

***Multilingualism in the English speaking World.* Viv Edwards. Blackwell Publishing, 2005, 0-631-23613-9, £16.99**

The sub-title of this book is '*Pedigree of Nations*', reminding us of Samuel Johnson's sentiment, '*I am always sorry when any language is lost, because languages are the pedigree of nations*'. Of course he also said, '*I believe that whoever knows the English tongue, in its present extent, will be able to express his thoughts without further help from other nations*', so there's no relying on him!

This excellent new book by Viv Edwards explores the tensions between these two views and provides a resounding and rich rejoinder to the latter by a fascinating and fulsome account of the former. She begins with a helpful delineation of her topic, providing clear definitions of the 'inner' and 'outer' circle countries that provide the evidence for her central thesis – that multilingualism enriches us all in all spheres of life. Drawing on her encyclopaedic knowledge of multilingualism across the Englishspeaking world, the book is leavened with telling anecdotes and detailed data drawn from an amazing array of areas such as education, family life, popular culture (explaining the difference between *salsa* and *corrido*, for example) and politics. To name just a few.

The book is divided into 12 chapters divided into three sections (*The extent of diversity; Language at home and in school; Language in the wider community*) all written in a fluent prose brimming with professorial wisdom. She has that rare ability to coast along at full stretch.

In the first section, she discusses the extent of linguistic diversity in the modern world, exploding the myth of monolingualism by demonstrating that '*even in the English-speaking world, an astonishing diversity of languages lies just beneath the veneer of homogeneity*'. She traces the roots of that diversity – first within the British Isles and then beyond through colonization (military and commercial), the gradual development of more open language policies and practices and the backlash from those (Canute-like zealots) that seek to impose English as the sole official language, such as the British National Party. She cites their 2003 manifesto, which vowed to: *Campaign to end, or oppose the introduction of, the teaching of Asian languages to classes containing any British children*. She also looks at language and the provision of services, such as translation and interpretation and points out how language can sometimes play a damaging role, citing for example a survey by the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (an often overlooked linguistic minority) that showed that one in four reported leaving their doctor's surgery not

knowing what was wrong with them and one in six not going to see a doctor at all because communication is such a problem.

In the second section she describes the factors that determine whether a family follows a bilingual course or not and looks at its impact on relationships that results. There are two chapters devoted to the history of language in education and its role in education in the modern world. She describes the more impressive levels of provision and support for 'other' languages in Canada and Australia (with its *unity in diversity* policy) than in the UK or USA. For example, New South Wales '*offers 47 languages in 454 schools to approximately 31,000 students*'. New South Wales has a population of about 6 million – a tenth of our own. Do the maths.

The third section looks at the social, cultural, economic and political benefits that can accrue from a positive approach to multilingualism. The evidence of the commercial advantages to both minority communities and the wider nation she lays before the reader is persuasive. As she argues, '*Thanks to the efforts of minority communities to keep their languages alive, the inner-circle countries have a competitive edge in international trade*'. In terms of cultural benefits, she ranges widely over such topics as Panjabi-English story-telling; oral poetry (American rap and African Caribbean dub); French Canadian, Celtic and Welsh theatre; commercial publishing of books and DVD material in other languages (did you know that at the beginning of twentieth century, 13,000 of the 23,000 books in the public library of Bellville, Illinois were in German? Thought not.); and then there are festivals such as the Welsh eisteddfod, the American Indian Pow Wow, the Australian Aboriginal Corroboree, and the Royal National Mod in Scotland. There is also a welcome discussion of the continued and pressing importance of multilingualism post 9/11. Not having learned the lessons of history from the Second World War, when the use of Navajo as a code language is thought to have saved thousand of lives (the code was never broken), we seem destined to repeat them. At the time of Operation Desert Storm in 1991, only 45 of the half million US military personnel had a background in any of the languages of Iraq. After 9/11 there was a sudden rush to recruit speakers of Arabic, Farsi, Pashto and Tajik. She also describes injustices perpetrated on the basis of linguistic ignorance, such as asylum seekers being denied entrance to Australia due to doubts about their true nationality, such as one claimant being deemed to be from Pakistan not Afghanistan because he pronounced the word *camp* with an Urdu accent (he had been in a camp in Pakistan, where this pronunciation would have been the norm). Multilingualism, then, '*is not simply a tool to help protect us from potential aggressors; it is also a tool to protect innocent bystanders from the worst excesses of xenophobia*'.

The book has been nominated for the British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL) book prize this year and, at the time of writing, is down to the last four. This is a credit to its author. If it wins, it will be a credit to BAAL.

STOP PRESS The winner of the BAAL Book Prize 2005 is indeed, Viv Edwards. Congratulations, Viv from all your friends in NALDIC!

Frank Monaghan
