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Evangelism, Ethnography and Linguistics: Carl Strehlow and J.R.B. Love

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Abstract: This article considers the intersection of evangelism, ethnography and linguistics in the work of two missionaries living among Aboriginal communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Carl Strehlow was one of several German missionaries working in central Australia in the 1890s and into the twentieth century. J.R.B. Love met Strehlow briefly in 1913, but did not become a fully committed missionary himself until the 1920s. This paper first considers Strehlow's evangelical, linguistic and ethnographic interests in relation to some of his German contemporaries, before comparing his approach to that of the younger, Presbyterian, Love to elucidate the inter-relationships between evangelism, linguistics and ethnography in the 1890s and early twentieth century in Australia.

Keywords: Evangelism; ethnography; linguistics

Many scholars distinguish between German-trained and Australian-trained missionaries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in terms of their outlook and priorities, particularly their attitude towards linguistics and folklore. Regina Ganter states on her website ‘German Missionaries in Australia’,

German speakers were more likely to come with a different approach to language, different instructions for the conduct of science, and different conceptual maps of evolution. The greater propensity among German speakers in the indigenous encounter to record vernacular traditions, to acquire local languages, and to record folklore (*Volksgut*) as the defining characteristic of a people (*Volk*) arises from their training and from the broader contexts of intellectual tradition. (<http://missionaries.griffith.edu.au>, accessed 28 January 2016).

While I do not dispute this generally accepted view of missionaries who were trained in German institutions that emphasised philology, linguistics and folklore, they were not merely products of a particular educational and religious environment. Each responded in his own way to the circumstances he found himself in at the mission site. Some Australian-trained missionaries’ evangelism was also influenced by their linguistic and ethnographic knowledge. In this paper I will consider Carl Strehlow’s attitude towards evangelism, linguistics and ethnography in the context of approaches taken by some of his fellow German-trained colleagues before analyzing the Australian-trained Presbyterian missionary, J.R.B. Love’s application of his linguistic and ethnographic research in his evangelical work.

Carl Strehlow was born 18 years before Love in northeastern Germany in 1871 and died in 1922 in central Australia (J. Strehlow 2011). He studied at the Neuendettelsau seminary in Bavaria, which did not specifically train young men as missionaries, but to serve German migrant communities. However, quite a number of graduates did work at mission stations, including two in central Australia: Bethesda at Killalpaninna, and Hermannsburg on the Finke River. They came to these positions with a strong grounding in philology and from an intellectual environment which predisposed them to take an interest in folklore and other aspects of the culture of the people they evangelised (Kenny 2013).

On graduation from Neuendettelsau, Strehlow was sent to Australia in 1892, first to the Lutheran mission to the Dieri, Bethesda, and then two years later to Hermannsburg mission to the north in western Arrernte country, where he remained until his death (Leske, 1977, 23).

His adolescent and adult life experience was all within the German Lutheran mission system. Although Strehlow lived in Australia for well over half his life, he spent all that time in a remote region of the country isolated from Australian/British intellectual life. He even sent five of his six children back to Germany to be educated. While in central Australia, Strehlow wrote an extensive ethnography of the Arrernte and the Kukatja-Luritja which was largely ignored in Anglosphere until relatively recently when scholars proficient in German began analysing his work in articles and books (see Kenny 2008, 2013; Strehlow 2011, Veit 2004).

Love was born in Ireland in 1889 and came to Australia as a baby, his family settling in South Australia in 1892, the year Carl Strehlow was sent to Killalpannina in the north of the state. His father was a Presbyterian minister. J.R.B. Love's early career did not follow the simple trajectory of training then mission work that led Strehlow to central Australia at the age of twenty. Love worked as an untrained teacher when he left school in 1906-7, then undertook a teacher training course, but before completing it he went to the tiny township, Leigh's Creek (now Copley), in the Flinders Ranges, where he taught non-Aboriginal students for three years (Australian Dictionary of Biography, n.d [1989]). From late 1912, under the auspices of the Presbyterian church, he spent over eighteen months travelling through the Australian outback on horseback to report on the conditions in which Aboriginal people lived and recommend possible locations for missions.¹ He presented his report in 1915 and then was sent as a relief missionary for six months to the Wororra at Port George IV (later renamed Kunmunya) mission on the Kimberley coast in Western Australia. After sitting his final exams for his Bachelor of Arts in November 1915, he enlisted in the armed forces and saw out World War I in the Light Horse and Camel Corps in the Middle East. After the war he went to theological college in Melbourne and then took up his first permanent posting as a missionary at Mapoon in Queensland. After five years he happily returned to the Kimberley, where he remained for 13 years before ending his missionary career among the Pitjantjatjara at Ernabella in Central Australia in the 1940s (Australian Dictionary of Biography, n.d [1989])

Strehlow and Love had different life experiences and training as young men, which no doubt influenced their approaches to a shared interest in linguistic and ethnographic work. The

¹ J.R.B. Love, 'Journal of an expedition undertaken for the purpose of enquiring into the conditions of life among the aboriginals of the interior of Australia under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church of Australia: started from Leigh's Creek, South Australia, on December 27th 1912, and to occupy two years.' PRG214/ series 5, SLSA.

