

National Indigenous Languages Report



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The authors show respect by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connections to land, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and Elders past, present and future.

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CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, formerly the Department of Communications and the Arts.

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) (Jacqueline Battin, Jason Lee, Douglas Marmion, Rhonda Smith, Tandee Wang).

Australian National University (ANU) researchers at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) (Yonatan Dinku, Janet Hunt, Francis Markham), and the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language (CoEDL) (Denise Angelo, Emma Browne, Inge Kral, Carmel O'Shannessy, Jane Simpson, Hilary Smith).

REPORT TERMINOLOGY

In this Report, "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people" and "First Australians" refers to all people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. The terms "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages", "Indigenous languages" or "Australian Indigenous languages" are used to refer to languages of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. An extensive Glossary is provided at the end of the Report to provide the meanings of terms used in this Report.

ARTIST STATEMENT

The artwork by Jordan Lovegrove, a Ngarrindjeri man, of Dreamtime Creative, portrays the vast diversity of different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and the National Indigenous Language Report's goal to maintain, preserve and celebrate the languages. The different patterned sections of leaves represent all the different languages and language groups including sleeping and new languages. The tree provides a visual representation of the flow, connectivity and joy of the languages; the languages branch out like a tree, connecting individuals, families and communities with their culture and identity.

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National Indigenous Languages Report



FOREWORD

The 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages has raised awareness of the crucial role that language plays in people's lives.

Languages are much more than a communication tool. They are integral to maintaining the identity, sustainability, vitality and strength of people and cultures across the globe. When a language is no longer spoken it disconnects people from their past, and a wealth of knowledge, tradition and culture becomes harder to express and pass on.

Today, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) estimates that of the 6,700 languages spoken worldwide, at least 40 per cent are in danger of disappearing. Many of these are Indigenous languages.¹

In Australia, the state of Indigenous languages is considered to be critical. As one of the most culturally rich and innovative countries on earth, we have a responsibility to reverse the decline as our legacy for future generations.

Indigenous cultures are maintained via the spoken word; hence languages are a vital underpinning of all forms of cultural expression, including art, music, and dance. For more than 60,000 years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages have carried dreaming stories, songlines and knowledge from generation to generation. Many of these languages are no longer spoken today.

Addressing the erosion of Indigenous languages will require working together to find and advance solutions.

The National Indigenous Languages Report is a key element of the Australian Government's

ongoing commitment to maintain, preserve and celebrate Indigenous languages. Each year, the Government provides around \$20 million through the Indigenous Languages and Arts program to support the revival and maintenance of languages, as well as the creation of new art. This investment also supports an Australia-wide network of Indigenous Language Centres which provide vital language services to communities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been saying for a long time that there are many benefits from speaking language – this written Report supports that position.

It includes evidence from a range of studies that show the economic and social benefits of speaking language, and provides information about the current state of language use.

This Report shows the sheer diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, how they are used and their ongoing importance in Australia. It also shows how new languages are evolving and how speaking language is vital for the well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to the National Indigenous Languages Report, and acknowledge the invaluable input of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language Centres and organisations and the language workers who have contributed their expertise.

**The Hon Paul Fletcher MP,
Minister for Communications,
Cyber Safety and the Arts**



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Report supports what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have consistently asserted about the importance of language; speaking language provides cultural, social and economic benefits to individuals, communities and the nation.

Drawing on research and analysis conducted by the Australian National University (ANU), this Report further identifies a wide range of language-based employment opportunities, such as translating and interpreting, teaching, arts and culture, broadcasting, tourism, and land and sea management. Given the demonstrated benefits of speaking language, and the widely acknowledged benefits of employment, capitalising on these opportunities should be a priority for governments at all levels.

While there is such strong evidence demonstrating the benefits of speaking language, the overwhelming majority – around 90 per cent – of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people report that they do not speak their traditional language.²

When the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) last conducted a survey of Indigenous languages in Australia (in 2014), it found that 13 traditional languages could be considered relatively strong (in that they are acquired as a first language by most children in the community). In the five years since that survey, this number has dropped to 12, demonstrating the continued threat to languages in Australia.

While there has been a decline in the number of strong traditional languages, there is also positive news; many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are actively seeking ways to reconnect with traditional languages. This is painstaking work, but in parts of the country some languages are being reawakened, demonstrating what is possible with community will and ongoing investment.

There has also been increased interest from non-Indigenous Australians in the country's original languages. Sometimes this is through learning to speak language (including in schools), or through appreciating the expression of traditional language in music or other art forms, or by making it visible, for example through dual naming of places and sites.

This positive news does not afford room for complacency, as the small number of speakers in any language group in Australia means that all Indigenous languages are under threat.

This Report makes clear that there is no single, homogenous experience of Indigenous languages in Australia. In some parts of the country, people speak traditional languages in all facets of their lives, including for cultural and commercial activities. In other areas, it may be only Elders who speak traditional language on a regular basis, while other generations use it primarily for cultural or commercial purposes. In yet other places, there may be no fluent speakers, and perhaps only a few words or phrases are remembered or have been revived and used. In some parts, new languages have emerged from the historical contact between English and traditional languages and are now used every day by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as their main language.

For the most part, the role of language has not been well-considered in the design and delivery of government policies, programs and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In some sectors, translation and interpreting services are available for people who speak traditional language. What has been largely ignored is the role that traditional language plays in the lives of people who may not speak it. Further, the circumstances through which languages have been lost are still a source of sadness and grief for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Another finding of this Report is that there is no one, clear context in which languages function. This Report outlines an approach which policy makers and service providers can use to understand the regional differences and considerations of language, when planning, implementing and evaluating initiatives.

Given the centrality of language – both its absence and its presence – to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, this Report encourages organisations, including governments at all levels, to use its findings to inform policy, program development and delivery for this country's First Peoples.

KEY FINDINGS:



Benefits gained by speaking language (Chapter 2)

1. Language is a fundamental part of Indigenous culture and identity, even for those who do not speak an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language.
2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a range of different relationships to language—from those who speak an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language as their first language to those who are learning a language as part of revival efforts.
3. All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, traditional and new, provide significant social and economic benefits to their speakers, including income-generating and employment opportunities.
4. Speaking language has demonstrated benefits for individual well-being and health, particularly mental health. Speaking language is also beneficial in learning contexts.

The state of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages (Chapter 3)

5. All of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are under threat.
6. Less than 10 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are reported to be speaking language at home.
7. The AIATSIS 2018–19 Survey of 141 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language varieties finds

that at least 123 are in use or being revitalised/revived in Australia today; the 2016 Census results found 159 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages reported to still be in use.

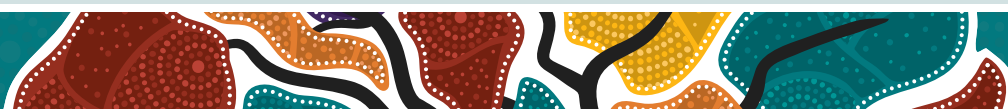
8. Most of these languages are highly endangered. The AIATSIS survey found only 12 relatively strong traditional languages and two strong new languages.
9. New languages – particularly Kriol and Yumplatok/Torres Strait Creole – are some of the strongest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in Australia, and their use is growing.

Maintaining and bringing Indigenous languages back (Chapter 4)

10. Maintenance, revitalisation, renewal and reawakening activities are vitally important to support the continuation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.
11. Even traditional languages currently considered relatively strong require purposeful and ongoing maintenance actions, so they do not become critically endangered.
12. The AIATSIS 2018–19 Survey finds that there are at least 31 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language varieties being reawakened by communities in Australia.

Opportunities for improved services and programs (Chapter 5)

13. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who speak language can experience difficulties with equitable access to services when they are delivered only in English.
14. The diversity of language situations and contexts in Australia means it is impossible to have a 'one size fits all' approach to service delivery and program design.
15. There are approaches available to guide how language is considered in the provision of services, designing programs and in supporting the vitality of language.
16. There is a strong need for more extensive and consistent data on the state of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. Existing data collection methods do not, in most cases, recognise the complexity of language contexts in Australia or reflect the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



GUIDE TO THIS REPORT

This Report is different from past reports about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.³ For the first time, research specialists have come together to review the breadth of evidence regarding the benefits of speaking language (which have long been understood by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people). The extent to which these benefits are being realised by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is demonstrated in an analysis of the state of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in Australia. The analysis of data, research literature and the language survey together recognises the diversity and complexity of Australia's language landscape.

This Report provides a synthesis of an extensive range of data and research: the Report of the Third National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS) conducted by AIATSIS (publication forthcoming at time of publication);⁴ analysis of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) by ANU researchers at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research and the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language (CoEDL);⁵ and a literature review exploring available information on well-being and Indigenous language ecologies by CoEDL.⁶ Research conducted by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors has been prioritised where possible.

The purpose of combining these various ways of exploring the use, importance and state of Australia's Indigenous languages is to provide a strong evidence base for decision-makers and people working to provide language services to stem and reverse the loss of traditional languages.

The findings in this Report are robust, despite limitations in the data available on the state of Indigenous languages and how they affect people's lives.⁷ Current data sources do not, for example, consistently distinguish between the different language situations and contexts across the country, or between types of Indigenous language (traditional or new). All data sources also required participants to self-report, creating varying ranges in what people consider a language and how they judge the proficiency of speakers. Methodologies and limitations to the data are explored in Appendix 1 and in more detail in the supplementary reports by the ANU and AIATSIS.

To date, data collection on Indigenous languages has for the most part had to fit with collection methods that are not designed with or by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (with the exception of the National Indigenous Languages Surveys). Data collection also

THIS IS THE FIRST IN A SERIES OF REPORTS; OTHER REPORTS IN THE SERIES INCLUDE:

The Third National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS3)

Indigenous language use and well-being: Findings from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey

Well-being and Indigenous Language Ecologies: a strengths-based approach

has not taken into account that languages may still be a strong part of cultural identity, whether or not they are still spoken. The way some data is collected may not reflect the full relationship Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have with language.⁸

The Key Findings are explored in the subsequent six chapters of this Report.

- **Chapter 1** sets the scene and provides context for the terms and approaches taken in the Report to better understand the situation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in Australia. This includes the different ways that language is used and different types of language ecologies in which they operate.
- **Chapter 2** analyses the NATSISS data and other research to outline the economic and social benefits gained by speaking language.
- **Chapter 3** explores in more depth how languages are being used and the extent to which they are being used. This includes information on the number of languages and speakers.
- **Chapter 4** has two parts: Part One considers the different situations that create an environment where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are maintained; and Part Two explores initiatives for revitalising, renewing and reawakening language.
- **Chapter 5** explores how people are accessing services and programs and what the (language) barriers are that, if removed, could improve access.
- **Chapter 6** describes further opportunities for an enhanced understanding of Australia's Indigenous languages. The concepts raised in this Report are complex and many matters are raised that will require ongoing work and commitment.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

THE IMPORTANCE OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LANGUAGES

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages are an important part of Australia's cultural identity, and form part of the diversity of cultures that make up Australia as a whole. These languages are distinctly and exclusively Australian. They contribute to understandings of our shared history and knowledge of the land and seas. They are intricately connected to the survival of some of the world's oldest cultures and as such, they are fundamental to Australia's uniqueness.

Language is central to identity and culture, regardless of the extent to which it is spoken. Australia's diverse languages carry with them unique identities, stories and heritage. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may speak and understand a number of languages at different levels of proficiency, depending on opportunities to learn and use them.¹⁰ All of these languages are highly valued by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and connect them to homelands.¹¹

Indigenous languages provide many individual and community benefits. They are integral to people's identity, connection with culture and emotional health. People who are emotionally strong are more likely to participate positively in social and economic activities (this is explored in detail in Chapter 2).

The diversity of Australia's Indigenous languages is a rich resource. Different perspectives and knowledge are highly valued in cutting edge research and policy teams because of their potential to facilitate greater creativity in finding solutions. On the world stage, it is well-known that cultural and linguistic diversity is a powerful promoter of conditions that foster innovation.¹² Australian Indigenous languages have also contributed in important ways to the understanding of the human language faculty,¹³ and that in turn has contributed to significant advances in technologies that incorporate and navigate languages.¹⁴

Beyond the clear economic and social benefits, there is also an imperative to recognise and value the richness of Australia's Indigenous languages. Valuing and respecting language provides a solid platform for reconciliation.¹⁵

How are 'Indigenous languages' defined and counted in this Report?

In order to count the number of languages spoken by a community, a way of identifying one language as being distinct from another is needed. But there is no single way of doing this. Linguists tend to use linguistic criteria, such as *mutual intelligibility*, whereby people speaking different language varieties can understand each other: if speaker A cannot understand speaker B, then A and B speak different languages. Other approaches will instead emphasise social, political and cultural criteria as the most important. For example, since the Yugoslavian civil wars, Serbian and Croatian are widely considered to be different languages; but Serbians and Croatians can generally understand each other.⁹

Sometimes a speaker of one named Indigenous language can understand a speaker of another differently-named language without any extra effort or knowledge – they are mutually intelligible. In this case, from a linguist's perspective they will be seen as speakers of 'dialects' of a *single* language. However, the differences may be of great significance to the speakers for reasons of identity, culture and Country, and so the community may hold that the speakers speak two *different* languages.

For this reason, linguistic studies of Australian Indigenous languages will tend to identify and count language varieties in one way; while asking speakers to self-identify which language(s) they speak will tend to give different results. The 2019 National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS3) received responses from communities, language centres and other organisations carrying out language projects, and linguists. This survey identified 141 language varieties. The 2016 Census asked speakers to self-identify which languages they spoke, and reports that approximately 159 Indigenous languages are currently spoken.

This Report uses the term 'language variety' as a cover term for some of these different approaches, recognising that, in some cases, the community of speakers may want to identify and count languages differently from linguists.

THE STATUS OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LANGUAGES IN AUSTRALIA

It is estimated that at the time of colonisation over 250 languages were spoken in Australia.¹³ The AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia (Figure 1.1) represents 390 recorded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language, tribal or nation groups.

