

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

# Issues of monolingualism: A new expression of Neo-Colonisation? The ideological underpinnings of language education in Australia: The case of New South Wales

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## Abstract

In recent decades, the drift toward English monolingualism has been a significant concern in Australian multilingual education. Despite Australia being multicultural and linguistically diverse, extensive research has shown that the nation is still adversely affected by a persistent ‘monolingual mindset’. Potential weaknesses regarding multilingual education have been long addressed but no satisfactory countermeasures have been implemented.

A recent challenge to the conceptual underpinnings of the ‘monolingual mindset’ have emerged in the last half-century from the neoliberal marketisation of education. Discouragement of multilingualism and multiculturalism may be related to Australia’s ‘liberal status quo’, in which language education has not been provided with adequate structural support from Australia’s liberal government and society. While Australian language educators have made continuous efforts to maintain ethnic minority ‘community languages’ within this context, these efforts will seemingly remain ineffective if a monolingual mentality is permitted to remain at a structural level. Recently, a neoliberal challenge has been levelled to make such structural changes, with the privatisation of education encouraging the learning of minority languages and cultivation of ethnic identities. However, political problems are raised by this response, which risks stressing ethnic conflict and political tensions. This paper investigates the issues around Australia’s liberal ‘monolingual mindset’, the structural causes for its discouragement of language learning and the strengths and weaknesses of its responses.

This paper utilises a qualitative approach to analyse documents relevant to current language syllabi in New South Wales. Through critical discourse analysis, thematic categorisation will reveal the values and interests contained in these documents. New South Wales has been chosen as a reference for other Australian states and territories regarding language planning and education due to its rich multicultural and multilingual makeup. This study is intended to motivate further inquiry into what may motivate students to pursue future language studies.

**Keywords** language education in NSW; language curriculum monolingual mindset; neoliberalism; liberal status quo in language education; economic capital; sociocultural capital

## 1. Introduction

Australia is known for its multicultural and linguistic diversity. Currently, more than 300 languages are spoken in Australia, as well as more than 250 indigenous languages (AIATSIS, 2018), and more than one third (21%) of residents speak a language other than English at home. The latest survey from the Australia Bureau of Statistics (2016) showed Australia’s multilingual makeup, with 2.5% of Mandarin speakers, 1.4% Arabic speakers, 1.2% Cantonese, 1.2% Vietnamese, 1.2% Italian, 1% Greek,

0.7% Hindi, 0.6% Spanish and 0.6% Punjabi speakers. Moreover, compared to data from 2011 multilingual speakers are on the increase (ibid.).

The above statistics reflect a multilingual social reality, which raises the importance of Australia’s approach to language education. A considerable amount of literature has shown that despite its multilingual makeup, there are significant monolingual trends in Australian culture (Clyne & Clyne, 1991a; Liddicoat & Crichton, 2008; Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2016). A number of studies have raised concerns regarding how non-English, ‘community languages’ in

Australia are threatened by the country's 'monolingual mindset', despite Australia's multilingual, multicultural background and resources (Adoniou, 2018; Sinkeviciute, 2020). This monolingual mindset relates to a liberal 'status quo' that stresses English as the dominant language of the market economy. Recently, this status quo has been challenged by neoliberalism, which aims to make more room for ethnic identities and community languages. However, there are problems with neoliberalism, which risks stoking ethnic tensions by preserving its stress on market outcomes and economic emphasis. Further research is needed to address the current state of language education and multilingualism in Australia to navigate between liberal and neoliberal extremes. This study, therefore, examines each Australian state's approach to language education, providing further documentation and analysis on this topic.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Unpacking the 'Monolingual Mindset' and its impact

While Australia is one of the most multicultural countries in the world, it is home to a 'monolingual mindset' predicated upon xenophobic attitudes. Australia's multiculturalism and multilingualism are reflected in the country's linguistic demography, but as Sinkeviciute (2020) has written, even among multilinguals there is a 'monolingual ideal' associated with Australian citizenship, and which perceives both immigrants and foreign languages as threats. The formation of this Australian linguistic mindset is complex, and thus it is imperative to examine the historical facts surrounding Australia's cultural landscape to better understand the monolingual mindset, and how this mindset affects language education.

Multilingualism in Australia has been identified, promoted, neglected and outlawed in the 200 years since British and European settled on the continent in the 19th century, but its most recent addressal was through the 1981 National Language Policy (Clyne & Clyne, 1991a). This policy was a perhaps delayed recognition that, despite considerable efforts, Australia continues to experience a clear linguistic conflict between multilingualism and monolingualism that favours the English language as a unified, secure, de facto national language (Clyne & Clyne, 1991a; Liddicoat & Crichton, 2008; Liddicoat, Heugh, Curnow & Scarino, 2014; Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2016). Moreover, linguistic drift away from ethnic minority or 'community' languages remains a significant concern in Australian society (Clyne & Kipp, 1996; Clyne & Kipp, 1997; Hunt & Davis, 2019). As a result, Australia's linguistic image remains a centre of social and economic tensions, with Lo Bianco (2009) writing that Australia has not yet achieved a fully successful integrative language planning, despite its

inclusive rhetoric.

