping 400,000 Australian to embrace others.

Kayleen Kerwin is a proud Paakantyi woman from Wilcannia, western New South Wales. She heard a lot of language from Elders when she was growing up, but there was no language taught. Now, only five people speak the language fluently, so it is regarded as endangered. She teaches Paakantyi at the Menindee Central School, to all students. Kayleen has contributed to professional development for other teachers, and to the production of resources. Paakantyi recorded stories are held by at the NSW State Library stories, Museum of Contemporary Art, and in the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens.

Tamara Kotoyan is a twenty-four-year-old recent graduate from the University of Sydney, gaining a degree in Bachelor of Arts and Commerce, majoring in Government and International Politics and Commercial law. She is a proud Armenian, having grown up in the Armenian Australian community, where she has taken up volunteer roles in her local church and community organisations. She has worked as an English tutor for

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Joseph Lo Bianco is Professor Emeritus in the Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne Australia. He is a specialist in minority language rights, literacy and social opportunity, multilingualism, language policy and peacebuilding. In recent years he has been engaged by UNESCO and UNICEF in Southeast Asian settings to lead language policy research and writing teams, for which he devised a method of facilitated dialogue. In 1987 he authored Australia's first national language policy, between 1990 and 2002 was Director of Language Australia/ The National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia.

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Aunty Diane McNaboe is a proud Wiradjuri woman. Her father was Wiradjuri (Dubbo area) and her mother was Gamilaraay Nation (Moree area). Diane teaches Wiradjuri language at Dubbo College, Delroy Campus. She has been teaching language and culture for over 30 years on Country. She has trained many others to teach, with currently 24 school programs operating. Diane has promoted bilingual signage in her town, in the town's biodiversity gardens, in government offices and in schools.

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David Moore is a linguist, interpreter, translator and educator based in Alice Springs of the Northern Territory of Australia. His PhD thesis

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Devrim Yilmaz is a lecturer in the School of Education at the University of New England. He teaches postgraduate units in the English, Literacies and Language Education, and Contextual Studies teams. He also supervises master's, EdD and PhD students. Some of the units he teaches are Society, Language and Culture, Linguistics for Language Teachers, and Teaching for Cultural Diversity. His research interests include dialectology of South Eastern European dialects of Turkish; etymology of common words and phrases in South Eastern European languages; Indigenous languages of Australia; and culturally responsive pedagogy.

Archbishop Mar Meelis Zaia is the Metropolitan of the Assyrian Church of the East, Archdiocese of Australia, New Zealand and Lebanon. The church is a member of the National Council of Churches in Australia, and the Ecumenical Council of New South Wales. He is head of the Assyrian community of over 27,000 in NSW and over 7000 in Victoria.

He was appointed bishop for the newly established diocese of Sydney and arrived in Sydney in March 1985. He was consecrated Metropolitan in 2008 by HH Mar Dinkha IV Catholicos Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East. He is co-chair of the Catholic Church and Assyrian Church Dialogue Committee.

Ghil'ad Zuckermann is Chair of Linguistics and Endangered Languages at the University of Adelaide. He is a chief investigator in a large research project assessing language revival and mental health, funded by Australia's National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). He is the founder of Revivalistics, a new trans-disciplinary field of enquiry surrounding language reclamation, revitalization and reinvigoration. In 2011 he launched, with the Barngarla Aboriginal communities of Eyre Peninsula, South Australia, the reclamation of the Barngarla language. Professor Zuckermann is elected member of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and the Foundation for Endangered Languages (FEL).

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