



Donald Clarence Laycock

DONALD CLARENCE LAYCOCK
1936-1988

On the 27th December, 1988, Dr D.C. Laycock, Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities died after a serious illness. His untimely death robbed Australia of one of the outstanding linguistic scholars of this country. He had worked for most of his academic life in the Department of Linguistics of the Research School of Pacific Studies, with his chief interests in linguistics directed at languages and the linguistic situation of the New Guinea area, Austronesia languages, and languages of intercultural communication, especially New Guinea pidgin. He also made valuable contributions to socio-linguistics, questions of language contact and mutual language influence and other areas of language study such as special languages and the role of languages in extraordinary situations, such as the phenomenon of playing with language as is common in the New Guinea area—a discovery made by himself. He also made contributions to Australian linguistics. Apart from being a brilliant linguist and polyglot, he was also a man of many diverse interests which went far beyond the usual orbit of scholars in linguistics, and a deep thinker on questions which involved language, but which for most of the past decades, the great majority of linguists outside Australia, and in part also within Australia have regarded as not falling within their field of interest. In later years, his foremost interest was devoted to lexicography, semantics, linguistic change, language use and special areas of it such as deliberate interference in their own languages by speakers in the New Guinea and Australia, as well as artificial languages, linguistic games and others. In many of the fields mentioned he contributed extensively to theoretical knowledge, largely by extending the concept of linguistic theory into areas largely neglected by linguistic theoreticians over the past three or four decades. In his linguistic work he was greatly helped by having a good active command of a considerable number of languages, and he never stopped learning new ones, in particular Russian and Arabic towards the end of his life.

Dr Laycock was born in Newcastle and took his first degrees there. He came to the A.N.U. in 1959 as the first PhD student in Linguistics in the University, and graduated in 1962, having worked over a year in the field in the Sepik district of Papua New Guinea, clearing up much of the immensely complicated language picture of that area. His thesis was published in 1965 as the first book length publication in the Department's Pacific Linguistics Series of which he later became one of the editors and materially contributed to the series becoming the largest publication series in the field of language studies and linguistics in the Greater Pacific area.

Having travelled and undertaken teaching and research assignments in North America, Europe and North Africa, after completing his PhD, he returned to Canberra in 1964 to be appointed first a Research Fellow, then a Fellow, and in 1969 a Senior Fellow in the Linguistics Department of the Research School of Pacific Studies at the Australian National University.

Dr Laycock was a member of the Australian Linguistic Society from its beginning, and was also a foundation member of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, a life member of the Association Phonétique Internationale, and also a member of the Australian Musicological Society. In 1980, he was elected a fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities in recognition of his contributions to linguistics and language study in the South-Western Pacific Area. In this capacity, he assisted to a very considerable extent in major international research projects under the auspices of the Australian Academy of the Humanities such as the Language Atlas of the Pacific Area of which he was one of the co-ordinating editors and which was published in 1981-1983. He also played a major part in the preparatory work for the Atlas of Languages of Inter-Cultural Communications in the Greater Pacific Area, and it is most unfortunate that he will not be able to take any further part in the production work involved in this atlas. He was also the person who made the historically important proposal in the Australian Academy of the Humanities that eventually the Academy and the Academy of Social Sciences should merge into a single Academy, foreshadowing at the same time that in common with the practice in most countries overseas, all four Academies in Australia should strive to be united in a single Australian Academy. With developments now heading slowly in the directions proposed and foreshadowed by Dr Laycock, it should be remembered here that it was his idea in the first instance.

Dr Laycock left ninety-nine published works, with several more at press. At least one of his major manuscripts which is almost completed and constitutes an extensive dictionary of a Papua New Guinea language is likely to be completed by his colleagues and to be published.

In addition to what has been said, Dr Laycock was a highly competent administrator and often Acting Head of Department. He supervised many post-graduate students and contributed greatly to the impressive range of PhD students which came out of the Department, with many of them today occupying important positions in Australia and overseas.

Dr Laycock inspired many persons in the academic world and also outside, with his deep and creative thinking, his ability to deal intuitively with problems and the novelty of his ideas on many subjects. He was an excellent colleague and a wonderful friend and collaborator and will be greatly missed by all those who knew him.

Steven Wurm