The most recent attempts to resolve the monolingual mindset in Australia show newer policy influences, although full results remain uncertain. For example, recent neoliberal policy changes have been employed by the government to influence state and territorial language policies, favouring an emphasis on English literacy (Bianco, 1990, Clyne, 1991a, and Djité, 1994). Yet, paradoxically, neoliberalism in fact exacerbates both sides of the equation, threatening to reinforce the monolingual mindset by stressing economic outcomes and associating English with the liberal economy, rarefying minority languages as 'authentic' and therefore a luxury item. Furthermore, Djité (1994) highlights two major language policy documents in Australian language development: *The Language of Australia: Discussion Paper on an Australian Literacy and Language Policy for the 1990s* (known as the 'Green Paper') and *Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy in 1991* (known as the 'White Paper'). Both policies have considerable implications for language education and have been widely criticised by language scholars as heavily economic-oriented. Moreover, recent events such as the global Coronavirus outbreak in 2019 have heightened xenophobic attitudes towards certain languages, exacerbating linguistic conflict (Piller, Zhang & Li, 2020), a particularly acute crisis among Asian language groups (Weinmann, Neilsen, & Slavich, 2021). That said, scholars such as Piller (2016) argue that these linguistic problems have existed under-the-surface for many years and have never been adequately addressed.

### 2.2. The weakness of multilingualism and bilingualism in Australia

Australia's monolingual mindset have contributed to the gradual deterioration of multilingual and bilingual education over the past century, and have undermined the development of Australia's linguistic education (Clyne & Clyne, 1991a; Clyne & Clyne, 1991b; Clyne & Clyne, 1991c; Hajek & Slaughter, 2014; Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2015; Hatoss, 2018). This monolingual mindset, which fails to accept cultural and linguistic diversity, represents a liberal proposition in its emphasising the economically utilitarian language of English.

The history of language education in Australia has been extensively studied, with many scholars showing that student motivations in learning foreign languages are often 'pragmatic' and determined by economic incentives emphasised by the government. More recently, government policies toward language education have exhibited neoliberal characteristics, promoting policies that privilege the economic returns of language learning. Academics such as Clyne (1991a; 1991b) and Piller (2010) have promoted multilingual education as a source of cognitive, cultural, social, and intellectual skills, but these skills are broadly secondary to economic priorities. The economy, moreover, has provided the rationales for language learning for state

and territory language education curriculum (Weinmann, Neilsen, and Slavich, 2021), and economic justification is almost a ‘must-mention’ when arguing for the advantages or benefits associated with language education. Therefore, despite academic support for the benefits of multilingual and bilingual education, economic priorities are still foremost on the minds of the Australian public.

### 2.3. Australian language education in the pre- and Neoliberal Eras

Issues and conflicts surrounding Australian language learning predate the neoliberal era, and if anything were part of Australia’s ‘liberal status quo’ of the mid-twentieth century. This status quo refers to a ‘lax’, or even dismissive attitude towards secondary- or foreign-language learning in Australian society, with many individuals not even fully aware of the diversity of foreign languages in the Australian context, resulting in a persistent climate of lack of recognition, and therefore discouragement, of multilingualism. Caballero (2010) has described the danger to Australian multilingualism posed by simple proximity to anglophone areas, and how, if conscious effort is not made to preserve, maintain and promote ethnic minority languages, Australia risks losing its multilingual heritage, and resources. Anglophone areas are of particular concern because of their economic and political power, which frequently refuses to acknowledge diversity if it comes at the expense of economic strength. Consequently, ‘strong’ monolingual English is associated with Liberal dominance, and it is this very dominance, which fails to recognise alternatives, that is the problem. Piller (2016) notes how previous attempts to preserve and maintain community languages were conducted in English, and most of their supporting academic studies were conducted in English, so while they seemed to support multilingualism they further maintained the monolingual ‘status quo’.

Building on the works of more recent scholars such as Piller and the neo-liberal stress on individualism, Bacon (2020) has suggested practical measures that language educators can personally take to proactively preserve multilingual education. These solutions focus on *self-critique*, with teachers focusing on their own internalised ideologies and expressions to overcome the monolingual mindset. Åkermark and Huss (2014) also stress how ideological clarification is the key to successful linguistic revitalisation, preservation and maintenance. Nevertheless, even these focuses on teacher responsibility often occur within a monolingual context, so their ability to ‘unlearn’ monolingualism is debatable. A clear, systematic, regulated process of ‘unlearning’ is required that can move educators and students beyond their linguistic comfort zone (Scarino, 2014).

### 2.4. Historical causes for the liberal status quo & insufficiencies of the Neoliberal critique

While neoliberal critiques of Australia’s linguistic ‘status quo’ have been effective, it is important to recognise the historical reasons for the development of monolingualism, as the sheer assumption that multilingual or bilingual education is politically valuable is not the most practical approach. Historically, cultural groups with linguistic autonomy have resisted conforming to state rules, resulting in serious political tensions. For instance, the resistance of Australian German-heritage Lutheran groups to linguistic diversity led to cultural and religious non-cooperation in Australia during the twentieth century, and contributed to significant political divisions in the years preceding the World Wars (Clyne & Clyne, 1991a). Significantly, newer neoliberal critiques from Piller (2016) praises German scholarship as promoting multilingualism, without considering that such scholarship has had significant political repercussions in the past.