The findings of this Report demonstrate that all of these traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are currently under threat, including those that are considered strong.¹⁷

The most important measure of language strength (or vitality) is intergenerational transmission.¹⁸ A strong language is one where the language is used fluently by all age groups, including children. Another measure of language vitality is the number of speakers. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, the total number of speakers is relatively small. According to some measures any language with fewer than 100,000 speakers is at risk.¹⁹ There are currently no Australian Indigenous languages with this number of speakers,²⁰ which is one clear indication that no Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language is safe. Figure 1.2 provides a picture of the traditional languages still spoken with a recorded number of speakers over 1,000.²¹



MYTH: THERE'S JUST ONE ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE, RIGHT? OR, WHAT'S THE ABORIGINAL WORD FOR THAT?

As this Report shows, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have always spoken lots of languages. Some of these languages are as similar as English and Dutch, some are distantly related, like English and Hindi, and some are as different as English and Chinese. Asking "What's the Aboriginal word for that?" is like asking "What's the European word for that?"



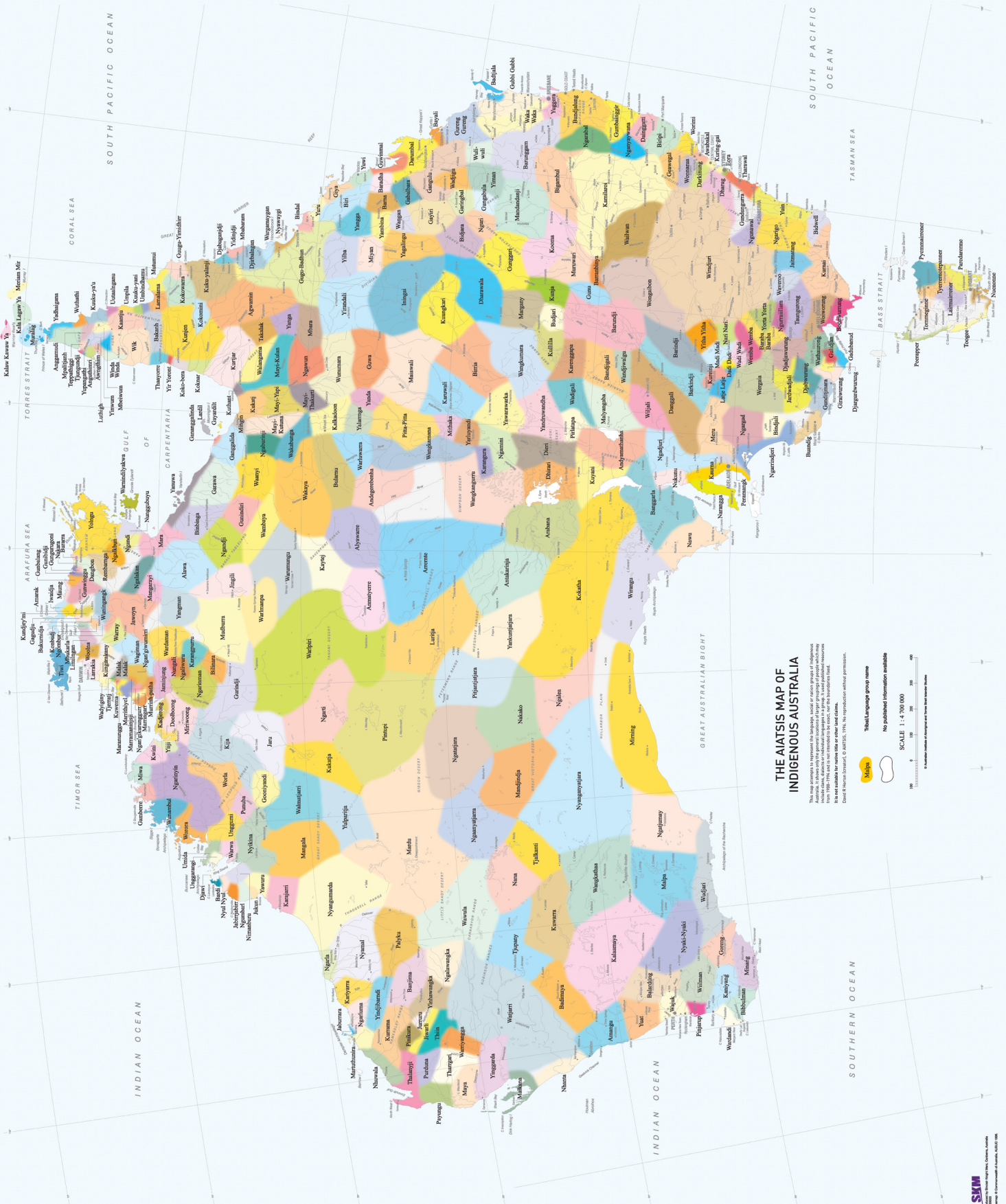


Figure 1.1: The AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia, by David R Horton, 1996. <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/aiatsis-map-indigenous-australia>

THREATS TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LANGUAGES

The threats to languages play out in different ways in different situations. For traditional languages, such situations can be one or a mixture of the following:

- situations where there was a break in intergenerational transmission and the language was considered to be sleepingⁱ
- situations where there is a decline in the number of speakers and fewer children are speaking the language
- situations where service delivery providers do not use the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language spoken for everyday purpose
- situations where language is not recognised or valued by the broader community.

The last two points also pertain to new languages, which are threatened in other ways. Speakers of new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are less visible in data and discourses about language.²² This could be due to less recognition or respect for new languages, or due to the fact that some new languages do not have widely used names and consequently cannot be easily identified or recognised.

At times, speakers of new languages have been incorrectly identified as speakers of English, speakers of a traditional language or even of an overseas language.²³

The consequences of speaking a new language are that there may be barriers to proper access to services, such as interpreting and translation. These issues are explored further in Chapter 5.

Language loss has occurred through many years of policies and actions which have disrupted language continuation. This has included punishing people for speaking their own languages and forcibly breaking up communities and families, resulting in breaking the transmission of languages to children.²⁴ As recently as 1980, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were punished for speaking language.²⁵ While this no longer occurs, the impact of these past policies and practices has been devastating, and there is still a limited understanding of the role that traditional language plays in people's lives.

These actions have hastened the shifting and loss of languages.²⁶ Societal marginalisation, and failure to understand the centrality of language to identity and culture, also contributes to this loss. Further to this, a failure to understand complex language situations and contexts contributes to the loss of languages.²⁷

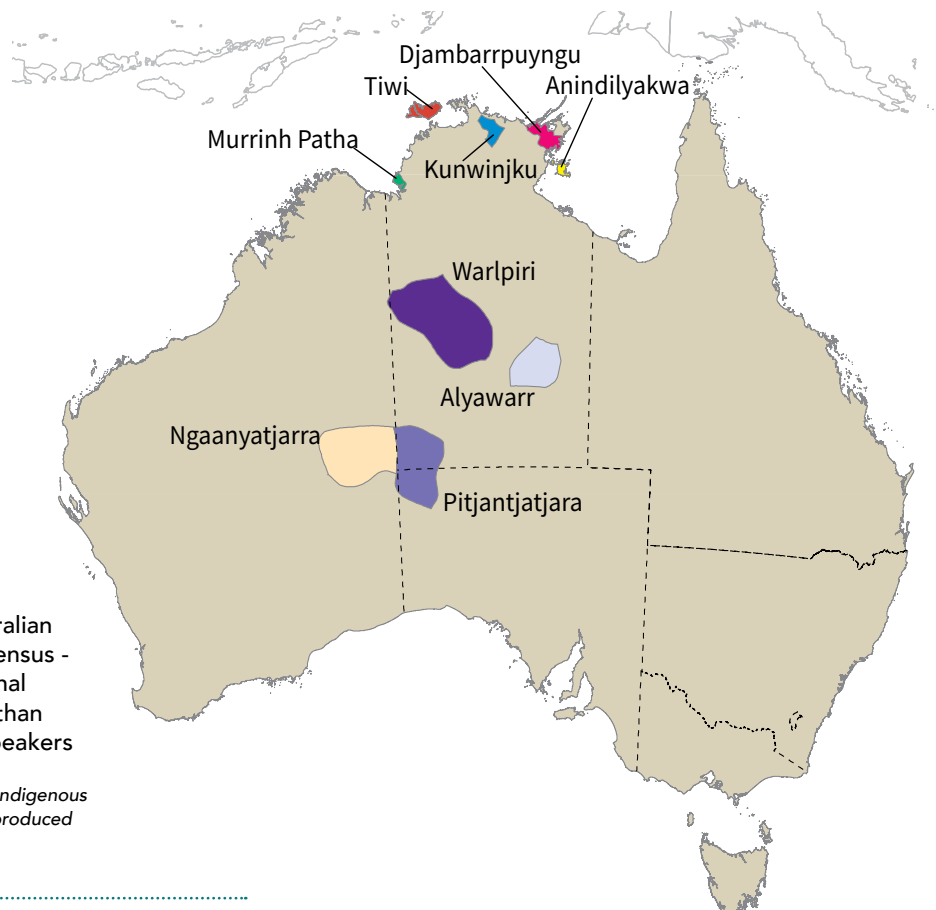


Figure 1.2: 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census - Heartlands of traditional languages with more than 1,000 self-reported speakers

Source: *Macquarie Atlas of Indigenous Australia, 2nd edn, 2019. Reproduced with permission.*

ⁱ 'Sleeping' refers to languages no longer spoken.

**FRAMING THE DISCUSSION:
UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLEX
INFLUENCES ON INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES**

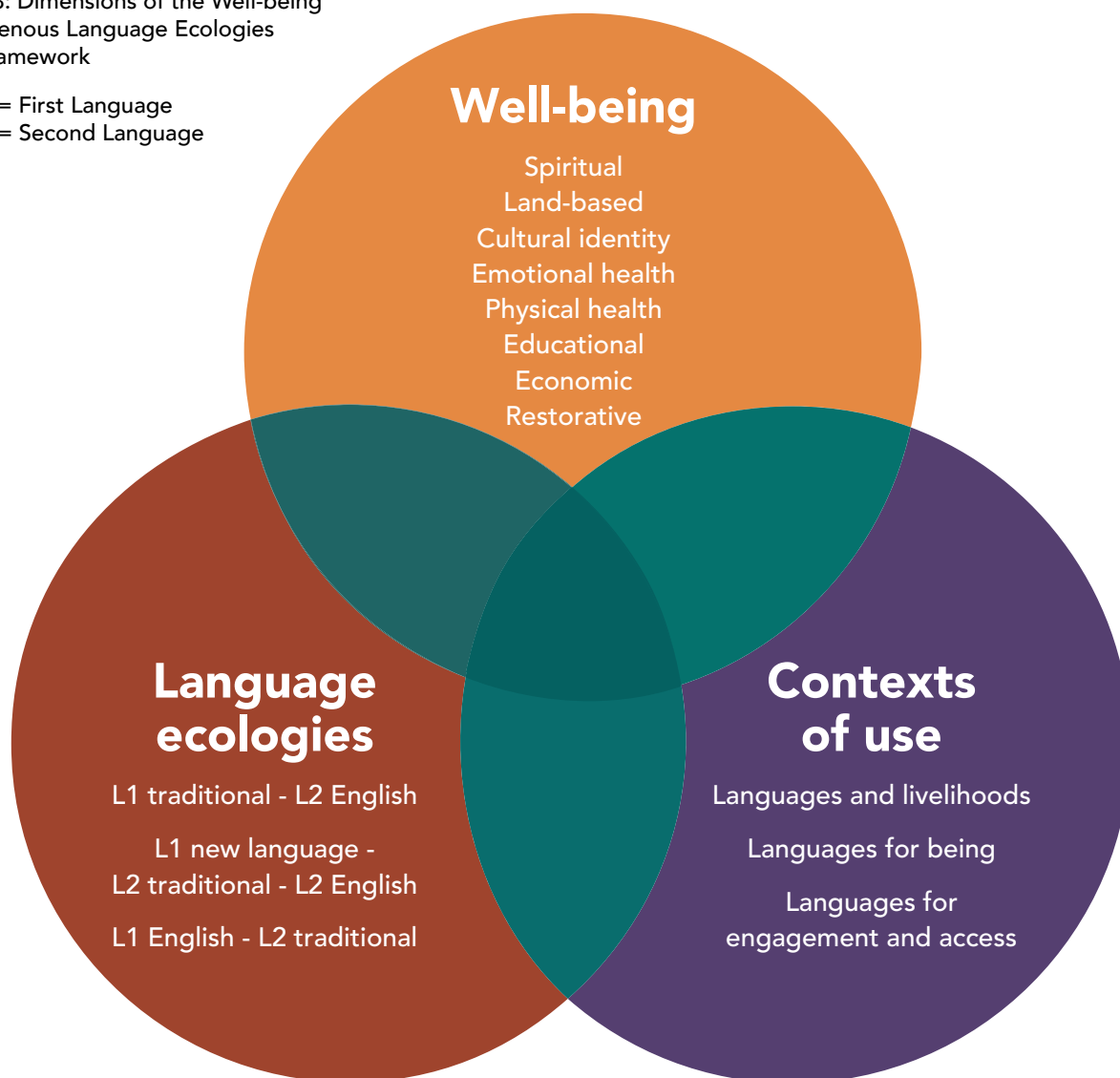
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia speak different languages and many draw on different languages for different purposes. Recognising these language situations and rendering them visible assists in the development of policies and programs that can provide significant benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

ANU researchers have developed an approach to describe some of the most prevalent kinds of language situations²⁸ (see Figure 1.3 below). They have used this system to show how language interacts with the well-

being and productivity of people and communities. The approach is based on the idea that in most places there is an arrangement of languages that is typical and expected for that area (the local language ecology) and it is derived from the different languages that people usually speak (individual language repertoires) in different contexts (for socio-cultural purposes, such as attending school, talking with family, visiting a doctor, or for cultural purposes). An individual's ability to interact with others or to access and benefit from services depends on their language matching the language in each interaction.²⁹ While this may seem self-evident, the fact that it is not reflected in current approaches to policy and program design, and service delivery, indicates that it is not widely understood or appreciated.

Figure 1.3: Dimensions of the Well-being and Indigenous Language Ecologies (WILE) Framework

Note: L1 = First Language
L2 = Second Language



TYPES OF LANGUAGES – A WAY OF THINKING ABOUT THE DIVERSE RANGE OF LANGUAGES SPOKEN

Three main types of language are learned and used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people around Australia.