South African missionary anthropologist Edwin Smith noted that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries religious and evangelical training was often in conflict with the emerging science of ethnography. He suggested that missionaries, '[i]n their attitude to native life' could be divided into four classes:

A few of them know and care nothing about it. ... A large proportion of missionaries are social anthropologists without knowing it ... and to a greater or lesser degree they apply their knowledge to their ministry. Some few have studied the science deliberately and of set purpose use it in the education of their people. Others possess considerable knowledge and do not apply it. (Smith 1924, 519)

I argue that Carl Strehlow belonged to this fourth category and Love to the third. Strehlow made an ethnographic study under the tutelage of his German mentor Moritz von Leonhardi but did not apply it to his ministry, unlike some of his German- and Australian-educated contemporaries. Love's ethnographic interests were intertwined with his everyday activities. He is said to have carried a notebook with him at all times in a canvas pocket hanging from his belt to record his observations of Wororra life (McGregor 1986, 77). Both men, however, made learning Aboriginal languages central to their evangelical project, not just becoming verbally proficient but writing grammars and translating Biblical texts.

Carl Strehlow

The historian Robert Thornton has argued that 'Ethnography is the product of two cultures in interaction and reflects conflicts on both sides of the conjunction' (Thornton 1981, 14-23). The missionary-ethnographer was on one side 'located right at the point of conflict between the emerging "scientific" worldview and the established religious worldview that, as a missionary, he was bound to teach and uphold.' These men (there were very few women), whose primary training was in religion, sometimes with a humanistic education in philology and history, found themselves brought into the emerging field of anthropology at the mission site encouraged by metropolitan theoreticians who, 'sought to bring workers in the periphery into increasingly close contact with themselves in order that they should become the means for developing a coherent theory of human morality and social practice' (Thornton 1981, 15-16). Thus, young men sent to regions distant from their European homelands to persuade the local people to abandon long-held cultural practices and beliefs and adopt Christian ones were also an important source of ethnographic information.

Carl Strehlow fits this scenario, although his metropolitan correspondent was not a theoretician but a proponent of empirical research. Strehlow was contacted by Baron Moritz von Leonhardi, an amateur but very well informed ‘armchair anthropologist’ with whom he corresponded for nine years. The result of this communication was an ethnographic study authored by Strehlow of the Aranda (Arernte) and Loritja (Kukatja-Luritja) of central Australia.

Strehlow’s first posting in 1892 was an established mission, Bethesda, under the direction of Johannes Reuther, another graduate of Neuendettelsau. (J. Strehlow 2011, 199) Strehlow’s facility with languages quickly became evident; within two months of his arrival he was teaching children in the local Dieri language. (J. Strehlow 2011, 310). The following year he and Reuther began translating the New Testament into Dieri. (J. Strehlow 2011, 326). No doubt training in the classical languages at Neuendettelsau helped Strehlow learn Dieri, but it is also clear he had a facility for learning languages, for many others with similar training, including Reuther, were not able to grasp Aboriginal languages with such speed.

Strehlow’s primary motivation was to teach the children in their own language, rather than curiosity about Dieri customs and society. A long letter to his Neuendettelsau teacher Johannes Deinzer in September 1893, fifteen months after he arrived at Bethesda, suggests he judged Aboriginal people from his own German and Christian values and morality with no concessions to Dieri understandings of the world.²

He explains why he believes there will never be many Christian Dieri. Firstly, he observes the Dieri cannot survive. In the camp associated with the mission are ‘decrepit old men and ugly old women’ and few children. This assessment is based on Strehlow’s observation and not evolutionary theory, which predicted that so called ‘primitive’ people cannot withstand the impact of civilization. Secondly, he explains empathetically that Christianity is incompatible with ‘camp life’, and therefore those who become Christian can no longer fraternise with their family and friends. Strehlow realises that most prefer to remain in their community rather than move away and be cut off from it, ‘Some are not prepared to put up with this beneficial barrier to many a pernicious influence and prefer in the end to return to

² Carl Strehlow to Reverend teacher (Johannes Deinzer), 6 September 1893 Lutheran Archives (LA), translated by J.L., (SLSA)

heathenism' (C. Strehlow to reverend teacher 6 September 1893, LA. Translated by J.L.). Thirdly, the Dieri are amoral, they have a great sexual appetite, particularly the young, and will not tolerate the restrictions of mission life. Thus 'natural man' prevails over civilization, even where adolescents have shown their intellectual aptitude to learn. In fact a half civilised heathen is worse than one untouched by Christian education; perhaps having learnt of sin they are readier to take it on. As well as moral laxity there exists the propensity for laziness, brought about by the environment in which they live. It takes little effort to collect enough food to maintain themselves and the rest of the time, if given the opportunity, they do nothing. Christianity and work go together. Heathenism belongs to natural man who is immoral and lazy. Strehlow's initial view of this savage world and its people may well have been influenced by Adolf Bastian's ideas of humanity divided, not by evolutionary stages, but culturally into *Naturvölker* and *Kulturvölker*: natural people contrasted with cultural people, who are literate and possess a recorded past (Penny 2008, 86-87; Cavin 2014, 275, 279, 291-2).³ But Strehlow does not see a clear division between 'natural man' (*natürlichen Mensch*) and civilisation as he teaches his charges to read and write in Dieri to make the bible more accessible, although some revert to their previous state.