Additionally, newer neoliberal emphases on multilingualism appear inadequate toward addressing the reality of the current onslaught on language education, given the focus on the individual and narrow, goal-oriented political concerns. Recent closures and downsizing of Asian language education departments reflect how, without support from sectors outside the economy, multilingual efforts will fail (McGregor, 2021; Weinmann, Neilsen, & Slavich, 2021). Overall, while neoliberalism has raised productive sources of critique, it remains dominated by economic considerations (Piller & Cho, 2013) and is perhaps as ineffective at resolving the monolingual mindset as previous efforts, and moreover may exacerbate ethnic tensions at the political level. While individually the focus on unlearning monolingualism on the part of teachers is a productive step, historical and contextual factors demonstrate the concrete dangers of complete linguistic autonomy (Clyne & Clyne, 1991a).

## 3. Theoretical Framework

To better understand current trends in Australian language education, as well as its underlying mindset, this study utilises Apple’s (1971) notion of a ‘hidden curriculum’ and Bourdieu’s (1986) theories on social, cultural and economic capitals. The ‘hidden curriculum’, as defined by Apple (1971), refers to values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviours and norms that are implicit or unspoken within educational settings. Apple’s (1971) primary argument was that the hidden curriculum was an inherent challenge toward active citizenship, as students were taking as unquestioned the ideological and political values set by government authorities (Vallance, 1974; Koutselini-Ioannidou, 1997). Consequently, the full significance of school subjects, including science and social studies, might not be fully comprehended, with students more likely to take for granted what they have learned as legitimate, reasonable and ‘unbiased’ (Apple, 1971). In many ways, a ‘hidden curriculum’ may apply to Australia’s liberal

education system in the years prior to Apple's writing, and included a monolithic, top-down attitude toward educational perceptions, attitudes and ideologies.

Bourdieu's (1986) notions of social and cultural capital provide ways for identifying the different 'values' of language learning. Social and cultural capital have implications for indicating the elements considered 'valuable' in language education, particularly as it regards future employment. Bourdieu (1986) argues that education is one modality for distributing cultural capital, and the educational process provides definitions and provisions for maintaining cultural capital. In these terms, language education may be construed as cultivating students' critical thinking skills, providing them with information for future employment and economic and human capital. Hence, Apple and Bourdieu's discussions on knowledge and its value are useful for understanding current multilingual education in Australia.

#### 4. Research Questions and Significance

While numerous studies have examined monolingualism and the complexities of multilingual education in Australia, these discussions have generally remained at a macro level. Given recent changes to language studies at Australian universities, particularly the deterioration of Asian language departments in the wake of COVID-19, this study explores specific patterns in educational documents to determine whether Australia's current policies are adequately addressing concerns over 'monolingual' dominance. Additionally, due to Australia's federated nature, conditions for language education differ in each state and territory, furthering the research gaps in previous studies. This research focuses on New South Wales (NSW), one of Australia's most multicultural states, and will collect and analyse discourse data derived from the region's latest rationale for language syllabi following reforms to the language curriculum in 2017 (Oriyama, 2017). This discourse data provides an opportunity to analyse current perspectives and goals of Australian mainstream language learning, revealing any underlying ideologies of the Australian government regarding language education. While the study is limited to NSW, it may provide a valuable perspective on other states and territories navigating issues of monolingualism and multilingual education.

The following questions will provide the structure for this thesis' exploration into language policy in NSW:

1. What are the key values, interests or attitudes underpinning the current language curriculum in NSW?
2. To what extent are the values, interests or attitudes implicit within the NSW language curriculum driven by social, cultural or economic motives?
3. How does the NSW language curriculum encourage or promote multilingualism? What evidence is there for such promotion in existing course or policy

documents?

### 5. Research Methodology

As the NSW language curriculum is presented directly as the syllabuses for each language, the syllabuses referred to in this paper correspond to the value of the language curriculum. Mainstream curricula and syllabi are generally reflective of a state's officially sanctioned economic, ideological, political, cultural and intellectual frameworks, signifying the distribution of power and opportunity in society (Apple, 2004). This paper primarily utilises a qualitative method to conduct document discourse analysis in order to examine the effectiveness and underlying attitudes of current language syllabi in New South Wales. It focuses specifically on recent changes to Asian language syllabi, selecting curricula from five major Asian languages and investigating their rationales to determine the motivations of policy- and decision makers in offering these courses. Data on students enrolled in these language subjects will also be collectively examined. In all, the thesis' critical discourse approach will combine a thematic categorisation method with an examination of the values and patterns reflected in the chosen texts.