Traditional languages: These are Australian languages spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people prior to colonisation, and the directly descended language varieties spoken today. Some are strong languages still spoken by children; others are being learned or renewed.



New languages: These Australian languages have formed since 1788 from language contact between speakers of traditional languages with speakers of English and/or other languages. New languages have historical influences from their source languages, including English, but they are not automatically understood by Standard Australian English speakers.



Englishes: Across Australia there are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of speaking English which differ somewhat from Standard Australian English, but which Standard Australian English speakers can more or less understand. These are varieties of English just as American English is a variety of English.

Language repertoires – language resources individuals can draw upon

Individuals acquire the languages they understand and speak from their life experiences, starting from birth, from what is spoken to them, used around them and learned from school or their own research. Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait people will speak one main language, with some knowledge of an additional language (depending on the opportunities available to them). Others may speak more than one language well, and will select which language to speak depending on who they want to talk to, what about, and in what context.³⁰ This can be referred to as code-switching (for more information, please see the Glossary). The different languages spoken and the fluency with which they speak them make up a person's language repertoire.

Socio-cultural purposes – different kinds of interactions

People deploy language(s) for different social and cultural purposes. Socio-cultural purposes can include:

- expressing identity or spirituality – for example, in cultural ceremonies or a Welcome to Country
- everyday interactions – for example, at home with family and friends or while shopping
- making a livelihood – for example, teachers, rangers, artists, interpreters and community liaison officers
- accessing services – for example, schooling, a doctor's appointment, financial services.

ANU researchers have identified a number of broad socio-cultural purposes associated with particular kinds of language use. An individual's well-being is likely to be fostered, or not, depending on whether their language repertoire matches the language required for particular interactions.³¹ The language(s) involved would be determined by the languages usually spoken locally (language ecology) and the purpose of the interaction (socio-cultural purposes). For example, delivery of government services, by default, typically occurs in English, which might pose a potential barrier if somebody does not speak English proficiently.

People use and need language for communicating and it is also part of identity.

A communication dimension

Everyone benefits from being able to use the language they speak best, whether it is for companionability or for high stakes information transfer (such as gaining health information). But Indigenous Australians have long been prevented from using their own languages, and this has been very damaging.³² For Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who speak an Indigenous language (traditional or new) as their main language, English-only interactions may also have a negative impact on well-being.

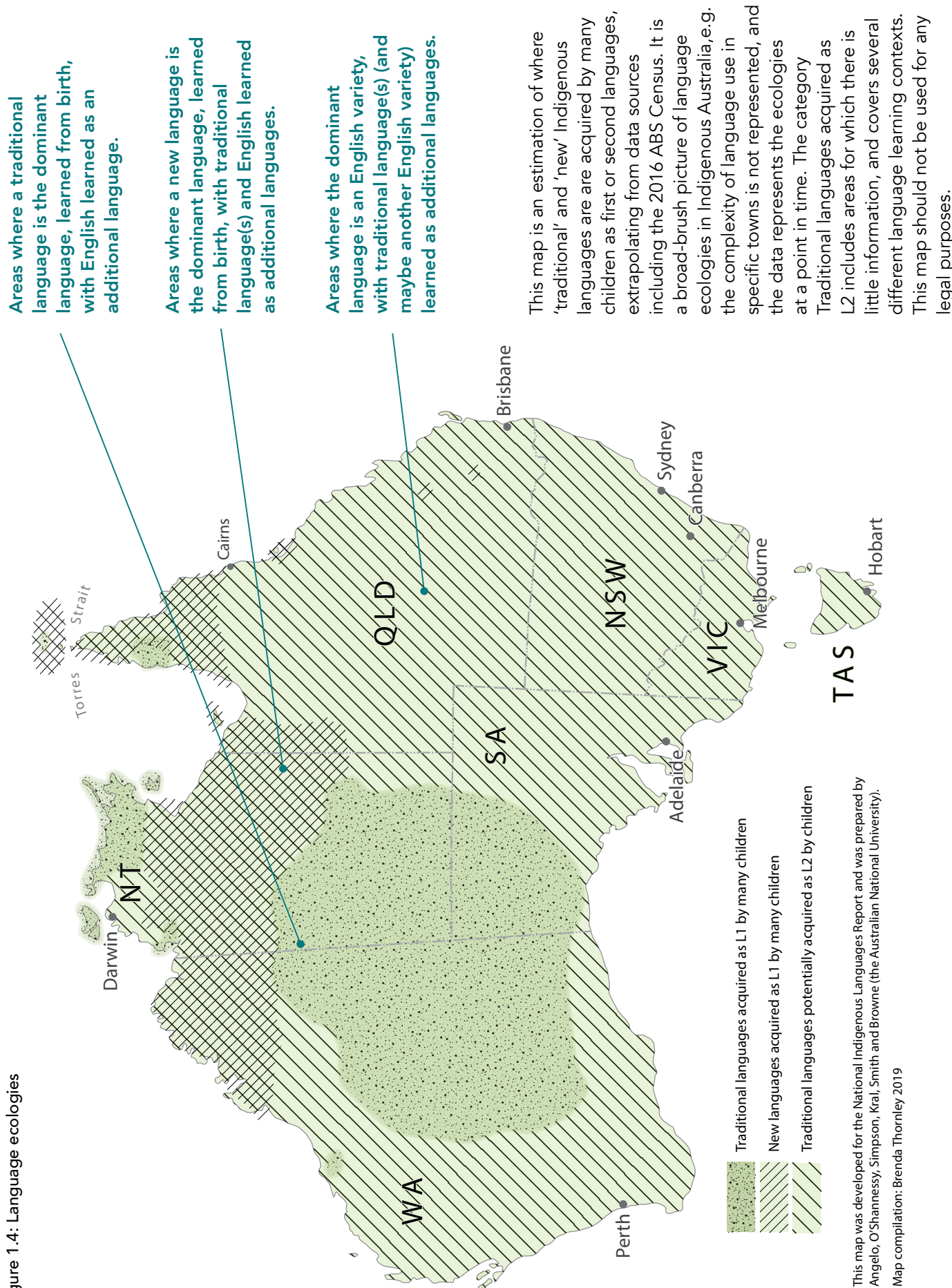
An identity dimension

Many Indigenous people emphasise the interconnectedness of language, culture and identity.³³ Expressing identity as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person occurs by speaking language, whether it is a few words or speaking it fluently. For people who are engaging in renewing or reawakening a traditional language, this activity itself appears to have positive effects on well-being.³⁴ Further to this, public respect for languages (through signs, broadcasts and so on) positively affirms cultural and individual identity.

The ANU found that much research has bypassed how languages were used in different places, and this makes it difficult to apply findings from one area to another.



Figure 1.4: Language ecologies



Language ecology – the languages used in a particular place

There is no single Indigenous language situation throughout the entire Australian continent.³⁵

Although Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language situations, taken as a whole, are rich, complex and dynamic, there are a number of common language situations.

This Report refers broadly to three types of language ecologies in Australia, as shown in Figure 1.4.

In some places **traditional languages** are strong, spoken by all age groups and learned by babies, while English is learned as a foreign language, just in classrooms.

In some places **new languages** are spoken by everybody and learned by babies. The traditional language may still be spoken by some older people, so younger people have to learn it in addition to their new language in order to revitalise it. English is learned as a foreign language, mostly just from classrooms.

In some places, **English** is spoken by everybody and learned by babies. The traditional language is heard on special occasions, like during NAIDOC week celebrations or Welcome to Country, and might be taught (through a community, school or adult education setting) as part of reawakening it.

In cities and many large towns, most people will speak English,³⁶ but as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is so large and diverse, there may be some speakers of new languages and traditional languages, particularly in more remote regions.

These different arrangements of languages in each place are called language ecologies. The ANU framework is a way of recognising these common language ecologies, so policy, programs and services can be differentiated to better suit local, on the ground language situations.



HOW DO THESE ECOLOGIES WORK?

In a city

Much of the contemporary city of Sydney is on the lands of the Aboriginal Dharug Nation. Here, Standard Australian English is the dominant language in the language ecology. Dharug people generally use Standard Australian English for everyday communication and for accessing public services, like education, health, media, etc.³⁷ For Dharug people, the language ecology also includes the reawakening of the Dharug language, which is classified as a sleeping language.³⁸ The Dharug people are on an ongoing journey to learn Dharug, which requires active and intentional engagement. Community members are beginning to make it heard again. In this language ecology, the impact of Dharug language on people's lives is likely to revolve around the benefits derived from strengthening community and cultural identity, and recognition and respect from the broader community. This language ecology involves the identity dimension of Indigenous languages and well-being.

In remote Australia

The remote community of Amata in South Australia (SA) has a quite different language ecology. In Amata, the Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara languages feature very strongly. People living in Amata use these languages in everyday life to talk with almost everybody in the community.³⁹ Most people will also learn some English as a second language due to its use in media, schooling and a number of other services.⁴⁰ Using these traditional languages has a positive impact on well-being. It strengthens community and cultural identity and attracts recognition and respect from the broader community. There are other language factors that potentially influence well-being positively or negatively, such as how typically English-based services are made more accessible to Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara speakers, who are learners of English as an additional language. Language accommodations to promote effective communications include more Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara speaking staff and using interpreters. This language ecology has a communication dimension to Indigenous languages and well-being, in addition to an identity dimension.

With a new language

Most people on the island of Badu in the western Torres Strait speak the new language, Yumplatok (also called Torres Strait Creole) as their main language of everyday communication. Yumplatok is the language spoken in the playground, down at the wharf, at the shop and in the clinic. Many of the older generation learned Kala Lagaw Ya, the traditional language, as their first language,⁴¹ but nowadays children are learning it as an additional language from older family members and at school. Learning and using Kala Lagaw Ya is a powerful statement of local community identity and cultural continuity and pride. People on Badu learn English almost exclusively in a classroom setting, but this may be augmented with some media and with further study or through work.⁴² Recognition and use of Yumplatok has a positive impact on speakers' well-being as it acknowledges the importance of the language and promotes effective communication.⁴³ Multilingual people on Badu are respected for their language skills and this enhances well-being and confidence.⁴⁴ This language ecology on Badu involves both a communication and an identity dimension to Indigenous languages and well-being.

Off Country

Place is an intrinsic component of a language ecology. For example, there are people who speak Pitjantjatjara as their main language, which they have spoken from birth, in the language ecology of Sydney. In Sydney, maybe just a few people speak Pitjantjatjara, so this creates a different communicative situation from speaking Pitjantjatjara in a place like Amata where most people do. In Sydney's English-dominant language ecology, there is much less opportunity to speak Pitjantjatjara (so opportunities to express identity and engage with community in this language are generally fewer). An individual's level of confidence with English will affect their engagement in English interactions. Even though the most dominant language of the Sydney language ecology is English, a large city like this will always have a number of other languages as part of its language ecology.

CURRENT APPROACHES AND SUPPORTS FOR LANGUAGES

Maintaining, revitalising, renewing or reawakening traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are important activities for the safeguarding of these languages, and they require different approaches. These varying approaches are set out in Chapter 4.

The different functions of languages are all part of a speaker's identity and a fundamental part of daily interactions.⁴⁵ This has impacts for service delivery and the successful implementation of programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There are various ways to better understand language contexts and relate them back to different policy, program and service design and delivery considerations. The approach summarised earlier in this chapter (and explored in more detail in the Report *Well-being and Indigenous Language Ecologies (WILE): a strengths-based approach*) provides one such way to guide discussions.

Without a strong understanding of different language situations, the different priorities that communities have for their languages will also remain poorly understood. When service providers and governments do not understand the roles of all the different languages in people's lives they cannot work effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to provide targeted services and means of support.⁴⁶

Further to this, new languages in the repertoire of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are generally under-recognised.⁴⁷ This means the loss of opportunities for language skills and knowledge to improve employment options in service industries and language-based ventures, and for building stronger local communities.

Generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have language skills that are not properly valued, honoured and used.⁴⁸ Their role in the survival, maintenance and revitalisation of their ancient language(s) is vital, but in order to fulfil their role as language 'teachers' in their family and community, their role needs to be legitimised and supported.

WORKING TO SUPPORT THE PRESERVATION, USE AND PROMOTION OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities: Communities and community-led organisations are at the centre of language work. Across Australia, these speech communities are diverse, as are their visions and directions for the development of their work with their languages.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander speakers, learners and/or workers: People who speak languages (to the extent that their language context allows it), actively find ways to continue to do so, including through researching and strengthening.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language teachers: Teachers ensure languages are learned and passed along, in informal or more formal settings, like early childhood, school or adult education, in community organisations and on social media.

Australian Government funded Indigenous Language Centres: There are 20 mostly community-led Indigenous Language Centres across the country. The scope, size and infrastructure of these language centres is diverse. They are primarily funded by the Australian Government Indigenous Languages and Arts (ILA) program, although some may also receive funding from other government sectors, academia, education or private industry. There are also numerous other ILA funded community-driven language projects that exist outside the Language Centres.

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies: AIATSIS maintains the largest collection of written and audio-visual language resources, supports language revitalisation/renewal/reawakening programs, assists with language maintenance and documentation, and aims to raise the profile of Indigenous languages in the wider community.



Collecting institutions: Libraries and archives also have interest in this area, as they often have significant holdings of resource material about languages. They also have public programs that aim to increase access to the information they hold. The National Archives of Australia has prioritised the preservation of identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audio-visual records in its collection, due to known degradation and loss in this format.

Education institutions: Schools have a unique role in supporting Indigenous languages, by linking communities, language centres, local, state and federal governments. Different schools will make different efforts to preserve, support and promote languages, depending on a multitude of factors determined by the context in which they are situated. State and territory jurisdictions and the school sectors (public, Catholic and independent) are responsible for policies, programs, curricula and strategies that enable Indigenous languages teaching.

Governments: All levels of government in Australia support Indigenous languages in various capacities. The way they provide this support differs greatly across departments, jurisdictions, and levels of government. A key function is service provision, which includes supporting interpreting and translation services.

Linguists: Linguists play an important role in working with communities. Linguists may be based in academic institutions, archival or documentation organisations, or located directly within organisations seeking to preserve languages, such as language centres and Living Languages (formerly known as the Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity).