Strehlow and Reuther began translating the New Testament into the Dieri language, but found it difficult to find Dieri words to express biblical concepts. One example 'Ordnung', order, illustrates Strehlow's concern with translating what he regarded as concepts unknown to natural man. 'As a people who simply do not know any "order", who also do not love "order" and do not know anything about "order", our blacks have totally forgotten the word "order" too.' This passage suggests that Strehlow believed that the Dieri did not regulate their lives in any way. What he observed was a people with no controls, including sexual controls, who do the minimum to keep alive. But there is also a suggestion that they have regressed, that they have totally forgotten the word 'order' which they once knew and which ruled their lives. So these people have regressed and are degraded by idleness, that is, lack of work. Christianity can only thrive among people who have given up carnal freedom and a lazy, effortless life.

In the same letter he raises other difficulties in translation such as a passage in John 3:29, in which the terms 'bride' and 'bridegroom' are used. There are no equivalent terms in Dieri

³ Adolf Bastian (1826-1905) was a founder and director of the Berlin Ethnological Museum, a founder of ethnology of nineteenth century German ethnology (Cavin 2014, 246).

because children are promised in marriage at birth and have no say in who will be their future spouse and, therefore, have no words for ‘bride’ and ‘bridegroom’, only ‘husband’ and ‘wife’. Another problem Strehlow and Reuther encountered was relationship terminology, for instance, there is no single term for brother, one must know where the brother comes in the family, as there are separate terms for younger and older brother etc, but in the bible one does not necessarily know which brother is younger or older. Similarly, while in English and German there is one form of ‘we’ (‘wir’ in German), in Dieri there are four forms. Strehlow goes on to discuss other translation difficulties which reflect his knowledge of the niceties of grammar, but not Dieri kinship systems and means of social and cultural control.

Strehlow’s biographer and grandson John Strehlow suggests that his interest in ethnography may have been piqued by fellow missionary and Neuendettelsau graduate Otto Siebert, who arrived at Bethesda two years after Strehlow and remained there until 1902. Siebert immediately took an interest in Dieri culture, studying and recording it (Kenny, 2008, 110). However two letters Strehlow wrote in 1896 to his brother-in-law Christian Keysser, who was a student at Neuendettelsau and would later become a prominent missionary in New Guinea, do not indicate a burgeoning interest in ethnography.

The first letter written on November 1896 from Hermannsburg where Strehlow worked among the Arrernte was a response to questions Keysser asked about mission work.⁴ Strehlow answers that he has given up on trying to convert the older people, who he claims are indifferent and generally incapable of understanding the Word of God. He describes their bedraggled appearance in European rags but with traditional hairstyle and weapons. The husband takes the lead, the wife, a beast of burden, follows. They will stay at Hermannsburg a few weeks. The man may help with the building work and if encouraged will attend Sunday service, but he would prefer to spend his time in the creek with his friends talking and fishing. Then however the ‘wanderlust reawakens’, and the family disappears to join a dance or circumcision ceremony. Strehlow characterises these Arrernte as lazy, their wanderings as pointless and their dances and ceremonies as mere entertainment. The most faithful Christians are those who were baptised as children. They sing holy songs at night and listen reverently to the Word of God. This interest in singing spurs Strehlow on to translate songs into Arrernte, much to the delight of the Christians.

⁴ Carl Strehlow to Christian Keysser 3 November 1896, LA.

A few weeks later Strehlow again wrote to Keysser in response to a question about his preaching methods, and this is the best insight we have into his preaching. I quote at some length:

In the sermon I make a great effort to simplify and avoid ambiguity, as much as it's possible for me to do so. I also draw in many stories and examples. They would not understand such [an academic] sermon as one hears in Germany. I am preaching this year on the Epistles; it is a difficult task to explain these, and often even to translate them. On the Epistle for the Second Sunday in Advent I roughly preached as follows: (here is just the train of thought) The Lord God promised the Jews a Saviour (the promise in Paradise, to Abraham and the patriarchs, to David, the promises of the prophets etc). These promises had to be fulfilled by God in order to remain true to His Word. God did not promise the heathens a Saviour, but they needed one just as much as the Jews. Therefore God gave them a Saviour purely out of mercy. – The Jews praised God for the Saviour (Abraham, Simeon and Anna, the shepherds etc.). The heathens too offered Him their praise (the Wise Men, the official etc.) Exhortation to praise and thanks for the gift of salvation. – I preach all the sermons for the blacks, both in the morning and in the afternoon. It is a huge job to learn the language. It is much more difficult and intricate/complicated than the Dieri language.⁵

While Strehlow realises the Arrernte have difficulty relating the biblical passages to their own lives and experience, he seems to hope that they will identify with the heathens such as his example of the 'wise men', as he makes no attempt to draw parallels with their own circumstances or pre-existing beliefs. These letters from Strehlow to his teacher and brother-in-law at Neuendettelsau indicate that he applied himself immediately to learning the language of the Dieri and Arrernte, but took little interest in their cultural life. He engages with the grammatical complexities which facilitate communication and bringing people to God, but not the cultural complexities which are an obstacle to be overcome.