### 6. Thematic and Critical Discourse Analysis

#### 6.1. Data analysis procedure

A combination of critical discourse and thematic analyses is carried out in this study as a reflexive method that actively seeks the foundational meanings of the text of mainstream language syllabi. Textual rationales may be viewed as 'codes' for data analysis, while thematic analysis identifies, organises and interprets patterns and themes in accordance with collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2012). Fairclough's (2013) notion of 'discourse' is used for the study's 'Critical Discourse Analysis', further contributing to this research's clarity, with texts or rationales being treated as discursive of a particular social perspective (ibid). Meanwhile, thematic analysis will approach data according to a modified version of steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006):

**Table 1.** Data analysis procedure

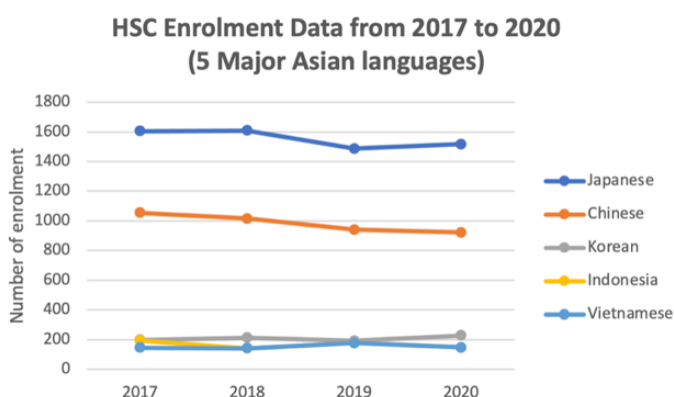
Step 1	Data Collection
Step 2	Familiarisation with data and rationale texts from main Asian syllabi
Step 3	Generation of initial code(s)
Step 4	Identification of theme(s)
Step 5	Review and definition theme(s)
Step 6	Production of report

#### 6.1.1. Data Collection

According to the figures available from the NSW Department of Education, as of June 2016 there are a

total of 22 language courses offered in grades K-10, with Asian languages offered including Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian, Korean and Vietnamese. Asian language courses with the highest number of enrolled students were chosen for further examination based on 2020 statistics from the NSW Department of Education, since this sample data is proportionally representative. Two major sources of data were used for this study: for qualitative data, rationale texts from five major Asian language syllabi in NSW were collected and analysed, while the quantitative data used was taken from students enrolled in language courses from different institutions, including those from the government, Catholic, and independent sectors. This data was dated after the NSW language syllabus reform of 2017 to 2020, the latest available data, and is considered representative of NSW's language education at a time of reform implementation. Still, this study cannot be generalised to account for language education in all of NSW due to research limitations, but can provide certain implications regarding current trends and opportunities.

**Table 2.** HSC Enrolment Data from 2017 to 2020 – Five major Asian languages, according to the latest report by Department of Education



**HSC Enrolment Data from 2017 to 2020 (5 Major Asian languages)**

	Japanese	Chinese	Korean	Indonesia	Vietnamese
<b>2017</b>	1605	1055	198	194	146
<b>2018</b>	1609	1016	213	142	142
<b>2019</b>	1486	940	193	178	178
<b>2020</b>	1517	921	228	147	147

### 6.1.2. Familiarisation with data and rationale texts from main Asian syllabi

Instead of analysing all existing language syllabi, five major Asian language syllabi were selected for the study. In selecting these five syllabuses, it is considered the significant changes that have been occurring in Asian studies and Asian languages (Weinmann, Neilsen, & Slavich, 2021). In particular, the two languages with the highest number of enrolled students - Japanese and Chinese - are used as examples. Due to the absence of the former Korean, Indonesian and Vietnamese

language syllabi, the previously used 2003 Japanese and Chinese language syllabi, and the new syllabi in these languages for 2017, were analysed thematically for greater understanding and identification of meanings and trends. The rationale section of language syllabi illustrates specifically how government and related institutions understand the significance of learning.

**Table 3.** Seven syllabi collected

<i>Older</i>	<i>Latest</i>
Japanese K-10 Syllabus 2003	Japanese K-10 Syllabus 2017
Chinese K-10 Syllabus 2003	Chinese K-10 Syllabus 2017
N/A	Korean K-10 Syllabus 2017
N/A	Indonesia K-10 Syllabus 2017
N/A	Vietnamese K-10 Syllabus 2017

### 6.1.3. Generation of initial code(s)

After familiarisation of the data, this study conducts a comparative thematic analysis of the syllabi's rationale texts. The seven sample texts will be manually coded and analysed for thematic classification. As a means of 'data condensation' (Malterud, 2012), each passage of the rationale text will be categorised into a thematic code and formed into thematic units to facilitate comparison.

### 6.1.4. Identification of theme(s)

Next, efforts will be made to identify different themes and directions in the rationale passages. Summarised themes will be presented in table form alongside the original texts so that their characteristics may be more readily observed. In the process of condensing and organising each passage into a theme, different levels, directions and relationships will be accounted for and reviewed carefully.

### 6.1.5. Step 5: Review and definition theme(s)

This stage involves the further refinement and clarification of the themes identified from the syllabi. Each passage is clarified in defining the underlying themes. This section not only contains a summary of the textual data, but highlights themes which are representative, interesting and reflective (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In conjunction with outgoing themes from the analysis, this section reflects the findings of this study.

