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Jacques Maurais (Ed.). *Quebec's Aboriginal Languages: History, Planning and*

Development. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters Ltd. 1996. Pp: xiv, 334

Quebec's Aboriginal Languages: History, Planning and Development is a translation of *Les langues autochtones du Québec*, an edited collection first published in 1992 by the Government of Quebec. It is a descriptive, predominantly socio-linguistic, analysis of Aboriginal languages in Quebec. As such it is a valuable contribution to the study of 'first nations' languages.

This text has 4 chapters that trace the historical, social, legal, and research contexts of the Aboriginal languages of Quebec. A fifth chapter provides grammatical outlines of three of those languages. The sixth chapter allows for 9 statements from indigenous informants as to the future of their own Aboriginal language. The last chapter summarises the text with information on language planning options for Aboriginal languages. A full bibliography and index are present, along with biographical notes on the main chapter authors, acknowledgments, and a preface especially written for the English volume. Having overviewed the structure of the book, I intend to review each chapter separately before concluding with an overall evaluation.

The first chapter by Jacques Maurais describes the state of Aboriginal languages across the Americas. Maurais, as well as is possible with the available census information, provides tables of demographic information about the numbers of speakers of various Aboriginal languages in countries such as Canada, Peru, Bolivia, and the United States. These lists are redolent, to this reviewer, of a roll-call of place-names, historical events, and childhood literary adventures among the various Aboriginal populations, eg. Kiowa-Apache, Penobscot,

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Peoria, Tupi, Nahuatl, Chinook, Delaware, Huron, Miami, Quechua, Cree, Ojibwa, Blackfoot, Algonquian, Seneca, Mohawk, Tuscarora, Bella Coola, Assiniboine, Dakota, Sioux. The realisation, as one reads on, that these names represent peoples and languages who are either extinct, endangered or minimised taints the emotion with sadness. This chapter paints the socio-linguistic picture of Aboriginal languages in the Americas in general; they have decreasing populations, a history of repression, and have poor legal protection. Then Maurais provides a similar linguistic demography of Canadian Aboriginal language populations. Maurais, as other contributors, tentatively points to survival solutions since "the decision to save ancestral Aboriginal languages can only be made by their speakers who must also select the means for doing so successfully." (Maurais 1996:32, 34).

Louis-Jacques Dorais's chapter on the history of Quebec's Aboriginal languages tightens the focus of the book on its title. Dorais provides helpful lists of the various language families and their locations. The socio-linguistic statistics paint a gloomy picture of the present state of Aboriginal language use. In response to 1971 and 1986 statistics, Dorais states "[M]onolingualism in an official language [English or French], bilingualism and trilingualism, had thus completely outstripped Amerindian monolingualism." (Maurais 1996:68). The chapter includes an appendix by Collis outlining the current state of native languages in Quebec and a set of maps locating the various language populations throughout the province. This appendix outlines the percentage of use of all the native languages in such situations as school, at home, on public signs, on radio, newspaper, and so. This thorough analysis of sociolinguistic information has been hampered by the lack of solid and reliable data; estimations and approximations are needed because official sources from Statistics Canada "do not separate out the Aboriginal languages. yet provide detailed accounts of the

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number of speakers of Portuguese, Chinese, etc. — linguistic communities worthy of interest, but whose cultural status is nowhere mentioned in the Constitution!" (Maurais 1996:77).

This situation is probably not unique to Quebec's Aboriginal populations. It is interesting to note that Aboriginal languages have been preserved, even with small numbers, because of geographic isolation which is now under threat with the development of improved roads, communications systems (telephone, fax, email, television, etc.), and accelerated development in regions bordering Aboriginal lands.

François Trudel's chapter reviews past and present Aboriginal language policies of both the Canadian and Quebec governments. Under Canada's federal system, Indian and Northern Affairs were the responsibility of the federal government in Ottawa. It appears that certain Aboriginal languages, especially those more isolated from the major urban areas of Canada, have persisted despite an assimilationist policy on the part of the Canadian government. Since the 1970s there has been an increasing transfer from the federal government to Aboriginal populations of responsibility and resources. Quebec only began to play an active role in its own Aboriginal populations from the 1980s. Surprising, in contrast to the vigour with which the Quebec government has sought to restrict the rights of English speakers in the province in the name of linguistic and nationalist survival, is the clear support, in law, that the Quebec government has offered to the Aboriginal populations and languages in its domain. Despite, this Trudel indicates that "the government policies adopted to date addressing Aboriginal demands in this domain remain extremely timid and, above all, concrete and concerted plans of action are overdue." (Maurais 1996:123). The chapter concludes with a summary of the 15 principles on Quebec policy towards Aboriginals.