Representative language organisations: First Languages Australia (FLA) is the peak body representing community language preservation and revival efforts. FLA's role is to communicate between members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander networks, communities, governments, partner organisations and the public. Education and awareness raising is a large part of FLA's role; it works with language communities to understand the possibilities and opportunities for language use, and with broader Australian and international audiences to communicate the importance and urgency of strengthening language, and the benefits of language use for all Australians.

CHAPTER 2

BENEFITS FROM SPEAKING LANGUAGE



BENEFITS FROM SPEAKING LANGUAGE

KEY FINDINGS:



- Language is a fundamental part of Indigenous culture and identity, even for those who do not speak an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a range of different relationships to language – from those who speak an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language as their first language to those who are learning a language as part of revival efforts.
- All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, traditional and new, provide significant social and economic benefits to their speakers, including income-generating and employment opportunities.
- Speaking language has demonstrated benefits for individual well-being and health, particularly mental health. Speaking language is also beneficial in learning contexts.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS:

Speakers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages both traditional and new:

Are more likely to earn an income from arts, crafts and cultural activities.

People speaking Indigenous languages as their main language are six to 11 percentage pointsⁱⁱ more likely to earn income from arts practice, crafts and cultural activities than English-only speakers.⁴⁹

Are more likely to report social connectedness and social efficacy.

Speaking an Indigenous language is associated with a 10 percentage point increase in the probability of people feeling like they have a say in their own community, and a 12 percentage point increase in the probability of frequent contact with family members and friends.⁵⁰

Are more likely to report having higher positive emotional well-being.

People speaking Indigenous languages are 11 percentage points more likely to feel happy, full of

life, calm and full of energy than those speaking only English.⁵¹

Are more likely to participate in other land and sea-based livelihood activities.

The probability of people engaging in activities that provide food to families, such as involvement in hunting, gathering and fishing is greater by 31 percentage points for speakers of Indigenous languages than English-only speakers.⁵²

Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in communities has resulted in:

- Increased regard and trust for institutions that engage with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.⁵³
- Increased student confidence and engagement.⁵⁴
- Increased community pride in the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture.⁵⁵

Harnessing language:

- Increases productivity and/or competitiveness for particular businesses in land management, tourism and hospitality, and service sectors.⁵⁶

ii In common usage, the number that is '10 per cent higher than 20 per cent' could be understood as referring either to 22 per cent or to 30 per cent. To avoid this ambiguity, in this Report the numerical difference between two percentages is always given in percentage points. For example, 30 per cent is 10 percentage points higher than 20 per cent; 50 per cent is 12 percentage points lower than 62 per cent.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people repeatedly assert that individuals, families and communities can achieve better life outcomes if they maintain or develop knowledge and use of their languages.⁵⁹ These assertions are supported by the research commissioned by the Australian Government and undertaken by the ANU for this Report, to clarify the relationship between the use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and well-being indicators, as well as by the findings of the NILS2 attitude survey.⁶⁰

This ANU research is the first study that quantifies the economic and social benefits associated with speaking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. It also examines whether the various benefits differ by level of language proficiency. The study systematically recognises Australia's complex language landscape by using a framework that considers the social-cultural purposes of how language is used, together with the language ecology of particular areas.

For example, actively re-learning a language is a different activity compared with speaking a language spoken from childhood as an everyday means of communication, and they are likely to have different effects on individuals. Likewise, speaking or re-learning a language in a place where many people speak (or are re-learning) that language is likely to have a different effect on well-being compared with the effects of being one of a handful of people in an area who speaks that language.

By using a systematic ecology approach for recognising nuances in the language landscape, the ANU researchers were able to analyse the 2014–15 NATSISS,⁶¹ and draw on academic literature to provide rigorous quantitative and qualitative evidence that shows the benefits of speaking an Indigenous language, traditional or new (as these are not differentiated in the NATSISS data set). The findings of the study can be grouped in the interrelated categories of Economic and Social Capital (social, cultural and emotional).



MYTH: ONE LANGUAGE IS ALL WE NEED - ENGLISH

In many countries people are multilingual. Australia is no exception - according to the 2016 Census more than 20 per cent of Australians speak a language other than English at home.⁵⁷

In the past, as today, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people spoke more than one language. There is some evidence that knowing more than one language is not only useful in expanding the number of people an individual can talk with, it also seems to help with certain mental tasks, such as working memory tasks.⁵⁸

WELL-BEING INDICATORS

This Report acknowledges that these well-being categories do not necessarily correspond to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, which tend to conceptualise well-being in a more holistic manner, reflecting the social, cultural and emotional well-being of the whole community, and encompassing a broad range of issues including social justice, rights, traditional knowledge, and connection to Country.⁶² The well-being categories in Table 2.1 have been distinguished in this Report in the context of existing data collection methods, to help frame the discussion of the benefits of language.⁶³



Table 2.1: Well-being indicators in NATSISS 2014–15 data

WELL-BEING INDICATORS	NATSISS 2014–15 data
Spiritual well-being and cultural identity	Whether identifies with clan tribal or language group
	Whether participated in cultural activities in the past 12 months
	Whether involved in selected cultural activities in the past 12 months
Land-based well-being	Whether lives on homeland/traditional Country
	Frequency of visiting homeland/traditional Country
	Whether involved in fishing, gathering and hunting in the past 12 months
Emotional well-being	Positive emotional feelings (felt calm, happy and full of life and had a lot of energy)
	The Kessler-5 measure of psychological distress
	Self-rated overall life satisfaction
	Whether has been diagnosed with mental health condition
Social well-being	Frequency of contact with family or friends outside of the household
	Whether feels able to have a say within community on important issues all of the time or most of the time
	Whether gets support in times of crisis from someone outside of the household
	Whether experienced unfair treatment in last 12 months because of Aboriginal and or/Torres Strait Islander identity
Economic well-being	Whether earns income from sale of arts and crafts
	Whether earns income from involvement/participating in cultural activities
	Whether currently employed
	Whether employed in food, accommodation, arts or recreational services industries
	Personal gross weekly income
Safety	Whether experienced physical violence in last 12 months
Access to services	Whether faced problems accessing public services
	Whether has problems accessing any of the following: housing services, power, water or gas providers, phone or internet companies
	Whether has problems accessing any of the following: doctors, dentists, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander hospitals, mental health services, alcohol and drug services and disability services
	Whether used legal services in the last 12 months

LANGUAGE PROVIDES ECONOMIC BENEFITS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people receive different types of economic benefits when they have knowledge of language, whether traditional or new. Language is important in every aspect of human life, and so recognising and using languages provides a wide range of economic benefits for a wide range of people. These benefits occur in at least the seven economic sectors shown in Table 2.2.⁶⁴

Personal benefits

The primary economic benefit of language is to the individual. Individuals who speak language may experience an increased quality of life, due in part to income from cultural activities.⁷⁰

As noted previously, speakers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages have a higher likelihood of earning an income from arts, crafts and cultural activities. People speaking Indigenous languages as their main language are also six to 11 percentage points more likely to earn income from the arts, crafts and cultural activities than English-only speakers.⁷¹

Table 2.2: Economic sectors in which the benefits of language occur

Arts and culture	There is clear evidence that speakers of an Indigenous language, traditional or new, are more likely to receive an income from the sale of arts and crafts and doing cultural activities.
Translation and interpreting	The establishment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interpreting and translation services has provided opportunities for employment for people who speak an Indigenous language as their first language and have high levels of English too. ⁶⁵
Living off the lands and seas	There is clear evidence that speakers of language, traditional or new, are more likely to participate in customary harvesting activities that provide food to families.
Languages in education	For many years, schools have been major employers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who speak Indigenous languages, traditional or new. This has provided not only employment, but also an enrichment of local Indigenous languages, playing an important role in language maintenance, revitalisation and revival. ⁶⁶
Broadcasting	Broadcasting in an Indigenous language more effectively informs communities of news and information such as public health advice, or emergency warnings, while also bringing Indigenous talent to the fore. ⁶⁷
Indigenous cultural tourism	The connection between language and tourism has many benefits, to visitors, locals and the economy. ⁶⁸ For tourists, their experience is enhanced; for the local communities there is employment and access to training; and economically, experiences involving language provide a key point of difference in a competitive market.
Land and sea management	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people possess traditional knowledge of the environment, developed over thousands of years of interacting with land, sea, waterways and ecosystems. By extension, Indigenous languages contain ecologically significant concepts. ⁶⁹



Arts and culture

In areas where an Indigenous language is the first language for the majority of the population, there is evidence that people who are strong in language are more likely to receive income from the sale of arts and crafts and doing cultural activities than those with higher proficiency in English.⁷² This suggests that these activities provide a means of generating income for people who may be excluded from participating in other economic activity due to lower levels of English proficiency, or due to limited opportunities for income generation. In addition to the economic benefits of language, we know that where language is strong, culture and the arts are also more likely to be strong. The ANU also found that heightened Indigenous language proficiency increases the likelihood of people reaping professional economic benefits from arts, crafts and cultural activities.⁷³

Arts and culture programs have increasingly tapped into the important connection between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and stories and works of art and performances. Language increases the value of the artwork by putting the work in context, and by securing its provenance.⁷⁴

Results in Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory (NT) illustrate this. The 2019 National Survey of Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists found that the use of traditional language by artists is very high in Arnhem Land.⁷⁵ Ninety one per cent of artists use their traditional language the most, eight per cent mostly use English, and the remainder mostly use Aboriginal English. The research estimates that the median annual income of artists in the region is around \$26,000 per annum, significantly higher than the \$12,453 median annual income for Aboriginal adults in remote areas of the NT (as derived from 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data, and adjusted for wage price index).

Translation and interpreting

The ability to communicate in local Indigenous languages at a deep level with local people is an advantage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in industries such as health, early childhood, aged care, Land Councils, government departments, and as liaisons for industries such as mining and tourism.⁷⁶

Translation and interpreting services also provides access to learning English at a higher level, such as engagement in creating resources like legal dictionaries, health information and grammars, or in cross-cultural awareness training for non-Indigenous people. For example, the Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service employs bilingual speakers of Indigenous languages – traditional or new – and English, for interpreting work in many fields in person, by phone or video link, and has diversified to broadcasting and assistance with Aboriginal language recording projects.⁷⁷

Living off the land and seas

The ANU study also found that the likelihood of people reaping benefits from livelihood activities that provide food to the family increases with Indigenous language proficiency. The probability of involvement in hunting, gathering and fishing is greater by 31 percentage points for speakers of Indigenous languages than English-only speakers.⁷⁸ The strength of this finding may vary with geographic distribution, and to some extent may be associated with the higher proportion of language speakers living in remote and very remote areas.⁷⁹

Community and livelihood benefits

Economic benefits flow through families and communities in several ways. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, having a family member employed because of their Indigenous language skills may mean that the family as a whole is better off. Communities also gain indirect economic benefits from language based employment that brings about better access to information (e.g. receiving emergency warnings in languages they understand), better communication (e.g. better liaison with businesses in negotiating uses of their land such as for mining and tourism) and better education and training (e.g. employing teachers who speak the local language makes it more likely that children will be engaged at school).

Languages in education

Where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children come to school speaking Indigenous languages, traditional or new, the employment of adults who speak their languages provides a vital bridge to classroom learning. Through employment in schools, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have had opportunities to engage in research projects in areas such as science and mathematics⁸⁰ and gain professional development.⁸¹ School-based language renewal programs are a further source of employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia. For example, in New South Wales (NSW), Language and Culture Nests have been initiated in Bundjalung, Gamilaraay/Yuwaalaraay/Yuwaalaay, Gumbaynggirr, Wiradjuri and Paakantji. The Nests are firmly focussed on Aboriginal employment, with a coordinator, a head language teacher and Aboriginal language tutors.⁸²

Language teaching is a specialised branch of teaching, but nationally, few programs accredit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages teachers: the Western Australian Aboriginal Languages Traineeship, a three-year program delivered by the Western Australian Department of Education; and the Master of Indigenous Languages Education offered by the University of Sydney to Indigenous people who already have an undergraduate teaching degree.⁸³

Business related benefits

Harnessing language has increased productivity and/or competitiveness benefits for particular businesses in land management, tourism and hospitality, and other service sectors.

An organisation or sector may derive economic benefit from employing Indigenous-language speaking people. A language carries with it cultural understandings and practices, which can mean that organisations employing Indigenous language-speaking people may be able to offer a competitive edge in comparison with other organisations in the field, such as in broadcasting or tourism.⁸⁴

Broadcasting

The Indigenous broadcasting industry showcases the rich diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, languages and talent. National Indigenous Television (NITV) now reaches over two million unique views per month.⁸⁵ Some of the content is delivered using an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language, while other programs showcase Indigenous languages. Further, wherever local talent is engaged in local media for local audiences, local ways of speaking are used. Radio 4MW in the Torres Strait, for example, estimates that 80 per cent of broadcast time is in Yumplatok (Torres Strait Creole).⁸⁶

Indigenous cultural tourism

For tourists, their experience is enhanced by having guides who speak an Indigenous language, by interpretive signage which brings in language, and above all by interacting with and learning from Indigenous people.⁸⁷

For community members, an Indigenous language is not only an advantage in this employment area, but also gives entry to other opportunities through language awareness, training and certification for working with tourists, as well as having greater access to learning English and other languages.⁸⁸

Emerging cultural tourism enterprises fit well with the way that in some communities, people shift between sectors of the economy, e.g. part-time work and traditional activities, a model that has been described as a 'hybrid economy'.⁸⁹



For the economy, Australia's Indigenous cultures are a key point of differentiation in the highly competitive international tourism market.