### 6.1.6. Step 6: Production of report

In the analytical stage of the report-writing process, the researcher maintains a critical, neutral perspective while iterating, refining and reflecting upon each study topic. Given the nature of this small sample study, its generalisability will need to be enhanced through future research. Despite this, the report offers a means for evaluating ideas and assessing underlying ideologies and attitudes reflected in different document texts.

## 6.2. Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of this paper, the data has been carefully collected from the government official curriculum and syllabus where the wording of rationales has been carefully considered and given meaning. Considering the qualitative nature of this paper, content validity is of particular importance when examining and analysing the motivation of the documentations (Brod, Tesler & Christensen, 2009). Therefore, the methods of thematic classification and critical discourse analysis were employed to systematically assess the perspectives from the data. In a number of recurring keywords by observing the text, several themes have been identified and categorised as much of the underlying information possible.

### 6.3. Study Limitations

One objective of this study is to evaluate the understanding and goals of language learning as outlined by policymakers and government officials in the latest NSW Language syllabi. A sampling method was chosen to focus on rationale sections, which allow for a more thorough analysis of discourse to comprehend the vision of linguistic education fostered by the government. Additionally, other syllabi descriptions, including the study's introduction, aim, objectives and results, may signal trends and attitudes in language education, but due to the length of and timing for this thesis it would be more reasonable to focus on analysing the relevant samples in detail.

## 7. Findings & Discussion

### 7.1. The Australian Approach to Language Education

According to the latest Australian census (2016), more than 300 languages are spoken at home, with 21 % of Australians speaking a language other than English. While Clyne (1991a) has reviewed Australia's long-standing ideological 'status quo' of English monolingualism, the country's social reality is

multilingual. Overall, Lo Bianco and Slaughter (2016) have identified five ideological underpinnings to Australia's language education, all of which have been historically determined: "comfortably British, assertively Australian, ambitiously multicultural, energetically Asian" and "fundamentally economic". That said, given the shifting ideological landscape to language education in Australia, as demonstrated by recent reforms to the NSW language syllabus, it may be beneficial to re-assess whether Australia has maintained these underpinnings in the face of pressure to be more inclusive of multilingualism. By evaluating reformed language syllabi, each state and territory can enhance its understanding of language education development and planning, thus better planning for language education in the future.

### 7.2. NSW's Approach to Language Education

To comprehend and convey the Australian government's orientation toward mainstream language learning, this study considers New South Wales' current educational reform, which aims to improve state language standards. This reform, the biggest in over 30 years, will commence in 2021 and will be fully implemented by 2024 (NSW Education Standards Authority, 2021). The reform's changes are potentially indicative of broader, country-wide developments, since the state reform will involve a large number of participants, with discussion and revisions from the government, teaching associations, parent organisations, employer groups and other community stakeholders. Accordingly, the NSW School Curriculum Reform follows several key principles and outlines three crucial curriculum changes: the priority of literacy and numeracy subjects; the restructuring of the curriculum by reducing unnecessary subjects; and the provision of modern pathways and opportunities for college and TAFE courses for Year 11 and 12 (ibid.). However, what qualifies as 'unnecessary' in this context is debatable, and there is a risk of overemphasising core English literacy and undercutting the learning of other languages.