Strehlow's subsequent correspondence in the late 1890s and early twentieth century with Martin Deinzer in Germany, and Gustav Julius Rechner, the chairman of Lutheran Mission Committee in South Australia, suggests that although Strehlow began absorbing knowledge of the Arrernte, it did not change his attitudes. He wrote that the 'Blacks', excited by circumcision ceremonies, behave as if mad and possessed, and the all night dancing made

⁵ C. Strehlow to C. Keysser 18 Dec 1896, LA. Translated by J. L.

them too tired to work.⁶ In another letter he discusses polygamy, a reflection of moral degeneration with no social function.⁷ A few years later he acknowledges that Christianity condones circumcision, but condemns the Arrernte revelry accompanying it as sinful.⁸ There is no suggestion that circumcision ceremonies have an important social and cultural function in Arrernte and other Aboriginal societies. When people leave the mission station, their wanderings are presented as arbitrary, only undertaken for pleasure. In 1904 Strehlow wrote a letter to Ludwig Kaibel, Rechner's successor, which makes clear that he is researching Arrernte culture and plans to publish his findings, although concerned he will be criticised because he is gathering data from people who have been exposed to Christianity since their youth.⁹ According to John Strehlow, Kaibel encouraged Strehlow to publish his research in the local mission paper, however, as we shall see, Kaibel severely criticised Strehlow's writings when they were published in Germany several years later (J. Strehlow 2011, 907).

Strehlow believed his religious calling prevented him from watching ceremonies, as he thought his presence would condone activities he condemned as a missionary. Instead he worked with male elders writing down verbatim the songs and stories they recited for him, working on the verandah, rather than through firsthand observation. Strehlow's approach is a contrast to that of Siebert. While Strehlow stayed at the mission station, the headquarters of Christianity, and refused to observe any Aboriginal ceremonies, Siebert accompanied the Dieri as they moved about the countryside, as Chris Nobbs points out (2005). Siebert believed he had to understand their culture and mindset as well as their language if he was going to be able to communicate and make Christianity relevant to them. After complaints from his fellow missionary Johannes Reuther, Siebert was reprimanded by Pastor Rechner for the ethnographic work he undertook at Bethesda from 1897 in consultation with the anthropologist A.W. Howitt. Rather than buckle to their prejudices, Siebert confronted them, quoting liberally from Gustav Warneck and other theorists of mission. He explains:

But in order to understand the religion of the Australians and especially of my Dieri and Wonkanguru etc, I have no choice but to study the people and to thoroughly research its legends and myths, its manners and customs, its going and coming. I must as it were abandon my European perceptions and enter into the manner of perception

⁶ C. Strehlow to G.J. Rechner 3 Sept 1898, LA. Translated by P. B.

⁷ C. Strehlow to G.J. Rechner 20 Jan 1899, LA. Translated by P. B.

⁸ C. Strehlow to J. Deinzer 8 Jan 1901 LA. Translated by E. E.

⁹ C. Strehlow to L. Kaibel 30 Aug 1904, LA. Translated by P. B.

of my Australians, in order to think and act in a way which corresponds with their sphere of thought. (Nobbs 2005, 37).

Although Siebert does distinguish between research for evangelical purposes and research for purely scientific aims, he argues that while science is not central to evangelical work, neither does it interfere with it.

While Siebert corresponded and was encouraged by the Australian anthropologist A.W. Howitt to communicate his observations of Dieri life and culture, Strehlow's ethnographic research was encouraged and guided by the German intellectual von Leonhardi. Von Leonhardi had an extensive library of anthropological works in German, English and French. He was familiar with contemporary research and theories and through his curiosity and knowledge guided Strehlow's research. I will not say more about their working relationship, as this has been more than adequately covered by John Strehlow (2011), Anna Kenny (2008, 2013) and Walter Veit (2004) among others. What is of interest here is Strehlow's attitude towards his research and evangelism, which contrasts with Siebert's approach.

The distinction between research for evangelizing and research for scientific purposes reaches to the crux of Strehlow's dilemma, the missionary-anthropologist's dilemma, which both Edwin Smith and Thornton recognise, namely, do evangelisation and anthropology complement each other, or are they quite separate endeavours? Strehlow agrees with Rechner that missionaries should not 'impress the truth of salvation on the "blacks" using the medium of their heathen perception', and that the bible speaks for itself to all people (Nobbs 2005, 32-33). Translating the bible makes it accessible, but making equivalences with Arrernte cultural practices would be counterproductive. Just as the ancient world was saved from destruction by Christianity, so will the Aboriginal people (*The Register* 7 December 1921, 11). Strehlow's research was purely for scientific purposes, and, therefore, he felt more vulnerable to criticism of his ethnographic work. When Kaibel, the then Chairman of the Mission Board, criticised Strehlow after receiving the first volume of his Arrernte and Loritja ethnography in 1908, 'the material is certainly the most worthless imaginable ever to be set down in writing. It is almost all chaff, with hardly a grain of moral worth here and there. ... In essence it is a deeply sad tragedy ... the dying out of the Australians', Strehlow did not respond (J. Strehlow 2011, 1031).¹⁰ Anna Kenny suggests he would have remained very circumspect

¹⁰ Ludwig Kaibel to Carl Strehlow 6 Aug 1908, LA.

about communicating his interest in ethnographic research after the criticism Siebert's and later Reuther's research received from the parochial and pietist local Lutheran mission board, and that his reticence extended to his correspondence with family and friends in Germany (2013, 92).