Tourism is Australia's largest services export industry, accounting for around 10 per cent of Australia's total exports. In the year ending June 2018, international visitor arrivals to Australia reached over nine million for the first time, while tourism spending exceeded \$42 billion.⁹⁰

The latest data from Tourism Research Australia shows that people are increasingly choosing to experience Australia through engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Expenditure on Indigenous cultural tourism has been on the rise, up by 8 per cent per year, on average, since 2013.⁹¹

Indigenous tourism includes activities such as visiting an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander site or community, experiencing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, craft or cultural displays, or attending musical or dance performances. The number of international tourists taking part in at least one of those activities has increased by over 40 per cent since 2013.⁹² In 2013, 679,000 visitors participated in an Indigenous tourism activity. By 2018 the number had grown to 963,000.⁹³

Internationally, language tourism is growing, where tourists visit to learn a different language, and more directly experience local cultures. This was a major feature of the Big hArt Ngapartji Ngapartji theatre program which introduced visitors to Pitjantjatjara language. Another example is the University of South Australia's summer intensive Pitjantjatjara courses and Charles Darwin University's online Yolŋu Matha course.⁹⁴

Land and sea management

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who speak languages have a potential career pathway to paid employment in land and sea management on country. In a time of increased environmental concerns, the value placed on maintaining this Indigenous knowledge is only likely to increase.⁹⁵

Knowledge of natural history, place and ecologies is embedded in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. It manifests in many ways through land and sea management, ecological knowledge, astronomy, weather cycles.

This understanding of environment and ecology can be incorporated into the school science curriculum and is also incorporated into many different types of government programs. A particularly strong application of this knowledge is through the Indigenous land and sea management programs. The *Our Land Our Languages* Report describes these programs as directly dependent "on the continued strength and availability of Indigenous language and associated Indigenous knowledge."⁹⁶

Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to use traditional knowledge to work on and manage Country has positive economic and social outcomes. This is highlighted by a number of long-term Australian Government programs, such as Indigenous Rangers, Indigenous Protected Areas and Learning on Country.

Ranger programs are major employers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, especially in remote Australia. Through ranger programs, Indigenous people are able to draw on their language and natural history knowledge to strengthen their participation in the workforce, while at the same time reinforcing their connections to Country. The benefits of this have been well documented in the Mayi Kuwayu survey.⁹⁷

Indigenous Protected Areas and associated Indigenous ranger programs can return up to \$3.40 for every \$1 invested.⁹⁸ Land and sea management programs also have flow on benefits to regional economies that are greater than those associated with other remote industries.⁹⁹

The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, signed at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit,¹⁰⁰ has a Working Group on Article 8 (j). This recognises the importance of preserving and maintaining the knowledge, innovations and practices of Indigenous and local communities relevant for the conservation of biological diversity, promoting their wider application with the approval of knowledge holders, and encouraging equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the use of biological diversity.

Organisations and industries derive economic benefit by engaging people from a diversity of experiences.¹⁰¹ This is true for indicators of culture, heritage, nationality, gender, socio-economic status, and numerous others. Nurturing multilingualism (the ability to speak more than one language) and linguistic

diversity reinforces cultural values and also enhances innovation, productivity and growth. If language is a marker of cultural identity, linguistic diversity is necessarily a part of cultural diversity. Greater cultural diversity is also associated with greater cognitive diversity, as people from different cultures tend to have different perspectives on addressing issues. Bringing these different perspectives together results in better solutions.¹⁰² Economic performance can be better in more diverse countries because of greater opportunity for an assortment of ideas, innovations, specialisation, competition and trade.¹⁰³

 **CASE STUDY:****Gumbaynggirr language, land, culture, community plus livelihood, income and employment¹⁰⁴**

In Gumbaynggirr Country on the mid-northern NSW coast, the Gumbaynggirr language is being re-learned by adults as a second language, in a revival context. The Gumbaynggirr language has profound connections to Country, culture, community and spirituality for Gumbaynggirr people, which affirms identity and enhances well-being. In addition to these benefits, Gumbaynggirr language revival can also be associated directly and indirectly with the livelihoods of Gumbaynggirr people in terms of work opportunities, and cultural means of supporting families.

Gumbaynggirr language work has been primarily coordinated through Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative for a number of decades. Muurrbay has provided a source of employment and training for many Gumbaynggirr people over many years as resources have been rebuilt with Elders who remember Gumbaynggirr language and through historical archives. Gumbaynggirr people are employed in various directing, administration, research and teaching roles at Muurrbay.

The Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Nest, a NSW Government initiative, has provided employment opportunities for Gumbaynggirr teachers/tutors in schools throughout the region since 2014. Adult education in Gumbaynggirr is available through Muurrbay's Certificate III course in Gumbaynggirr Language and Cultural Maintenance. A number of initiatives also focus on developing language and cultural capital for Gumbaynggirr people outside mainstream education options, such as Muurrbay's newly released online learning course, and the Goori Learning Centres, which offer after-school programs and community-based language revitalisation classes.

Gumbaynggirr language and culture are at the forefront of a number of Aboriginal tourism ventures. Promotional material, such as the Coffs Coast Gumbaynggirr Showcase, features Gumbaynggirr language, Country and culture. Sharing Gumbaynggirr language and culture is a highlight of many Aboriginal community organisation initiatives, such as the culture show at the Sealy Lookout each month.



LANGUAGE BUILDS SOCIAL CAPITAL

There is clear evidence that Indigenous language use is positively associated with social capital formation,¹⁰⁵ which in this Report is taken to mean the building of an environment of trust that facilitates cooperation.ⁱⁱⁱ For the purposes of this Report, social capital is explored through interrelated themes, as illustrated in Figure 2.3.

There is a wealth of evidence that supports the positive associations of health, education and employment outcomes, as well as general well-being, with language and culture. Aboriginal and Torres Strait languages are inseparable from culture and form the foundation for learning and interacting with others.¹⁰⁶

Taken together, the themes in Figure 2.3 build local environments that foster collective resilience, supportive networks and increased trust and access to scarce community-controlled resources.¹⁰⁷

Social capital generates numerous benefits in a number of ways. On an individual level, people with higher social capital often feel emotionally supported and ‘healthy and happy’.

This has associated positive social gains such as reduced needs for health and welfare support.¹⁰⁸ By contrast, loss of language, and loss of social connectedness through language, has long been articulated as a source of grief for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.¹⁰⁹ On a community level, the social benefits of learning traditional language may include healing and enhanced family and community functionality. Thus, investment in language and culture is a sound approach for realising a range of social benefits.

Figure 2.3: Social capital formation



iii The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines social capital as “networks together with shared norms and values and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups.”

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS ABOUT SPEAKING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES, TRADITIONAL AND NEW:¹¹⁰

Cultural identification and participation

Identification with homelands/Country

Analysis of the NATSISS shows that speakers of Indigenous language were:

- 35 percentage points more likely to identify with a language group
- 20 percentage points more likely to live on homelands, and
- 34 percentage points more likely to visit homelands at least once per year, if living elsewhere.

Participation in land-based activities

Participation in hunting, fishing and gathering increases compared with English-only speakers:

- Those who spoke only some Indigenous language as a second language were 15 percentage points more likely to participate
- Those who spoke an Indigenous language well as a second language were 25 percentage points more likely to participate
- Those who spoke an Indigenous language as their main language were 31 percentage points more likely to participate.

Participation in cultural activities and events

Participation in cultural activities such as arts, crafts, dance and music increases compared with English-only speakers:

- Those who spoke an Indigenous language as their first language were 90 percentage points more likely to participate in cultural activities and events
- Those who spoke an Indigenous language as their second language were 82 percentage points more likely to participate in cultural activities and events
- Those who spoke an Indigenous language to some extent were 79 percentage points more likely to participate in cultural activities and events

Connection with family and friends¹¹¹

Those who spoke an Indigenous language were 12 percentage points more likely to report having frequent contact with friends and family outside of their homes.

Those who had learned and spoke an Indigenous language as a second language were 10 percentage points more likely to report that they felt like they had a say in their community even though they lived in areas where English is the dominant language.

Positive emotional health¹¹²

Emotional Health

Analysis of the NATSISS found that:

- Indigenous language speakers were 11 percentage points more likely to report significantly higher positive emotional well-being (feeling happy, motivated, etc.) than English-only speakers. This is particularly pronounced in areas where Indigenous languages are widely spoken.
- Speaking Indigenous languages was also found to have a significant association with higher life satisfaction scores.^{iv}
- Indigenous language speakers were eight percentage points less likely to report having been diagnosed with a mental health condition.

Trust in, and engagement with, institutions and services¹¹³

Engagement with the education sector

As part of the ANU review of academic literature, it was found that the recognition and use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in communities and schools have different benefits for children, including:

- increased student engagement and achievement
- increased cognitive flexibility, including learning and problem-solving, and
- increased community pride in the local Indigenous culture.

^{iv} On a scale from 1 (completely unsatisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied), speaking an Indigenous language is associated with a 0.4 unit increase in the score of life satisfaction.

Cultural identification and participation

Australian governments at all levels have acknowledged that culture is fundamental to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' strength and identity.¹¹⁴ This Report demonstrates that traditional languages are part of culture, identity and connection to Country regardless of the extent to which they are spoken, and that traditional and new languages are mediums for effective communication where they are spoken proficiently. Language contributes to speaker identities and fulfils local social protocols. These different but significant roles for Indigenous languages – culture and communication – can be found across all Closing the Gap priorities.

The *Bringing them home* Report found that the loss of traditional languages is intimately connected with the loss of identity for those forcibly removed and their descendants.¹¹⁵ Further to this, the *My life my lead* Report by the Australian Government Department of Health found that there is strong evidence that language has a significant influence on well-being, self-worth and identity formation. It also found that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, education in their first language not only helps children maintain their spoken language, and provides a good foundation for learning English, but also fosters respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture within the school.¹¹⁶

The ANU literature review confirmed that the centrality of language to culture is recognised both in Australia and overseas.¹¹⁷ In addition, the ANU analysis of the NATSISS shows that Indigenous language use is clearly associated with stronger cultural identification and participation.

Similar ideas are expressed in a Canadian study of Indigenous language and diabetes:¹¹⁸

The participants believed traditional culture and language to be one and the same... Language transmission is a particularly effective means of reinforcing culture and has the benefit of integrating most cultural and communal activities. Language is also an extremely efficient means of establishing membership or inclusion in a community. Studies that might disentangle language and culture are possible, but the approach argued for here takes it as a given that language is the most efficient means of transmitting, maintaining, and even reviving culture.

While culture encompasses many things, this Report focusses on the following cultural indicators that were available from the NATSISS data set:

- Identification with and connection to homelands/Country
- Participation in land-based activities; and
- Participation in cultural activities and events

Identification with homelands/Country

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, homelands or Country are more than just a geographical place; they also encompass spirit and identity. Culturally, each traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language has been associated with a particular tract of land, islands, waterways and seas.

Dharawal researcher Shayne Williams provides two reasons for the fundamental relationship between language and Country for Indigenous people in Australia:¹¹⁹

The first is ... the synthesis between language and knowledge which in the Indigenous context is bound to country. The second relates to how language literally signifies country for us; how it names the identity of our families and communities in relation to country and the boundaries of country typically thought of as cultural nationhood.

Language connects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to Country. Indeed, sometimes the name of a traditional language is the same as the name of the homeland that is connected to it. For this reason, in Australia many studies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures tend to refer to 'clans' or 'tribes' or 'nations' as 'language groups'.¹²⁰

Participation in land-based activities

Indigenous people often place land management as a two-way interaction between people and Country, differing from a view of land management as a process where people take specific actions to affect the environment.¹²¹

Figure 2.4 Gulumoerrgin (Larrakia) seasons calendar

Larrakia, Darwin - Northern Territory.
Lorraine Williams, Judith Williams, Maureen Ogden, Keith Risk, Anne Risk and Emma Woodward. 2012.
Gulumoerrgin Seasons (calendar): CSIRO Ecosystem Sciences, Darwin, NT. © CSIRO Australia

There is a positive and statistically significant relationship between Indigenous language use and participation in land-based activities.¹²² Speakers of Indigenous languages, traditional and new, are more likely to participate in hunting, fishing and gathering activities, and this likelihood increases with the level of proficiency in an Indigenous language.

Hunting, fishing and gathering are highlighted because the NATSISS has data that connects language use and these activities. Given the importance of Country to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies, there are a number of other land-based activities carried out as part of customary obligations for management and use of lands – often termed as ‘caring for Country’. These activities are highly diverse and include customary land management (such as burning, threat abatement or revegetation).¹²³

Participation in cultural activities and events

The NATSISS data also included other cultural practices that are recognised by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as part of the connection to land and language. Cultural activities included arts, crafts, dance and music. Cultural events included ceremonies, funerals and/or sorry business, NAIDOC week activities, sports carnivals, festivals or being involved with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander organisations in the last 12 months (see Figure 2.5).

Indigenous language use, traditional or new, is associated with a statistically significantly higher likelihood of participating in cultural activities and events. Speakers of Indigenous languages – either as a main or second language – are substantially more likely to report participating in cultural activities such as arts, crafts, dance and music than English-only speakers.¹²⁴

Figure 2.5: Participation in cultural activities

Probability of participating in cultural activities



DID YOU KNOW?

Indigenous season calendars (collaborations between a number of Aboriginal language groups and organisations such as the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology) depict not only seasonal ecological knowledge embedded in each of the languages but also commentary on culture and a diversity of land-based activities.

Connection with family and friends

In analysing the NATSISS, the ANU found that speakers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are more likely to report social connectedness and social efficacy.¹²⁵

“Language is a community – a group of people. Not only do you speak that language but generations upon generations of your families have also spoken it.”

[Amelia Turner, as part of her submission to *Our Land, Our Languages*]¹²⁶

In areas where an Indigenous language is the dominant language spoken by the community, speaking an Indigenous language as a first or second language is also associated with a small but significantly higher probability (10 percentage points) of being able to get support from outside the household at a time of crisis than English-only speakers.¹²⁷

The ANU literature review found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people see recognition of language in their local communities as an important act of reconciliation.¹²⁸

Positive emotional health

The 2018 *Evidence review of Indigenous culture for health and well-being* suggests that across the world there is a positive relationship between health outcomes and Indigenous cultures.¹²⁹ The NATSISS study bore this out with respect to emotional health:¹³⁰

A finding was that people speaking Indigenous languages are 11 percentage points more likely to have felt happy, full of life, calm and full of energy than those speaking only English.