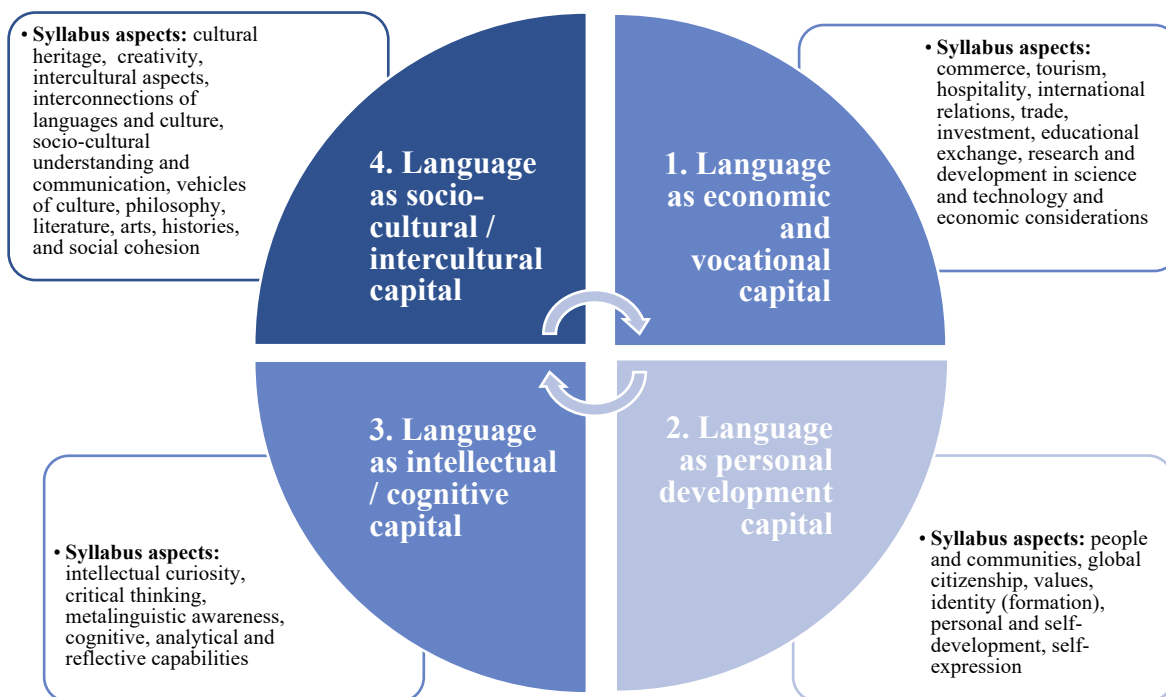


Figure 1. Themes identified in the latest language syllabus

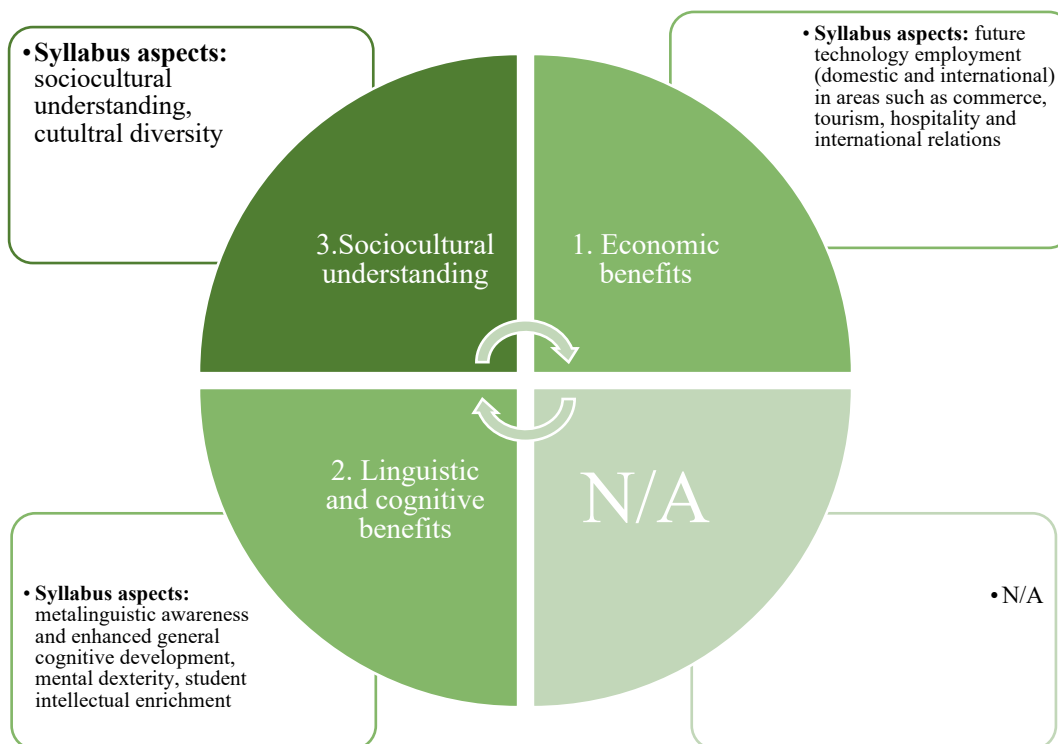


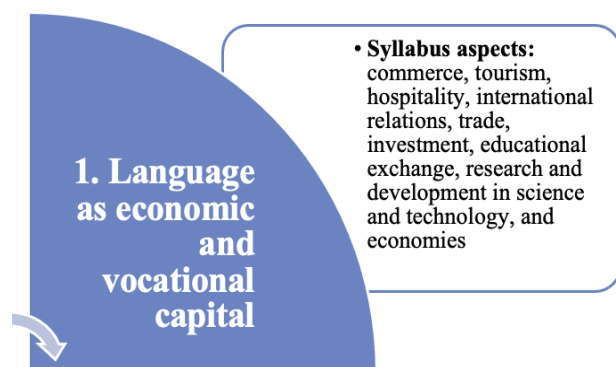
Figure 2. Themes identified from the former language syllabus

After analysing and contextualising the rationale sections of the seven Asian language syllabi considered for this study, two figures were developed from the themes compiled, shown in Figures 1 and 2. Each of these Figures illustrates, and compare accordingly, the differences, similarities and thematic patterns of the language syllabi before and after the curriculum reform. Four main themes have been identified and categorised: language as economic and vocational capital; language

as personal development capital; language as cognitive/intellectual capital; and language as sociocultural/intercultural capital. Each of these themes embodies distinct beliefs about the purpose of the knowledge (language) to be delivered in schools, values and attitudes that should be taught to students and objectives and priorities that should be emphasised in language programmes and activities.