Strehlow's circumspection is not so much an anticipation of criticism (after all he had told Kaibel he was undertaking research) but rather reflects his wish to separate research from evangelism. Kenny suggests, 'Language went hand in hand with culture and its particular intellectual concepts, it was not a big step to ethnographic and other scientific research.' (Kenny 2013, 92). For Strehlow however it was a big step, one which gave him great intellectual stimulation and satisfaction, but which was quite separate from running a mission station and maintaining its religious life. His attitudes to evangelism and ethnography do not seem to have changed markedly for the rest of his life. In 1906 both Strehlow and his fellow missionary at Hermannsburg, Nicolaus Wettengel, wrote reports published in the *Kirchen- und Missions-Zeitung*.

Wettengel, like his fellow missionaries, took an interest in Aboriginal culture, although his research was not extensive. Nevertheless, he does seem to have used his knowledge to inform his evangelism. In 1905 he was teaching baptismal candidates the catechism. He pointed out that the interpretations of the catechism had to be adjusted to understandings of the local people, for example he poses the question, Who is your god? The answer: the creator of the heaven (sky) and the earth, but the religious instructor must take cognizance of the existing beliefs of the people:

According to the local blacks there are many creators, of whom each creates something specific and only belongs to a particular stretch of country. For example there are gods who create rain, others who create mountains, rivers, animals and seeds, each one created or still creating its own specific thing. There are women's and men's gods who are specifically revered.¹¹

Strehlow's report later in the year gives no sense that his growing ethnographic knowledge informs his evangelism. He describes the deaf mute and three blind adults in his class and the difficulties he confronts teaching the class about the life of Jesus when their minds have been occupied with other things throughout their lives. While this is a problem for Strehlow's

¹¹ Nicol Wettengel to Friends of the Mission, *Kirchen- und Missions-Zeitung (KMZ)*, 14 Feb 1906.

pedagogy, there is no suggestion he tailors his lessons to his knowledge of Arrernte beliefs and practices.¹²

In 1921, just a few months before he died, Strehlow wrote an article published in the Adelaide newspaper *The Register* (7 December 1921, 11). He discusses his study of the religious traditions, mental capacity and social organization of the Aranda (Arrernte) and Loritja (Kukatja Luritja) over nearly 30 years. He argues that they are a degenerate people, not descended from the apes as the evolutionists claim, and he deduces this largely from their ‘wonderfully structured language ... which reminds one of the old Greek language’, although it is even more complex. Therefore the Aborigines must have been descended from a higher state of intellect because current Aboriginal people would not have the capacity to construct such a wonderful language (he gives details of the complex grammar of Arrernte).¹³ He claims the Aboriginal people believe in a supernatural higher being. Strehlow’s concerns are still with language and a religion he believes will facilitate conversion to Christianity. He discusses totems, not to convey an understanding of Aboriginal culture per se, but to show that their beliefs and ceremonies give them sensibilities which will make them good Christians.

What little evidence we have of Strehlow’s evangelical strategies suggests that the detailed research he undertook between 1905-1910, which took up so much of his time when he was not running the mission station, had little influence on his preaching and teaching. He continued to view contemporary Arrernte as lazy and immoral, despite the sophisticated language they had inherited.

¹² Carl Strehlow to Friends of the Mission, *KMZ*, 26 Sept 1906

¹³ Strehlow described the Aranda language in the following glowing terms:

The well-constructed language of the Aranda reminds one of the old Greek language; in fact, it has more moods than the last mentioned. It possesses an indicative, conditional, optative, minative, and imperative, it has not only the usual tempora, present, imperfect, perfect, and future, but also three aorist forms, aoristus remotus, aoristus remotior, and a remotissimus; besides, it has a dual for all three persona. In the declension of the noun there are not only a double nominative (transitive and intransitive) and a genitive, dative, and accusative, as in other old languages, but also a vocative, ablative, a double locative, an instrumentative, a causative, &c. The derivations and compounds are often quite marvellous. Then the great number of words!. It is difficult to count them on account of the many derivations and dialectical forms; but, the latter included, I estimate, that the Aranda language possesses not less than 6,000 words. This wonderful construction of their language leads one to the thought that the aborigines must have descended from a higher state of intellect to a lower grade, because among the present members of the Aranda tribe there is none that would be able to construct such a wonderful language. (*The Register* 7 December 1921, 11)

Strehlow's interest in linguistics can be traced back to his Neuendettelsau education. His interest in the scientific study of Aboriginal religion and mythology and social structures can be linked to von Leonhardi in Germany. Strehlow's intellectual life was a German life. He never accepted, and by his description in *The Register* did not understand, Darwinian evolutionary theories which influenced British and Australian anthropologists. He seems to have been in agreement with local Lutherans that scientific endeavor and evangelism were quite separate, while language and linguistics were essential tools for winning over Aboriginal people to the Christian God. He was not interested in drawing parallels between Christianity or the Christian God and Arrernte beliefs, but rather tended to view them as inferior and immoral. Unlike Siebert, who thought the missionary could reach the heathen only through a knowledge and understanding of their beliefs and culture, Strehlow, believed the Arrernte could only become Christian by jettisoning their pre-existing beliefs and culture. Probably as a result Strehlow baptised and retained relatively few Christians in his 32 years as a missionary.