An apparent extension of the above finding is that fluent speakers of Indigenous languages are considerably less likely to report mental health diagnoses than English-only speakers: by six percentage points in remote areas where Indigenous languages are frequently spoken as a first language, and by 10 percentage points in parts of the country where English is the predominant mother tongue.¹³¹ However, whereas emotional well-being is experienced at an individual level and can be reported independently of health services, a mental health diagnosis requires access to specialised mental health services, which may not be offered in Indigenous languages. Factors other than language and access to mental health services could be involved here, including social connectedness or different ways of conceptualising mental illness.¹³²

There is a growing awareness that information about mental health should incorporate Indigenous languages and local knowledge. The Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara Women's Council 'Uti kulintjaku' project aims to use local languages for sharing knowledge around mental health literacy between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people. Here, workshops are framed around developing language-based resources such as posters illustrating psychological states labelled with Pitjantjatjara expressions:¹³³

"Our group is about bringing things out in the open – talking about mental health and trauma. This is to help our families and communities see and understand what's happening... We've now got words to talk about these things with our children and grandchildren. We are bringing things out into the open and we really enjoy this work."

Uti Kulintjaku Project Participants 2014

In New Zealand, a 40-page booklet has been produced with a translation of mental health terms into Māori.¹³⁴ The introduction explains the benefits of having terminology in the Indigenous language (even though many users will probably be first language speakers of English):

The translation of English words into Māori will greatly increase understanding of mental health conditions, symptoms and consequences and in the process will lead to better engagement between whānau [family] and health services... the language of mental health becomes more aligned to the people most concerned rather than to those who provide treatment and care.

Suicide, and in particular youth suicide, disproportionately affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities,¹³⁵ having devastating effects on families.

In 2017, suicide was the leading cause of death for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons between 15 and 34 years of age, with an age-specific death rate over three times that of non-Indigenous Australians.¹³⁶ Generally it accounted for a greater proportion of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths (5.5 per cent) compared with deaths of non-Indigenous Australians (2.0 per cent)¹³⁷ and was ranked as the fifth leading cause of death for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, while it is ranked 13th for the non-Indigenous population.¹³⁸

In the Australian context, while it has been found that a sense of belonging and cultural heritage may be of benefit in reducing suicide,¹³⁹ there is insufficient nuance in current research about the use of Indigenous language as a preventative factor.

This relationship has been explored in an international context. For example, in Canada census data has been used to investigate the effects of community-level knowledge of Aboriginal language and youth suicide. Language knowledge had predictive power over and above that of six other 'cultural continuity' factors (self-government, land claims, education, health care, cultural facilities, policing and fire services). It also found that youth suicide rates were effectively at zero in those few communities in which at least half the people reported a conversational knowledge of their own 'Native' language.¹⁴⁰ In the US, an investigation on perceived discrimination, traditional practices, and depressive symptoms among American Indians found that language was one of three measures of participation in traditional practices.¹⁴¹ They found that those who engaged in powwows, speaking their traditional language, and carrying out traditional activities were less susceptible to depressive symptoms.¹⁴² This protective effect did not hold for people who reported engaging less often in cultural activities. These people were more likely to be depressed by perceived discrimination.

Trust in, and engagement with institutions and services

Trust in, and engagement with, institutions and services relies on the provision of services that consider Australian languages in their design, implementation and evaluation.¹⁴³ This includes institutions such as schools which recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages play a pivotal role in Indigenous students' engagement and achievement in education and training. In addition, academic literature suggests that multilingualism provides greater cognitive flexibility and endowment of cultural capital and improves a number of skills, including learning and problem-solving.¹⁴⁴

Planning effective and efficient service delivery requires a recognition of the local language situation. For clients, this requires people delivering services to recognise their repertoire of languages and their language preferences.¹⁴⁵ The Commonwealth Ombudsman recognised this in its 2012 submission to *Our Land Our Languages*:¹⁴⁶

In our experience, without interpreters and proper regard to the language barriers that Indigenous Australians face, service delivery can be misdirected and damaging, and people can be excluded from, and alienated by, the very programs designed to assist them.



CASE STUDY:

Foundations for Success

Foundations for Success¹⁴⁷ was developed as a set of guidelines for early childhood settings (preschool, pre-prep and/or kindergarten) in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Queensland. They explicitly state how early childhood educators should work with Indigenous children's first languages.

The independent evaluation by Charles Sturt University¹⁴⁸ of the Foundations for Success program found that it was an excellent example of how to develop curricula for young children in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.¹⁴⁹ In particular, language in the school setting was recognised as a key factor in children becoming socially, emotionally and spiritually resilient.

"Those parents who did come up to the door and they can hear the young kids say our traditional language greeting and it makes the parents feel really good about us. We didn't have that in our time ... But now little people are saying that in school, it's great."

[Indigenous teacher]

The independent evaluation of Foundations for Success notes the critical importance of languages for the development of young Indigenous children's personal and cultural identities. On-site visits and interviews showed that this was of 'particular relevance to Indigenous educators, who often had experienced quite the opposite in their own education.'¹⁵⁰

The honouring and celebration of both Home Language and Standard Australian English is not only educationally sound but is the single most important defining feature of a program informed by Foundations for Success.

Further matters around service delivery, including translation and interpreter services and education and curriculum, are explored in Chapter 5.

HOW ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES ENHANCE OVERALL BENEFITS

Meaningful employment is a social determinant of health for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, providing structure, purpose and connection, as well as nurturing self-esteem, social connections, and a sense of identity. Employment, be it full time or part time, paid or unpaid, can play a role in promoting positive health and well-being, and may make people less likely to engage in unhealthy behaviours.¹⁵¹

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, speaking language as a first language or as a second language widens opportunities for social connection and for employment.¹⁵²

Being employed in turn provides financial rewards, but also boosts confidence and self-esteem, provides greater independence, building social networks, enhancing civic engagement, creating greater access to health information and services, and discouraging anti-social behaviour.¹⁵³ The benefits of employment also go back to community.

The 2016 Census indicated that 52 per cent of Indigenous Australians aged 15 years or older were participating in the labour force,¹⁵⁴ compared with 60 per cent of non-Indigenous Australians.¹⁵⁵ For Indigenous Australians, there is a relationship between social inequities (including employment) and negative health outcomes.¹⁵⁶ Indigenous Australians are more likely than non-Indigenous Australians to have, and die from, health conditions such as cardiovascular disease, psychological distress and mental health disorders – health conditions that are positively affected by work and negatively affected by unemployment.¹⁵⁷

The effect of unemployment is intergenerational, with research indicating that children who live in households where the parents are unemployed are more likely to experience unemployment as adults, either for their entire life or for discrete periods of time.¹⁵⁸

Unemployment is considered to be one of four predictors of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's higher rate of offending.¹⁵⁹ Research indicates that people who are employed tend not to commit serious crimes, whereas the longer a person is unemployed the more likely it is that they will become involved in crime.¹⁶⁰

Languages provide numerous employment opportunities. Maximising the potential of these employment opportunities would capitalise on the demonstrated benefits of speaking language, and widely acknowledged benefits of employment.

This chapter has outlined the range of benefits and opportunities that speaking language affords, particularly for those speaking their mother tongue. The following chapter provides information on how few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are currently able to reap these benefits.



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CHAPTER 3

THE STATE OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LANGUAGES



THE STATE OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LANGUAGES

KEY FINDINGS:

- All of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are under threat.
- Less than 10 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are reported to be speaking language at home.
- The AIATSIS 2018–19 Survey of 141 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language varieties finds that at least 123 are in use or being revitalised/revived in Australia today; the 2016 Census results found 159 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages reported to still be in use.
- The AIATSIS 2018–19 Survey finds that there are at least 31 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language varieties being reawakened by communities in Australia.
- Most of these languages are highly endangered. The AIATSIS survey found only 12 relatively strong traditional languages and two strong new languages.
- New languages—particularly Kriol and Yumplatok/Torres Strait Creole—are some of the strongest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in Australia and their use is growing.



AVAILABLE DATA ON AUSTRALIA'S INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

The information for this Report has been drawn from the third National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS3) 2018–19, the ABS Census 2016 and the NATSISS 2014–15. Due to the different data collection methods there is no absolute answer to the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language varieties or to the number of speakers of these languages. This Report instead explores these issues and presents the common findings.

Table 3.1: Comparison of available data

AIATSIS SURVEY (NILS3) 2018–19

141 language varieties were surveyed. Participants self-report.

171 responses were received. Participants choose what language they report on from the AUSTLANG list of language varieties, which numbers around 1,200 names.¹⁶¹

	Is the data available?	What does the data say?	Limitations of the data
Number of languages spoken	✓	Approximately 123 language varieties have speakers. These languages are spoken to different extents. Table 4.3 provides detail on the number of language varieties spoken in each of the categories of strong, undergoing reawakening and endangered.	Responses were only received from 141 language varieties, and not all reported speakers. There are languages known to have relatively large numbers of speakers that did not respond to the survey.
Number of speakers	✓	25,647 to more than 34,620 speakers were reported for 141 language varieties. NILS3 data on speakers was collected by total number of speakers and by ages/categories (to assist respondents 'speaker' is defined in the survey). The number of speakers is one key vitality measure for a strong language.	Responses were only received for 141 language varieties. There are languages known to have relatively large numbers of speakers that did not respond to the survey. Respondents provided estimates of speaker numbers from a list of ranges. Respondents varied on counting fluent speakers only or including partial speakers.
Strength of languages	✓	Using another key vitality measure (intergenerational transmission) NILS3 identifies 12 relatively strong traditional language varieties and 2 strong new languages.	Responses were only received from 141 language varieties.
The places where languages are being spoken	✓	NILS3 uses AUSTLANG language codes, for almost all of which the homelands are geographically identified.	AUSTLANG displays centres of homeland regions where languages were traditionally spoken and is less clear when speakers now live away from traditional areas.
Proficiency	✓	171 respondents indicated that of the languages surveyed, at least 123 language varieties were reported as having some level of proficiency.	As this data is self-reported, respondents vary on how they interpreted what a 'speaker' is, from fully fluent to limited speakers. (The survey went some way to mitigate this issue by providing categories of proficiency.)

Table 3.1: Comparison of available data

CENSUS 2016

The Australian population is asked to self-report what language other than English they speak at home. The Census provides a write-in box; this response is then coded to the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL) categories. If the language spoken is not in the ASCL the response is coded to a 'not elsewhere classified' category. For the 2016 Census there were 217 Indigenous languages listed in the ASCL.¹⁶²

	Is the data available?	What does the data say?	Limitations of the data
Number of languages spoken	✓	It was reported that approximately 159 Indigenous languages are spoken.	Currently the data does not distinguish between languages spoken at home and heritage languages. Only one language can be chosen. The ASCL list of languages is smaller than that of NILS (AUSTLANG), but there are a large number (around 8,000) of speakers of 'Australian languages not further defined' in the Census.
Number of speakers	✓	In 2016 approximately 65,000 people reported speaking an Indigenous Language.	The Census provides data of the full population but does not distinguish between speaking a language fluently and speaking a few words and has a limited number of languages to choose from.
Strength of languages	✓	The proportion of child speakers varies considerably among languages	The Census provides indirect measures of the strength of languages through comparing number of child speakers and total number of speakers.
The places where languages are being spoken	✓	The Census provides data on where languages are spoken, both for people living on their traditional country and for people living away from it.	N/A
Proficiency	✗	N/A	Does not collect data on Indigenous language proficiency but has English proficiency.

NATSISS 2014–15

A random sample survey designed to be representative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in private dwellings (11,178 people were surveyed). Participants self-report.¹⁶³

	Is the data available?	What does the data say?	Limitations of the data
Number of languages spoken	✘	N/A	The NATSISS only distinguishes between broad categories of language spoken at home (English, Aboriginal languages, Torres Strait Islander languages, other languages).
Number of speakers	✘	N/A	Estimates of the number of language speakers at different levels of proficiency can be derived from the NATSISS, but not for individual languages.
Strength of languages	✘	N/A	This level of detail is beyond the scope of NATSISS.
The places where languages are being spoken	✘	N/A	Some geographic data is available in the NATSISS, but it is not all published. The most detailed geographical reporting available is by remoteness areas for each state and territory.
Proficiency	✓	For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, NATSISS distinguishes between levels of proficiency for speech and comprehension, and also asks if respondents are learning an Indigenous language.	N/A

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES SPOKEN IN AUSTRALIA

Today, there is still a diversity of Indigenous language varieties, but the nature of that diversity has changed. There is now a mix of traditional and new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken across Australia, along with English and foreign languages, which are being spoken to varying degrees.

Asking what languages Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are speaking should be considered in the context of how these languages are being used. This question is further complicated by fundamental issues of definition and understanding surrounding 'what is a language', who are the 'speakers' and which language varieties are being counted in large surveys and data sets (traditional and/or new languages).

2018–19 AIATSIS Survey

In 2018–19, AIATSIS conducted the National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS3) to update the information surrounding the state of Australia's Indigenous languages.^v This is the third survey in a series, which continues to provide a comprehensive overview of the state of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language varieties.

For this survey respondents are able to pick from a comprehensive list of about 1,200 language variety names in AUSTLANG. NILS3 collected information on 141 language varieties, of which between 123 and 127 were reported as being spoken.¹⁶⁴



WHAT IS AUSTLANG?

The AUSTLANG database of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language varieties has been assembled from a number of referenced sources. AUSTLANG can be searched with language names, placenames and via the codes. AUSTLANG has links to a number of online resources. AUSTLANG includes many variant forms of language names.

The NILS2 Language Activity Survey received 102 responses, covering about 79 individual languages (some languages appeared more than once).¹⁶⁵

2016 ABS Australian Census

The Census asks about languages other than English spoken in Australian homes. For Indigenous languages, answers to this question can be provided through a write in box and responses are then coded to the ASCL categories, which included 217 Indigenous languages in 2016. If the language spoken is not in the ASCL, the response is coded to a 'not elsewhere classified' category.^{vi} It is important to note that categories and lists of Australia's Indigenous languages used by researchers vary; for example, for the AIATSIS survey series the AUSTLANG database of 1,200 language varieties is used.