### 7.2.1. Theme 1: Language as Economic and Vocational Capital



An example from a Syllabus rationale extract reads as follow:

*Chinese is an important language for young learners in Australia, as Australia progresses towards a future of increased trade, investment, educational exchange, research and development in science and technology, and engagement with Asia. Students develop an appreciation for the place of Australia within the Asia region, including the interconnections of languages and cultures, peoples and communities, histories and economies....and for future employment, within Australia and internationally, in areas such as commerce, tourism, entertainment, hospitality, education, sport, visual arts, performing arts and international relations. (NSW Education Standards Authority, 2017, p. 11)*

In the context of globalisation and neoliberal marketisation, the relationship between language learning and human capital has been extensively studied on the basis that the skills acquired through education increase personal productivity. In particular, modern languages and linguistic skills are generally regarded as marketable assets or ‘economic capital’ working toward an individual’s competitive market advantage and resultant social mobility (Stein-Smith, 2016). Moreover, language is now considered a marketable asset not only in Pacific regions such as Australia but also in the European Union and throughout the world (ibid).

While language learning’s economic considerations are important, the promotion of language education based solely on economic interests may be detached from a true holistic significance. Moreover, given Australia’s socio-linguistic makeup, multilingualism and multiculturalism can have measurable benefits as national resources, beyond merely symbolic recognition (Ng, & Metz, 2015). Still, based on a comparison between old and new language curricula, the emphasis on language as economic and vocational capital does not appear to have significantly changed. For example, the language syllabi consistently state that language skills are positive for those wishing to engage in national and international markets, tourism, trade and investment.

The prioritising of liberal economic values in both older and more recent language syllabi indicate the mainstream’s continued approach of emphasising linguistic market value, which may continue to

implicitly favour English rather than multilingualism and continue linguistic drift. If languages continue to be primarily regarded as organised according to market value, ethnic minority languages will be in danger of neglect. For this reason, governments and relevant authorities must recognise the social and educational implications of their directing language learning toward monetary ends.

Additionally, justifications for language learning on a scientific and technological basis is also frequently found on the reformed syllabus, which further emphasises economic factors, although it also promotes educational exchange, research, and technological development. This is especially evident in Asian languages, as the newly reformed language syllabus seems closely aligned with principles put forward by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which seeks to revolutionise education through innovative technological developments (Peña-López, 2016). Ultimately, this educational innovation is seen as essential for driving economic and social development (ibid.). Overall, education will benefit from this emphasis on scientific resources for nations to achieve socio-economics efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.

### 7.2.2. Theme 2: Language as Personal Development Capital



An example from a Syllabus rationale extract reads as follow:

*Students broaden their horizons in relation to personal, social, cultural and employment opportunities in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world.... They develop understanding of global citizenship, and reflect on their own heritage, values, culture and identity. (NSW Education Standards Authority, 2017, p. 11)*

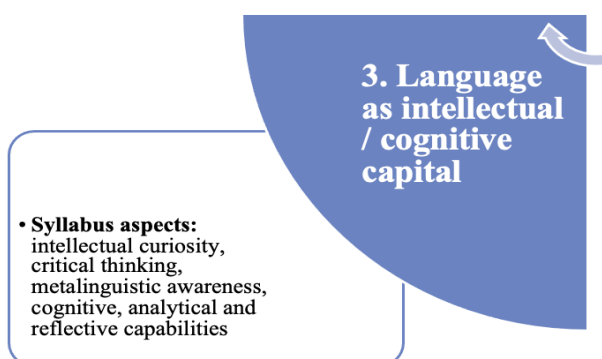
While positive economic effects are an important aspect of language learning, the theme of language as personal development capital present in the latest language curricula is especially pronounced, with language seen as essential to forming personal identity, enabling self-expression and solidifying communal identity and global citizenship. In contrast to the former language syllabus, the new curriculum reform explicitly mentions language’s role in personal development and shows a government acknowledgment of how individuals may have a bond with language that moves beyond a national or



economic resonance. While older syllabi were more concerned with describing the intellectual development of an individual, the new syllabus prioritises the holistic individual, rather than simply their rational nature. The notion of educational institutions or schools functioning as mediators of "social control" (Vallance, 1974), with students passively receiving, directly or indirectly, 'the content, ideas, and beliefs taught to them by the school' and then situated within a society with a constant set of values is rejected. Instead, students are now personally engaged with language in a dynamic process that is both active and passive.

Critically, some studies question the purported impact of multilingual learning on defining one's personal identity (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001). Notably, these critics argue that the association of language too closely with identity may contribute to problematic notions, such as the idea that multilingualism negatively impacts the 'purity' of one's identity, which is linguistically 'pure'. Despite this, as Abes, Jones and McEwen (2007) explain, identity is a multifaceted concept and the construction of identity is multidimensional, and multilingual learning provides further possibilities for identity shaping and self-perception. Therefore, the newly reformed syllabus provides some positive direction to language learning in terms of the importance of language as a capital for personal development.