J.R.B. Love

At the end of his first year teaching at the Leigh's Creek school in 1910, Love went north for the Christmas holidays to the Lutheran mission Bethesda at Killalpaninna.¹⁴ He was twenty-one, about the same age Strehlow was when he was posted there. He wrote a report of his trip which indicates that he already had an interest in missions and how they might improve the lives of Aboriginal people, as well as recognizing the importance of collecting ethnographic information and linguistics, even though he had no formal training in either of these fields. He was deeply impressed by the hospitality of the German missionaries and how they related to the Dieri communicating with them in their own language. He was fascinated by the Dieri language, convinced that it was Aryan in origin. Discussing the grammar he commented,

Considering the intricacies of some of the inflections I feel that the Dieri are degenerate from a higher race of man, for though they now use these forms, I do not believe that, at their present level of intelligence, they could ever spontaneously or even unconsciously have evolved such a highly organised grammatical system.¹⁵

¹⁴ J.R.B. Love, 'Visit to Killalpaninna Dec 1910' PRG214 series 3, State Library of South Australia (SLSA).

¹⁵ J.R.B. Love, 'Visit to Killalpaninna Dec 1910' PRG214 series 3, SLSA.

These comments on degeneracy are similar to Strehlow's remarks in his 1921 newspaper article. It is possible that Love was echoing his more experienced missionary hosts in making this assessment. If so he was more critical of their approach to evangelism. While Love admired the Lutherans and what they had achieved, he thought they erred in emphasizing conformity with their religious expectations rather than the welfare of the Dieri,

I fear they are not quite practical enough, and insist a little too much on the religious side. I believe the missions should be primarily industrial, ultimately religious, but not solely, nor necessarily, primarily religious.¹⁶

Love was to stick with this view throughout his career which contrasts with Strehlow's priorities, and that of most missionaries of that era. He made a very similar observation about the Anglican Roper River mission in 1914, 'I must confess that religious zeal outruns practical ability and in some cases commonsense'.¹⁷

Love met Strehlow in 1913 when he visited Hermannsburg in the early stages of his travels through the Northern Territory, to the Western Australian and Queensland borders. Strehlow was his host at Hermannsburg, but unfortunately Love gives us no more information about their meeting. He was, however, impressed by the mission. The children were 'happy, laughing youngsters' and the men helpful, offering to unpack the camels. One of the children's favourite pastimes he noted was singing hymns. He was as impressed by the German hospitality as he had been three years earlier at Bethesda.¹⁸

Unlike Strehlow, Love admired the ceremonies he witnessed as he made his way through the outback. He may have been referring to Arrernte ceremonies in a letter he wrote to his sister in June 1913 about 3 months after he left Hermannsburg:

there is all the pomp and glory of the sacred ceremonies. These things require a man's lifelong deep study to comprehend (Spencer and Gillen do not know much of them)... The missionaries, with good knowledge of the language and years of study, confess that they do not understand much of these things.¹⁹

¹⁶ J.R.B. Love, 'Visit to Killalpaninna Dec 1910' PRG214 series 3, SLSA.

¹⁷ J.R.B. Love to Jack 3 Feb 1914 PRG214/39/22, SLSA.

¹⁸ J.R.B. Love to Father and Mother, 27 Feb 1912 [seems to be incorrect year should be 1913] PRG214/39/15, SLSA.

¹⁹ J.R.B. Love to Maggie, 10 June 1913 PRG214/39/18. He had a rather similar view of Spencer's cultural and linguistic knowledge as Strehlow's supporters, maybe influenced by the Lutheran missionary as he went on to

In his report for the Presbyterian Board of Missions in 1914 after his two year journey through the outback, Love gives equal emphasis to the importance of the missionary and the ethnologist, writing, ‘It is extremely desirable that a well equipped expedition should ascertain the exact position as regards the desert tribes of the west-central part of the continent on both religious and ethnological grounds’.²⁰ He was pleased when he was appointed as a temporary missionary at Port George IV (Kunmunya) mission in the Kimberley in northern Western Australia. These people had only very recently come into contact with outsiders. In contrast he never warmed to his posting after World War I to Mapoon in Queensland, where most of the Aboriginal inhabitants were of mixed descent, because he did not find them ethnographically interesting. ‘I have not and never shall have the keen delight in this work that I had among my own people – the real Australian blacks – but it is good and most necessary work.’²¹ When he finally returned to the Kimberley mission in 1927, he was thrilled to be back among those he regarded as his own people.

One of his first tasks, like Strehlow’s, was to begin translating books of the bible. And like Strehlow he was impressed by the complexity of Aboriginal languages. There, however, the parallels between the two men’s approaches to scientific endeavour and evangelism end. Over the five or so years Strehlow carried out ethnographic research, he recorded data in great detail but at one remove, never observing firsthand, or participating in Arrernte cultural or social practices. He linked Christianity with hard, productive work. Although we know that Strehlow had put great effort into his study of Arrernte and Loritja society and culture, his correspondence and reports never admit that there is any merit in them. The ceremonies are mere entertainments and have no deeper meaning. The people during the ceremonial season behave as if mad and possessed.²²

Love thought of his ethnographic interests as melding with his evangelism. The most important thing was to save the people from degradation and record their beliefs and cultural

say, ‘Spencer certainly has done good work, but is it evident that with no knowledge of the languages and on a short trip, his information cannot be deep.’ Love remained critical of Spencer’s work in a book review in the early 1930s of SD Porteus’s *The Psychology of Primitive People* he criticise d Porteus for drawing on Spencer and Gillen’s work. PRG214/20/1, SLSA.

²⁰ J.R.B. Love, ‘The Aborigines Their Present Condition As seen in Northern South Australia, the Northern Territory, North-west Australia and Western Queensland’ Under honorary commission from the Board of Missions of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, 1913-14. PRG214/8, SLSA.

