



REVIVING GERMAN LANGUAGE IN THE BAROSSA

The Hon. A. PICCOLO (Light): At the end of last month was International Day of Bilingualism. I am a great supporter of young people trying to learn a second language wherever possible, because languages not only open the door to understanding other cultures but also can benefit in an economic sense.

Closer to home, a language that was once taught in the region, particularly in the Schubert electorate, was German, which sadly has a sore history, and I will explain why. I have been working alongside the Barossa German Language Association for some time now. I know they are very keen to re-establish a bilingual German program either as a subject or subjects to be taught in German or as a bilingual program throughout the Barossa. With appropriate government support, I believe a pilot program

could be initiated to see what the uptake would be.

The Barossa German Language Association aims to value, renew and expand the use of German in the region and hosts regular events spoken in German, such as the monthly Kaffee and Kuchen event, which is basically coffee and cake. Some key individuals involved in the association include Dr Peter Mickan from the University of Adelaide, who has been a key driver of this initiative as a project leader of a Barossa German language revival and renewal project, which led to the establishment of the Barossa German Language Association in 2015; Steffi Traeger, the current president of the Barossa German Language Association; local historians Everard Leske and Don Ross, and Don is also the manager of the Barossa Museum, and they both regularly attend events; and Reto Gasser, who is a former teacher at Xavier College when it was in my electorate, and he provides catering for the events. He was

actually a catering and hospitality teacher, and he lives in my electorate. Very importantly, German is a heritage language in the Barossa. There is an emerging younger generation of local families and migrants who want their children to learn and retain bilingualism with effective German programs. A bilingual program would re-establish bilingualism for community members who have missed out on the opportunity to be competent in the use of German. I hope that a motion in this parliament at some point will contribute to the rehabilitation of the status of German as significant in the lives of people and in the history of the Barossa Valley.

German is of significant social and cultural value. I understand that before 1914 and the First World War, there were 29 bilingual German-English schools in the Barossa Valley. The schools were closed down due to anti-German sentiment in 1917. This has had a big impact on the practice of spoken German in the valley. The Barossa was settled by German speakers in the mid-19th century, with spoken and written German maintained by a few descendants into the 21st century.

The history of spoken German in the Barossa is a combination of the resilience of language transmission across generations and the fragility of language in the face of ethnic hostility, exacerbated by global conflicts. In the Barossa community, German was spoken normally until the second half

of the 20th century. People spoke German with families and neighbours and in their day-to-day business. They attended local Lutheran churches with services held in German.

When children went to school, they were required to learn English as an additional language. Celebrations and social events were in German. German was the first language at home, in church, in schools and for business. It was for quite a while the community's language in the Barossa. Sunday school, confirmation classes, weddings, youth activities and funerals were also spoken in German. Church services were based on the German liturgy, with hymns sung in German and preaching in German. Pastors and teachers were educated in German. Education was valued in Lutheran communities.

Between 1839 and 1914, some 115 Lutheran congregational schools were opened in South Australia. In the Barossa Valley, from 1842 to 1862, 23 community bilingual German-English schools were established. The curriculum was organised with subjects taught in German in the morning and English in the afternoon. Sadly, by the middle of the 20th century German was no longer a community language. In a few families, German was spoken in private at home, to talk with grandparents, but the maintenance of German through use in the family has practically ceased.

In the years from 1914 to 1946, anti-German attitudes, actions and legislation had an enormous impact on German language use in the community. With the declaration of war in August 1914, the descendants of German-speaking immigrants who had been welcomed into the English colony in the 19th century and contributed significantly to the economy of the new colony experienced ethnic discrimination and internment, including pastors, community leaders and businesspeople. To cope, some families actually Anglicised their names.

In 1914, inscriptions of gravestones in German were discontinued. The Nomenclature Act of 1917 changed 69 German place names in South Australia to English—places like Bethany in the Barossa Valley and others. Petersburg became Peterborough, Hahndorf became Ambleside, Lobethal became Tweedvale, Klemzig became Gaza and Blumberg became Birdwood, amongst some others. A few of the names were restored between 1935 and 1986, but others remain unchanged.

In 1917, the South Australian government passed legislation to close all bilingual schools. The legislation halted local bilingual education and disenfranchised teachers who could not switch to teaching English. After the Second World War, when former bilingual schools were reopened, the curriculum was only in English without reference to the German

history and culture of the school. By the end of the Second World War, public and private use of German was discouraged and German was taught in schools not as a community language but as a foreign language.

Today, German has virtually disappeared from public use outside some of the Barossa German Language Association events. The promotion of Kaffee and Kuchen events has attracted recent immigrants to join with heritage speakers. The current focus of the Barossa German Language Association is education. It has established programs for preschoolers to adults. There is a playgroup (spielgruppe) for preschoolers, children's club (kinderklub) for school-age children and German classes for adults. The Barossa German Language Association is now planning the introduction of bilingual teaching in local schools. The re-establishment of bilingual classes is a social justice responsibility of cultural restoration with recognition of the value of bilingual education.

Just to re-enforce the importance of language, it is interesting when speaking to people who have a great understanding of the history of the Barossa Valley and German migration to the Barossa to learn that the German people were a highly educated population who put huge value on education. I wondered why German people were different from groups of migrants in other parts of the world. I am told it is that they are Lutherans. Lutheran people have a strong

emphasis on the relationship between an individual and God, and so to understand that relationship they had to be able to read the Bible, and to be able to read they were educated.

So there was a strong emphasis in Lutheran families to make sure that their family members were well educated so they could have that relationship with God. As a result, German was a really strong language and, as a community, they were quite literate and well educated. It would be sad if a language that has had such a strong history in this state disappeared. I think the time has now come to consider some bilingual schools, acknowledging the importance of English but also accessing the culture of the Barossa through an understanding of the German language.