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Lynn Drapeau provides a summary of research into Aboriginal languages in Quebec. She identifies three main areas of concern for all the language groups: standardisation of script for written language, standardisation of language dialect for schooling purposes, and the need to elaborate the lexical base of the language to address life outside immediate Aboriginal language environments. Given the isolation of Aboriginal communities, their relatively small numbers, their pride in their own dialects and scripts, it is difficult to see how such large needs can be met quickly.

The grammatical sketches chapter is broken into three sections that provide 74 pages of insight into the syntax of three languages ie. Mohawk, Montagnais, and Inuktitut. The grammars for these three polysynthetic languages provide rich training grounds for linguistics lecturers looking for new raw material for undergraduate students. Certainly the complexities and difficulties in syntax, for non-Amerindians, exposed in this chapter drive home some of obstacles these Aboriginal languages face in relation to the dominant European languages and populations of Quebec and Canada.

Chapter six allows space for Aboriginal informants to discuss the future of their own language (ie. Algonquin, Atikamekw, Cree, Huron, Inuktitut, Micmac, Mohawk, Montagnais, and Naskapi). The nine submissions that make up the chapter provide insight into the emotional dimensions of language preservation for Aboriginal peoples. In the editor's words, "what ties these texts together is a profound awareness of an ongoing struggle against the economic imperative of a dominant culture, against a historical trend which started centuries ago." (Maurais 1996:233).

In the final chapter, Lynn Drapeau and Jean-Claude Corbeil review the situation of Aboriginal languages in Quebec and discuss means by which those languages might be

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preserved. Their emphasis echoes that of Jacques Morais in the first chapter. They enumerate four preferred responses that depend on the Aboriginal peoples themselves since “[t]he most basic way of guaranteeing the normal transmission of the ancestral language to children is to ensure that it is the normal language of private life, whether within the family or in the community. ... This can only be done by the Aboriginals themselves.” (Maurais 1996:299). Thus, they advocate (Maurais 1996:298):

- a) that the use of ancestral language within private life be strengthened by ideological means,
- b) the consolidation of ancestral language use in all domains of community action,
- c) the improvement of ancestral language skills in school, and
- d) the expansion of the ancestral language from traditional domains to sociosymbolic domains, such as public administration and business.

Certainly without these means, all other means including legislative action, are doomed to fail to preserve ancestral Aboriginal languages.

I cannot recommend *Quebec's Aboriginal Languages: History, Planning and Development* highly enough, notwithstanding Barbara Burnaby's (1998) perceptive critique of the book's weaknesses concerning its unclear readership and its failure to expose essential elements of the larger French versus English political scene of Canada and Quebec in which Aboriginal languages must survive. The issues, concerns, and factors affecting Aboriginal language, and peoples, in Quebec are not unique to that place. There are lessons in this text for those concerned with the preservation of indigenous languages throughout the world. Furthermore, it is a thorough, well structured, and illuminating text that other authors would do well to emulate.

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One issue of concern, though inevitable in this type of research, is the datedness of the data. Since the original writing before the 1992 publication there have probably been many changes to the status of Aboriginal languages in Quebec — already there is a need for an update. Certainly, things in New Zealand Maori revitalisation have changed greatly for the better in the 1990s, whereas in the case of Quebec things may well have gotten a lot worse.

Though there have been a number of books and articles on the status of Australian Aboriginal languages published in the last two decades (e.g. Dixon 1991; McKay 1996), it is easy to imagine this text acting as a template for similar volumes on Polynesian languages, including New Zealand Maori, or Australian Aboriginal languages, or Melanesian languages. Since there is clearly a market for this text, there will certainly be one for books written for a global market on the history, planning, and development of Pacific Aboriginal languages.

Let us hope that we do not have to wait too long for such texts.

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Gavin T. L. Brown
Researcher
Learning, Curriculum, & Assessment
New Zealand Council for Educational Research,
PO Box 3237, Wellington 6000, New Zealand
E-mail: gavin.brown@nzcer.org.nz

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