²¹ J.R.B. Love to his Father 5 Dec 1919, PRG214/39/89, SLSA.

²² C. Strehlow to G.J. Rechner 3 Sept 1898, LA.

and social life. He always carried a notebook with him to record his observations as he moved among the Wororra (McGregor 1986, 77). While he condemned some Wororra practices such as polygamy, betrothal of baby girls at birth and infanticide, he also acknowledged that they had important roles in traditional society (Love 1936, 95). He noted that among the Wororra there were no single women. When a woman's husband died she married his brother, so every woman was part of a family unit. To destroy polygamous unions had social as well as moral consequences. Aboriginal women who had to go out every day to collect food could not carry and nurture more than one baby at a time, or cope with a disabled baby so these babies were killed. In 1940 Love wrote to the South Australian Commissioner of Native Affairs,

In preaching of the Gospel my aim has always been to conserve the good in the tribal system, and to be very cautious in breaking down the primitive customs that might at first seem strange to a white man who may not realise the valuable part these customs play in the life of the tribe.

I believe that Kunmunya (Pt George IV) has shown that Christianity can be successfully grafted on to native law, rather than destroy native law and attempt to replace it with white man's law. The tribal corroborees I encourage. These serve a valuable purpose in uniting people and providing outlet for the expression of artistic and histrionic feelings.²³

After observing a series of rituals, Love was struck by the deep religiosity of the Wororra and how similar their observances were to Christian ones,

I had been witnessing rites akin to the most sacred observances of the Christian faith. I had been witnessing, in all their primitiveness and crudeness of administration, the rites of the Laying-on of hands, of Baptism, and of a sacred meal that could without irreverence be called Communion. (Love 1936, 219)

He pointed out that Christian rites were based on pre-existing ones which were imbued with new meaning by Christ, and so Aboriginal people would be able to take their pre-existing rituals and 'put them on a proper foundation'. There was no great gulf between the civilised and the savage.

²³ J.R.B. Love to Commissioner of Native Affairs, Bray 20 Dec 1940, PRG214/1/97, SLSA.

David Trudinger and Mark Clendon have suggested that we should not exaggerate Love's enlightened outlook and that he was often conflicted and contradictory over what he found acceptable in Wororra society, and what he did not. (Trudinger 2010, 144-46; Clendon 2014, 11-15). He certainly adhered to the racial attitudes of the time, distinguishing between people of full Aboriginal descent, 'fullbloods', and people of mixed descent, 'halfcastes', and making judgments of people according to their racial mix. He wrote in 1914, 'The full-blood will probably always be in a subordinate (very subordinate) position, and, provided he is justly treated, it is better and safer so'.²⁴ Nevertheless, Love's ethnographic research was at one with his evangelical aims.

As we have seen, Love's interest in ethnography pre-dated his work as a missionary, but his investigations remained those of an amateur. Although he wrote a Masters thesis in linguistics on the grammar of Wororra, and read anthropological work, he was never able to undertake a formal study in anthropology. Through the 1930s and 1940s until his death in 1947, Love wrote books and articles about the Wororra covering linguistics, anthropology and material culture. He made at least one ethnographic film and sent artefacts to anthropologists and museums in England.²⁵ Recently scholars have re-engaged with his work reissuing his book *Stone-Age Bushmen Today* and his Wororra grammar (Love 2009; 2000).

He was most widely known for his book *Stone Age Bushmen Today* published in 1936. It is difficult to characterise this book. Strehlow's seven volume study of the Arrente and Loritja was a methodical, carefully edited series, starting with myths, legends and fables of the Aranda and Loritja, followed by totemic conceptions and the *tjurunga* of the Aranda and Loritja, the social life of the two tribes and lastly the material culture. Love's book is a mixture of personal memoir and ethnography. He describes his first trip by lugger to the mission, exploring the country around the mission with a small group of Wororra men, one of whom, he realised, contemplated killing him. When he discusses Wororra life it is not at a

²⁴ J.R.B. Love to Father and Mother 24 March 1914. PRG214/39/14, SLSA.

²⁵ Publications include. 'Mythology, totemism and religion of the Worora tribe of North-west Australia' reprinted July 1935 from the Report of the Melbourne Meeting of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science; 'Notes on the Wororra tribes of N. Western Australia', *Transactions of the Royal Society of SA*, 1917; *Stone-Age Bushmen of Today*; 'The double raft of N-W Australia' *Man*, 1939; and several articles and Notes in Oceania; G. Ph Miles, Cranmore Ethnographical Museum Kent to JRB Love, 17 Jan 1935, PRG214/1/32, SLSA; HR Balfour to JRB Love 30 Jan 1935, PRG214/1/51, SLSA; TA Joyce, Department of Oriental Antiquities and Ethnography, British Museum to JRB Love 5 July 1935, PRG214/1/56, SLSA. Several letters from HJ Brauholtz at the British Museum eg 1 Oct 1935, 12 April 1937, PRG214/1/58, SLSA.

clinical distance but more as a travelogue; he identifies to whom he spoke, how he obtained his information and what was going on around him. It is clear that Love felt no compunction about attending ceremonies or involving himself in the everyday life of the people. There was no division at Kunmunya between the ‘heathen’ and those who professed Christianity in terms of the food they were given or the circumstances in which they lived, unlike Hermannsburg under Strehlow’s direction, where there were clear demarcations.