### 7.2.3. Theme 3: language as Cognitive/Intellectual Capital



An example from a Syllabus rationale extract reads as follows:

*Through the development of communicative skills in a language and understanding of how language works as a system, students further develop their literacy in English, through close attention to detail, accuracy, logic and critical reasoning. Learning languages exercises students' intellectual curiosity, increases metalinguistic awareness, strengthens cognitive, analytical and reflective capabilities, and enhances their creative and critical thinking. (NSW Education Standards Authority, 2017; 2018; 2019, p. 11)*

The skills gained through language acquisition not only have a significant impact on an individual's identity and personal expression, but also contribute to their cognitive and intellectual abilities. A large body of neuropsychological and social science research has established significant links between individuals with

bilingual or multilingual skills and higher and more active cognitive performance (Diaz, 1984; Marian & Shook, 2012; Hakuta, & Diaz, 2014; Kroll & Dussias, 2017), acknowledging a positive correlation between these skills and cognitive well-being (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Oz, Demirezen & Pourfeiz, 2015). In both older and newer syllabi, the NSW government has emphasised language learning for intellectual, cognitive and higher order thinking skills, specifically naming traits of intellectual curiosity and critical, analytical and reflective thinking and capabilities. Moreover, the government appears to have gained a greater insight into language-learning cognitive impacts in its newer syllabus, moving from a 'mental dexterity' focused on cognitive skills to a more comprehensive view that aims at a more holistic individual development. This may result in greater clarity and confidence among educational institutions, educators and language learners, and closely aligns with Australia's overall educational goals (Barr et al., 2008).

### 7.2.4. Theme 4: Language as Sociocultural/Intercultural Capital



An example from a Syllabus rationale extract reads as follows:

*Learning languages provides the opportunity for students to engage with the linguistic and cultural diversity of the world and its peoples...The ability to communicate in Chinese provides incentives for travel and for more meaningful interactions with speakers of Chinese, encouraging socio-cultural understanding between Australia and Chinese-speaking countries, and cohesion within the Australian community. (NSW Education Standards Authority, 2017, p. 11)*

Language has been increasingly valued as a socio-cultural or intercultural capital in Australia, a fact that is inextricably linked to the nature and history of Australian society. Socio-cultural capital, however, differs considerably from economic and intellectual capital in its methods of development and transmission. The concept of cultural capital as developed by Pierre Bourdieu in his conceptual triad (1986) holds that it is accumulated through 'smart networks', and can be converted into cultural capital only when one obtains appropriate networks, credentials and social prestige (Norton & Toohey, 2011). In Australia, the concept of 'socio-cultural capital' has been further tailored to reflect Australian socio-linguistic and historical

characteristics; while it exhibits fundamental characteristics of 'cultural capital' and can be accumulated, achieving and acquiring an ethnic minority or community language is complex and multifaceted (Pöllmann, 2013).

The newly revised language syllabus introduces the concept of 'heritage' for the first time, highlighting both cultural and linguistic heritage along with the interconnectedness between language and culture. This suggests that sociolinguistic-cultural engagement and connectivity is significantly woven into the new syllabus, reflecting an attempt at an inclusive, optimistic outlook towards language learning and culture. Overall, the new curriculum suggests an aspiration toward social cohesion and connectedness within Australian society, with language serving as a 'social bridge' or 'social lubricant' between diverse societies and cultures, and as a vehicle for diverse cultural expressions.

In brief, it can be seen from the reformed syllabi that the four major themes discussed could be considered as a part of an integration between a liberal linguistic 'status quo' and the neoliberal critique. Unfortunately, while there is further acknowledgment that individuals have more comprehensive needs than their intellectual capacity, there is still a heavy emphasis on economic requirements. The neoliberal critique itself is uncompromising on this point, and therefore offers no alternative that could prioritise community languages. From the perspective that language education is valued as an economic, sociocultural, intellectual and personal development capital, these syllabi still maintain a liberal ideal and an implicit monolingual mindset.

### 7.3. Limitations of the Study

There are limitations as to the generalisability of this study's findings. First and foremost, it is challenging to conduct a thematic analysis of language curricula, which are developed out of the collaboration of a wide system of professionals. While this study focuses on the NSW language syllabi, its scope was limited by time constraints and could not possibly examine all 22 existing syllabi, including recent ones just released in 2021; moreover, most older NSW syllabi are no longer available. The study therefore has a relatively small sample size. Second, this study utilises a hybrid approach to textual research analysis, specifically a combination of thematic and critical discourse analyses, which may not necessarily be a mature method. Third, since this dissertation is not a study on foreign language acquisition, the selected texts were excerpted only from parts related directly to this paper's research topic; a full thematic textual analysis for every course syllabus was not performed. Finally, while the aim of this paper is to explore attitudes and perceptions of the Australian government and relevant policy makers towards languages other than English, there is no overarching Australian policy for language education and language-in-education policy available for analysis.

## 8. Conclusion

This paper examined the current state of Australian language education and how government attitudes expressed in mainstream language curricula have ideological underpinnings that affect language teaching, educational management and public expectations of language education. A case study of NSW language curricula is utilised to illustrate the Australian government's current direction toward language education, and four main themes are highlighted: economic, cognitive, personal development and socio-cultural impacts of language as capital. This examination reveals that the current NSW language-learning syllabus is an attempt to merge the multicultural and multilingual while preserving a stress on economics.

The thesis has several acknowledged limitations as to the generalisability of its results. For example, the paper is focused on NSW data and policy, but future research and sample collection could be carried out in other states for more detailed results. First-hand data could also be collected from schools to investigate the motivating factors for students to learn languages. There is a greater need for comparative studies on each state's different syllabi, and the relationship between states, territories and Australia's national government, that could reveal further ideological trends in language education.

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