In 2011, the Census reported that approximately 156 Indigenous language variety names were identified as spoken in Australian homes.¹⁶⁶ The 2016 Census reported an increase to approximately 159^{vii} Indigenous language varieties, but as indicated in Table 3.1, this does not measure proficiency.^{viii}

In order to be separately classified in the ASCL, languages must have a minimum threshold of three self-reported speakers. For the 2016 Census, a review resulted in the ASCL list having an additional traditional language (Yugambah) added.¹⁶⁷

There are no questions in the Census about how people are using language and the contexts and depths to which language is being spoken. Nor does it easily recognise language varieties. The Census also only allows for one language other than English to be listed. This does not reflect the occurrence of multilingualism, which is common in some communities. The Census also does not capture information about people learning an Indigenous language,¹⁶⁸ who may for example use that language for cultural, spiritual or ceremonial purposes.

v AIATSIS received 171 valid survey responses on up to 141 language varieties for this survey (140 unique AUSTLANG codes and one with no AUSTLANG code). A number of the 141 language varieties surveyed were reported as having no speakers (more than 16 language varieties). AUSTLANG codes are used as a guide for identifying the language groupings – using different criteria could produce slightly different results. No responses were received for some languages which are known to have many speakers, including Anmatyerr, Burarra and Tiwi.

vi The ASCL is used in the collection, aggregation and dissemination of data relating to languages usage in Australia and to classify the following language variables: first language spoken, languages spoken at home, main language spoken, and main language other than English spoken at home. The ASCL was last revised in 2011. (ABS, 2016)

vii These languages were reported as being spoken by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, non-Indigenous and individuals that did not specifically identify.

viii The ABS 2016 Census recorded 171 language labels with speakers, including 10 'nec' (not elsewhere classified) and 13 'nfd' (not further defined). 4 nec and 4 nfd language labels are excluded to arrive at 163 named 'language varieties' that the 2016 Census recorded as having speakers. Based on mutual intelligibility and other linguistic factors, AIATSIS considers this number can be rounded down to at least 112 languages. Refer to NILS3 and ABS Census data for further details.

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE SPEAKERS IN AUSTRALIA

2018–19 AIATSIS Survey

The answer to the question “How many speakers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are there?” is not straightforward.

The AIATSIS Survey provides some insight into the language varieties where responses were submitted. Although absolute numbers are not provided through the survey, respondents were provided a multiple-choice list with ranges of numbers of speakers (more than 1,000, 501–1,000, 251–500, 51–250, 11–50, 1–10, 0, and don’t know). Respondents were also asked to give a confidence rating on how accurate they felt their estimate was. The differences in responses could be seen with, for example, languages for which there were multiple survey responses, which sometimes had very different answers, depending on the respondent.

The AIATSIS Survey findings on numbers of speakers per language variety and total numbers of speakers of all language varieties are presented in Table 3.2. This table shows that there are around 20 language varieties said to have more than 1,000 speakers. This includes some languages that are being revived by 1,000+ learners, along with some strong languages that have large numbers of speakers.

This category also includes some language varieties for which, while they have substantial numbers of speakers, intergenerational language transmission has ceased.

At the other extreme, there are 17 language varieties reported as having no speakers. There are also 67 language varieties reported as having fairly small numbers of speakers, probably mostly elderly, meaning these languages are under great threat.

As this data is self-reported, respondents vary on how they interpret what a ‘speaker’ is. Some count only fully fluent speakers, while others count limited speakers or learners. The AIATSIS Survey dealt with the question of variable understandings of the term ‘speaker’ by providing proficiency categories (in Question 5 of NILS3). These included:

- Can only say some words and simple sentences.
- Can have a conversation in limited situations. Cannot express everything in the language (part speakers).
- Can have a conversation in all situations. Can express almost everything in the language (fluent speakers).

The AIATSIS Survey asked for numbers of speakers by age ranges—this information is presented in Table 3.3. This table shows the speaker number range for each age group, and the number of language varieties reported; thus there are seven language varieties with more than 1,000 speakers in the 0–19 age group.

Table 3.2: NILS3 question 3: How many people do you think speak this language?¹⁶⁹

Range of estimated speaker numbers	Number of surveyed language varieties in each range	Total number of speakers (for all languages in this range)
More than 1000	20	More than 20,000
501-1000	3	1,503 to 3,000
251-500	12	3,012 to 6,000
51-250	15	765 to 3,750
11-50	30	330 to 1,500
1-10	37	37 to 370
0	17	0
Don't know	7	0
Total	141 language varieties	25,647 to more than 34,620 speakers

Table 3.3: NILS3 Question 4: How many people in each age group do you think speak this language?¹⁷⁰

Range of estimated speaker numbers	Ages 0-19	Ages 20-39	Ages 40-59	Ages 60+
More than 1000 speakers	7	4	2	3
501-1000 speakers	5	2	2	1
251-500 speakers	6	7	6	2
51-250 speakers	10	16	16	17
11-50 speakers	15	23	31	30
1-10 speakers	17	28	36	51
0 speakers	60	41	28	18
Don't know/no response	21	20	20	19
Total number of language varieties	141	141	141	141

Table 3.4: 2016 Census (ABS) Indigenous language labels recorded with more than 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander speakers.

ABS language label	No. of speakers ^x
Australian Indigenous Languages, nfd	8,627
Kriol	7,105
Yumplatok (Torres Strait Creole)	6,000
Djambarrpuyngu [a variety of Yolŋu Matha]	4,267
Pitjantjatjara [a variety of Western Desert]	3,049
Warlpiri	2,275
Tiwi	2,019
Murrinh Patha	1,968
Kunwinjku [a variety of Bininj Kunwok]	1,705
Alyawarr	1,551
Anindilyakwa	1,478
Ngaanyatjarra [a variety of Western Desert]	1,089

2016 ABS Census

The 2016 Census indicates that approximately 64,000^{ix} Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reported that they speak an Australian Indigenous language at home.¹⁷¹

A limitation of the Census is that it collects respondents' self-reported 'main language other than English spoken at home' without collecting any information on the proficiency of the language spoken, so part-speakers or learners are counted the same way as fluent speakers.

Most of these languages with over 1,000 speakers identified through the Census are considered relatively strong in the NILS3 – Kriol, Yumplatok, Yolŋu Matha, Western Desert language (includes Pitjantjatjara and Ngaanyatjarra), Warlpiri, Murrinh-Patha, Bininj Kunwok languages (Kunwinjku), Alyawarr and Anindilyakwa.

NILS3 notes that the category 'Australian Indigenous Languages nfd [not further defined]' is not a language but a group of possibly unrelated languages that the ABS calls a 'residual category'. This is excluded from NILS3.^{xi} This residual category contains a large number of speakers, for whom it is not possible to identify whether specific new or traditional languages are being used. Tiwi is not classed as a strong language in NILS3 because of rapid and radical language change between traditional and modern Tiwi, which are not currently differentiated in AUSTLANG. This is further discussed in the full NILS3 Report (forthcoming at time of publication).

ix The actual numbers from the 2016 Census are: 64,763 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, non-Indigenous and people who did not provide their Indigenous status reported speaking an Australian Indigenous language. Of this, 63,754 people who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reported speaking an Indigenous language.

x The ABS introduces a random error to small cells to protect confidentiality, so exact numbers may vary each time data is retrieved from the ABS.

xi There is a large number of speakers in this category, and existing data collection methods do not describe if speakers in this category are speaking new languages that do not have names, or traditional languages that have not been recognised or have been written down inaccurately and are therefore unable to be identified.

Table 3.5: Relatively strong languages by category – new or traditional

	Language
New languages	Kriol
	Yumplatok/Torres Strait Creole
Traditional languages	Western Desert languages (includes Pitjantjatjara and many other Western Desert varieties) ^{xii}
	Yolŋu Matha (includes Djambarrpuynu and many other Yolŋu varieties) ^{xiii}
	Warlpiri
	Arrernte
	Alyawarr
	Anmatyerr
	Murrinh-Patha
	Bininj Gun-Wok/ Bininj Kunwok (includes Kunwinjku; Kune; Mayali; Kuninjku; Gundjeihmi)
	Anindilyakwa
	Burarra (includes Burarra; Gun-nartpa and Gurr-goni)
	Wik Mungkan
	Mawng

THE STRENGTH OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LANGUAGES

2018–19 AIATSIS Survey

Given the intricacies surrounding how language varieties are counted, the question of the strength or vitality of Australia’s Indigenous languages is even more complex.

There are a number of ways to assess the vitality of a language. The answer to this question will vary depending on the indicators used.

AIATSIS analysis of NILS3 data, the 2016 Census, and other sources found that 14 Indigenous languages can be identified as relatively strong. Of these:

- 12 are traditional languages; one fewer than the 13 reported as strong in NILS2.¹⁷² All generations speak these 12 languages as their first language, including all children (intergenerational transmission is unbroken). Some of these languages include more than one well-known variety.
- Two new Indigenous languages have the most speakers – Kriol and Yumplatok/Torres Strait Creole.¹⁷³

xii Pitjantjatjara is a language variety that is mutually intelligible with a number of other Western Desert language varieties, including Kartujarra; Kokatha; Kukatja; Luritja; Manyilyjarra; Martu Wangka; Ngaanyatjarra; Pintupi; Wangkajunga; Wangkatha; Yankunytjatjara; Yulparija; Tjupany (ABS names have been used here).

xiii Yolŋu Matha is the name for a number of language varieties including Yolngu Matha, nfd; Dhangu, nfd; Galpu; Wangurri; Dhangu, nec; Dhay’yi, nfd; Dhalwangu; Dhuwal, nfd; Djambarrpuynu; Djapu; Daatiwuy; Marrangu; Liyagalawumirr; Liyagawumirr; Dhuwal, nec; Dhuwala, nfd; Gumatj; Gupapuyngu; Guyamirillili; Wubulkarra; Djinang, nfd; Wurlaki; Djinang, nec; Djinba, nfd; Ganalbingu; Manyjalpingu; Ritharrngu; Wagilak; Nhangu, nec; Dhuwaya; Madarrpa; Warramiri; Rirratjingu (ABS names have been used here).

Table 3.6: Indigenous language vitality measures

UNESCO	AIATSIS NILS3
1. Intergenerational transmission	1. Intergenerational transmission
2. Absolute number of speakers	2. Absolute number of speakers
3. Proportion of speakers	3. Proportion of speakers
4. Trends in existing language domains	4. Domains and functions of a language
5. Response to new domains and media	5. Response to new domains and media
6. Materials for language education and literacy	6. Materials for language education and literacy
7. Government and institutional language education and literacy	7. Type and quality of documentation
8. Community members’ attitudes towards their own language	8. Language programs
9. Amount and quality of documentation	

Measuring the strength of Indigenous languages

For the purposes of this Report, the indicators used to assess the survey results of NILS3 and identify the state of Australia’s Indigenous languages are based on the UNESCO Language Vitality indicators.¹⁷⁴ These indicators are outlined in Table 3.6 along with the corresponding measures used in the NILS3 analysis.

When measuring Australia’s Indigenous languages against the UNESCO vitality indicators none of Australia’s Indigenous language varieties meet the thresholds across all the indicators and as such, they are all considered under threat.¹⁷⁵

These indicators are not weighted equally, meaning that certain indicators hold more value as an indication of a language variety’s strength or vitality.

The two most important (or weighty) of the vitality indicators are **intergenerational language transmission** (indicator 1) and **absolute number of speakers** (indicator 2).

The importance of intergenerational transmission is also discussed in relation to reawakening languages in Chapter 4.

Table 3.7: The importance of intergenerational transmission to language vitality

Degree of Vitality	Description
STRONG/SAFE	The language is used by all age groups, including all children. People in all age groups are fluent speakers.
UNSAFE	The language is used by many age groups, but not all children are fluent speakers.
DEFINITELY ENDANGERED	The language is used mostly by the parental generation and older. Only people in the parental generation and older are fluent speakers.
SEVERELY ENDANGERED	The language is used mostly by the grandparental generation and older. Only people in the grandparental generation and older may still understand the language.
CRITICALLY ENDANGERED	The language is used mostly by the great-grandparental generation and older. Only people in the great-grandparental generation and older may remember some of the language and may not use it very often.
REVIVING/REVITALISING/ REAWAKENING	The language has not been used as an everyday language for some time, but some people are now learning and speaking the language.
NO LONGER SPOKEN [SLEEPING]	There is no one who can speak or remember the language.

HOW PEOPLE ARE USING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LANGUAGES

2018–19 AIATSIS Survey

The NILS3 survey results provide a good insight into how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language varieties are being used around the nation.

The survey found that the state of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages is diverse and multi-layered, with signs of reawakening but also continued threat.

It also found that some traditional language varieties (some high on the endangered scale and also some sleeping) that have not been naturally passed on to children for some time are now being reawakened or revitalised and gaining new speakers.

In some cases, non-Indigenous community members are also encouraged to learn the language. NILS3 asked respondents about the local non-Indigenous community’s involvement with their language, especially in relation to resources and activities.¹⁷⁶ Responses to this question fell into two categories: those who talked about the limited engagement with the languages by the local non-Indigenous community; and those who talked about the recognition of language by the broader community.

Responses also reflected the varied geographies and language ecologies of the respondents. For example – mostly in locations where the local language is strong and non-Indigenous people are a minority – 38 per cent of those who responded to the question on non-Indigenous involvement with the language commented on low or limited engagement with the languages by the local non-Indigenous community,^{xiv} and tended to lament this lack of engagement.

^{xiv} There were 119 (out of a total 171 surveys) responses to this question in NILS3, that is, 38 per cent of 119 responses.