There is little indication in the book as to when he collected information, whether in 1915 or after his return in 1927. Unlike most functionalist anthropology which dominated the discipline in Australia between the world wars, Love writes about how things were changing. He makes no attempt to present a pristine, untouched traditional society. The articles Love wrote for professional journals are more dispassionate, but the reader is still well aware of the writer’s interventions.

Love did not turn a blind eye to Wororra culture; he acknowledged it, tried to understand the underlying rationale of Wororra life, and then tried to see how Christian values and beliefs could enhance and in some ways change that life. He did not impose outright bans on particular activities he found obnoxious, or turn against people who wanted to maintain cultural traits which a missionary might regard as unchristian.

Although Love did not have Strehlow’s grounding in languages when he began his career as a missionary, he eventually made a formal study in linguistics, completing his Masters degree on Wororra grammar in 1933.²⁶ Both ethnographic and linguistic knowledge underpinned his evangelical work. On hearing that he would be sent to Mapoon rather than Kunmunya after the war, Love anticipated he would miss the excitement of learning a new language and ‘a wealth of folklore’, as well as delving into an alien psychology. He believed Mapoon was a community where ‘tribal traditions have been shattered and folklore lost’ and the ‘savage life’ of corroborees and fights which kept people ‘alert and fit’ no longer existed.²⁷ Nine years later, back at Kunmunya, Love was fascinated with his work translating St Mark, trying to find equivalent words for biblical concepts including ‘sins’ and ‘holy’. Like Strehlow he enjoyed the intricacies of grammar.

²⁶ It would have been difficult or even impossible to study anthropology in Adelaide at that time as there were no courses in anthropology or linguistics. Love’s MA supervisor was a classical philologist.

²⁷ J.R.B. Love to Father 5 Dec 1919 PRG214/39/89, SLSA.

Conclusion

The German-trained missionary and the Australian-trained missionary whose careers overlapped shared a humanitarian concern for the Aboriginal people with whom they lived, while relating to them in quite different ways. They shared intellectual interests, not only in evangelical Christianity, but in ethnography and linguistics. Yet the way they pursued these interests was quite different.

Strehlow was intellectually aligned with the country of his birth. He looked to a German reading public and institutions for support and recognition, but in the globalizing world of the early twentieth century his work, published in Frankfurt, was known of, if not read, in Australia and Britain. It was condemned in Australia, especially by Baldwin Spencer, whose own research among the Arrernte was undertaken using different methodologies and drawing different conclusions from those of Strehlow (J. Strehlow 2011; Kenny 2013; Veit 2004). Love was Australian educated and most of his work was published in Australia, although he did correspond with people in Britain, particularly with staff of the British Museum in the 1930s. He did not speak German, and it is unlikely he was aware of Strehlow's ethnographic work, despite meeting Strehlow when he was a young man and admiring the achievements of the Hermannsburg mission. He was, however critical of Baldwin Spencer's approach to Arrernte ethnography, which he argued was neither informed by a knowledge of the language or indepth lifelong study.²⁸ Notwithstanding their different education and life experiences, Strehlow and Love did hold some attitudes in common. They worked closely with Aboriginal people of full descent yet perceived them as societies which had degenerated over the eons from sophisticated people who constructed a complex language to the present day people who they believed intellectually incapable of such a feat.

Both men undertook ethnographic research but using different methodologies. Strehlow perceived his collection of data as a scientific exercise, separate from his day-to-day life, undertaken in the evening and at the behest of his mentor von Leonhardi. He stopped his investigations on completion of his manuscript and the death of his patron. Love took an interest in the culture and beliefs of the Wororra and later the Pitjantjatjara throughout his

²⁸ JRB Love to Maggie 10 June 1913, PRG214/39/18, SLSA.

ministry. He did not distinguish between his evangelical and ethnographic work but believed that they were interrelated. Strehlow claimed the Arrernte believed in a higher being, Altjira, who 'embodies the highest good', lives in the sky and is eternal, although unlike the Christian God he neither creates humans, nor cares about them. (C. Strehlow 1907 [1991 translation]). He argued that this belief in a higher being suggested that the Arrernte would be able to make the transition to an acceptance of the Christian God. Love also looked to the existing Aboriginal society to support his contention the Wororra were open to Christianity, but he based his hopes on a close observation of their ceremonial and ritual life as we have seen, not an abstract belief. While Strehlow denigrated the religious life of the Arrernte and thought ceremonies were licentious and mere entertainments, Love perceived them as expressions of art, music and drama as well as demonstrating an appreciation of the sacred.

Where the two men's interests coincided is their deep appreciation of language and grammar. They both admired the complex structures of Aboriginal languages, the challenge of learning them and translating Christian religious texts into them. When Strehlow finished his ethnographic study he returned to linguistics and translation. Love undertook a higher degree in linguistics.

This brief evaluation of the work of two linguists and ethnographers with a deep commitment to Christian evangelism suggests that the interaction of evangelism, ethnography and linguistics was complex and varied from one missionary to the next. Today there is a greater acknowledgment than previously of the ethnographic and linguistic contributions missionaries such as Carl Strehlow and J.R.B. Love have made to our knowledge of Aboriginal societies and the orthography and recording of their languages. What is not well understood is the interrelationship between ethnographic and linguistic knowledge and their evangelism.

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