“Schools between Port Augusta to Leigh Creek have incorporated Adnyamathanha language classes into their program which increases non-Indigenous staff and students to engage with the community, outside of these few select schools, non-Indigenous community involvement is limited.”¹⁷⁷

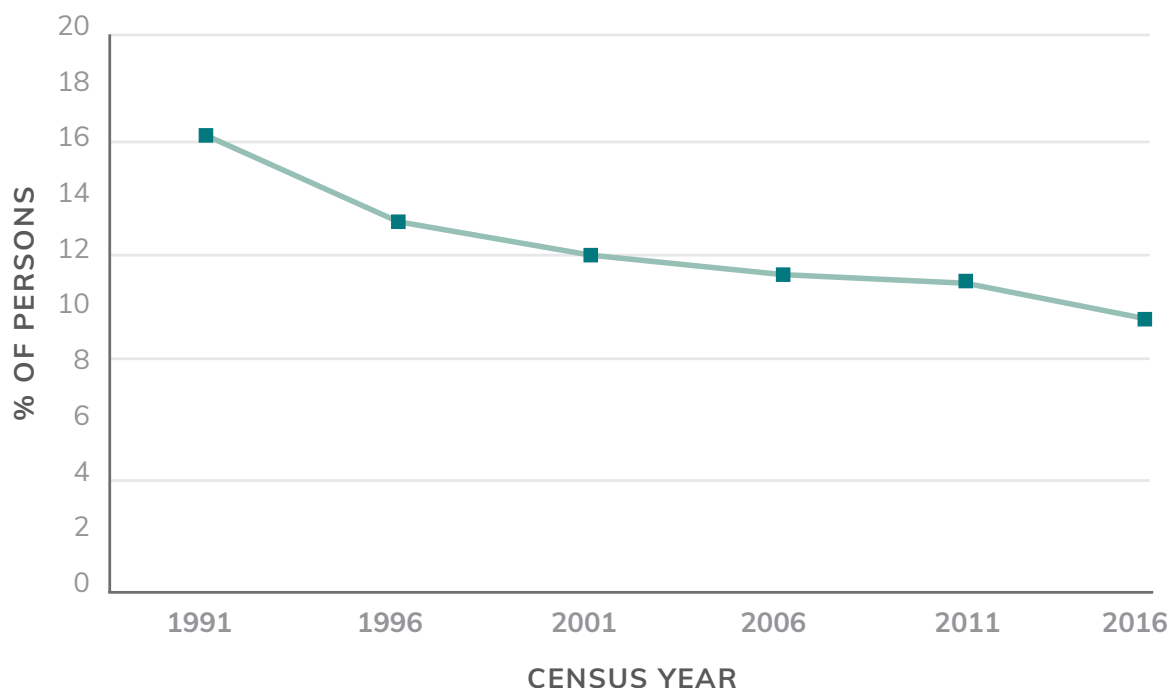
“Some local non-Indigenous community members have made an effort to learn some Bininj Kunwok, but many do not. In Kunbarlanja, most non-Indigenous people have a few words of Bininj Kunwok, but in Jabiru, many do not engage at any level with the Traditional Owners and their culture/language.”¹⁷⁸

How the way languages are spoken has changed over time

Today, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ language repertoires can include a mix of traditional language varieties, new languages and Englishes. However, since 1991 there has been a decrease from 16 per cent to 10 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reporting speaking an Australian Indigenous language (whether traditional or new) at home, and a corresponding increase in the proportion saying they spoke English at home.¹⁷⁹

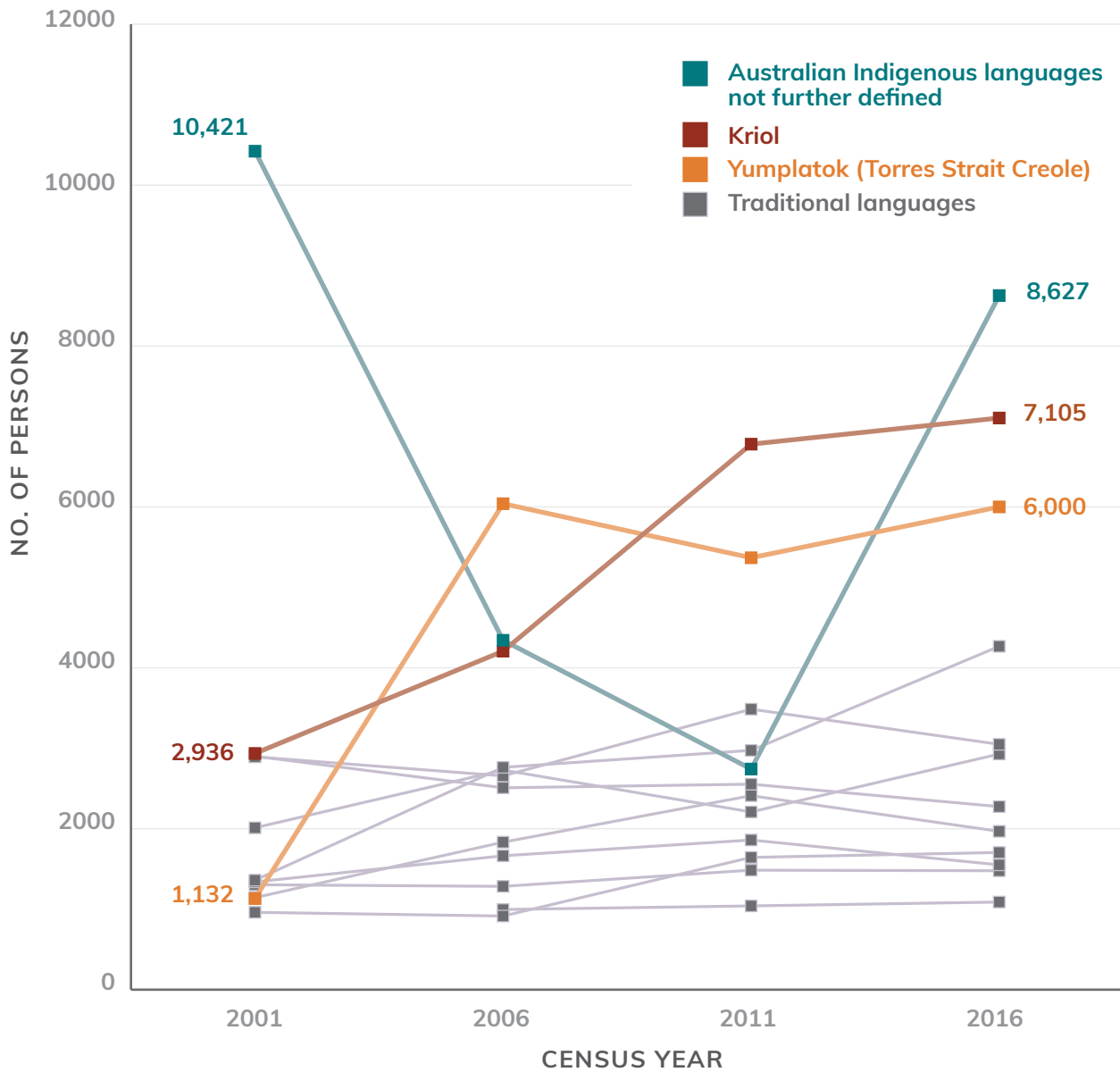
Figure 3.8: Australian Indigenous languages spoken at home by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Australia, 1991 to 2016. Source(s): ABS Census of Population and Housing 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016.

Percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people speaking Australian Indigenous language at home, Australia, 1991 to 2016



When looking at both traditional languages and new languages together, further analysis indicates that since 2001, reported speakers of some new languages has been increasing, while reported speakers of some traditional languages has been declining.

Figure 3.9: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language speaker numbers 2001-2006-2011-2016 for new languages, traditional languages and languages not further defined.^{180 xv}



^{xv} Graph adapted from Simpson et al. (2018), p. 118.



NEW LANGUAGES

'New' or 'mixed' languages arise from contact between traditional Indigenous language varieties and English. As far back as 1788, a simplified version of English started to develop (often called a pidgin), as did (occasionally) simplified versions of Indigenous languages.¹⁸²

These pidgins spread across the country and were expanded and developed into different full new languages spoken by children as their first languages. This happened at least as early as 1908 in the Roper River Valley,¹⁸³ and almost certainly many decades earlier in NSW.

Many words in these new languages are originally from English but they may be pronounced differently. New languages may have different grammar or create words in different ways to English.

Some of the new languages, such as Kriol and Yumplatok, have a long history of official recognition. They are estimated to have a relatively large number of speakers (20,000-30,000 people),¹⁸⁴ and are thought to have increasing speaker numbers across a growing area of the country. Over successive Census surveys, more people have been self-reporting to be speakers of new Indigenous languages,¹⁸⁵ a sign of growing recognition, pride and confidence in these languages. It is unclear whether, if at all, the growth of new languages influences the use of traditional languages.

Counting the numbers of speakers of new languages is not simple, as numerous issues affect how new languages are declared and counted. Not all speakers refer to languages by the same term that the Census lists and so might not be counted. Further, only one language can be declared in the Census, but people might prefer to claim other languages which they speak, such as a traditional language or English. For example, Gurindji Kriol is a new language which had emerged by the 1970s in the Victoria River District in the NT.¹⁸⁶ Meakins' survey of pidgin and creole languages suggests that there are around 1,000 speakers,¹⁸⁷ although in the 2016 Census, even though the name 'Gurindji Kriol' was available, only three people reported themselves as speaking it, whereas 400 people reported themselves as speaking Gurindji. These Census numbers include people who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, non-Indigenous and 'not stated' respondents.¹⁸⁸

It is very common for new languages to be misrecognised as other creoles. For example, 'Yarrie Lingo' from far north Queensland is not listed for Census purposes.¹⁸⁹ A proportion of Yarrie Lingo speakers are showing up incorrectly as speakers of 'Kriol' from the other side of the continent, but most as speakers of English.



MYTH: NEW LANGUAGES LIKE KRIOL AND YUMPLATOK ARE JUST SIMPLIFIED VERSIONS OF ENGLISH

Speakers of what come to be new languages are endlessly creative in their drive to communicate in changed language conditions, but to do this efficiently they need shared ways of talking. Over the centuries, English speakers have settled on ways of talking which include a shared set of rules for forming sentences: for example, "My brother found Molly in the bush", or "Molly was found by my brother in the bush". Much more recently people in the north of Australia and the Torres Strait have settled on shared ways of talking, which are systematic, and different from English.

Here's a Kriol example from the Northern Territory¹⁸¹

Main braja bin faindim Moli jeya la bush

[My brother found Molly in the bush]

Kriol speakers use:

main where English speakers use 'my'.

bin faindim where English speakers use 'found'.

la where English speakers might use 'in' or 'at' or 'on'.

These are systematic grammatical rules, as are the English rules for the use of 'my' for 'my book' but 'mine' for 'this book is mine'. These apparently small differences between Standard Australian English and the new languages mean that speakers of one language cannot automatically understand and speak the other.

Figure 3.10: Showing new and mixed languages¹⁹⁰



TRADITIONAL LANGUAGES

The 2016 Census results show that less than 10 per cent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is currently speaking a traditional Indigenous language at home.^{191,192} The findings of the NILS3 further demonstrate that only 12 traditional languages can be considered relatively strong.¹⁹³ It is unclear the extent to which, if at all, the growth of new languages influences the use of traditional languages.

AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGES NOT FURTHER DEFINED

The Census question on languages spoken in the home is a combination of the most common responses in the previous Census (all non-Indigenous languages) and a text box that allows individuals to enter Indigenous languages. These written responses are then coded to the ASCL categories, and only if the language spoken is not in the ASCL is the response then coded to a 'not elsewhere classified' category or otherwise known as a 'supplementary code'.

The index for coding responses clearly states that a response should be coded to a residual category only when it is clear that it is a distinct language or dialect which cannot be placed in a specific language category.¹⁹⁴ Responses which are not precise enough to be coded to any category should be assigned the appropriate supplementary code. The review of the ASCL is based on individual text responses to the question in the previous Census.

This chapter has outlined the range of data available on the numbers of both speakers and languages, including analysis on their vitality and/or relative strength. The following chapter explores in more detail how languages are being kept strong and in some cases being brought back after a period of no use.

CHAPTER 4

WHAT IT MEANS
TO MAINTAIN AND
BRING BACK
INDIGENOUS
LANGUAGES



WHAT IT MEANS TO MAINTAIN AND BRING BACK INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

KEY FINDINGS:



- Maintenance, revitalisation, renewal and reawakening activities are vitally important to support the continuation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.
- Even traditional languages currently considered relatively strong require purposeful and ongoing maintenance actions, so they do not become critically endangered.
- The AIATSIS 2018–19 Survey finds that there are at least 31 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language varieties being reawakened by communities in Australia.¹⁹⁵

PART 1: MAINTAINING A STRONG LANGUAGE

In this Report, references to ‘maintaining a language’ refer to strong traditional languages, which are spoken ordinarily by all generations as fluent speakers, within families and in the community. The chain of language transmission from parent to child is unbroken. This intergenerational language transmission is ongoing in the case of strong languages.

This section does not include discussion on the maintenance of new languages as this is a complex subject and goes beyond the data collected for this Report. The benefits of using mother tongue languages (both traditional and new) in service delivery and education are discussed in Chapters 2 and 5.

Ideally, communities make the decisions about the future of their languages and determine the actions and practices appropriate to use and preserve them. In this context, maintaining a language is about the sum total of speakers’ decisions (influenced by the opportunities available to them) – moment to moment and day to day – about speaking their language. Members of a speech community can be supported in maintaining language by ensuring they can use their language as often as possible, in as many facets of life as possible. The more restricted speakers’ use of a traditional language becomes, the harder it is to maintain it as a strong language.

INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION

A language is being maintained when intergenerational transmission of that language is taking place:

Within families

Across the generations, parents speak this language as a first language and use it with their children who respond to them in kind.

In the community

The everyday language spoken in the community is this language, so children hear it and use it, and continue acquiring it.

KEEPING TRADITIONAL LANGUAGES STRONG

Maintaining a language requires using that language. For languages with a smaller number of speakers, which in 2019 includes even the strongest traditional languages with the largest numbers of speakers,¹⁹⁶ this can be a difficult proposition in the face of the dominant national and international language, English, and in some areas competing with a vibrant new Indigenous language as well.

Everyday speakers of a traditional language can feel pressure to switch to English (or perhaps a new language) in order to carry out some part of life.¹⁹⁷ While multilingualism is of itself beneficial, opportunities for speaking small, minority languages are easily swamped by the need to speak dominant languages if intentional actions to support them are not taken. For example, government services can employ speakers of the same languages as are spoken in the community, including in schools, clinics, social services and police stations. Speakers can be given time and encouragement to develop common ways of using language to discuss new initiatives so as to better inform the community and service providers.

Language maintenance is influenced by a variety of factors. Other languages, commonly English, are dominant in broader communication needs and commerce situations. In addition, traditional languages are facing rapid and potentially radical change, and different generations may hold different attitudes to speaking traditional languages.¹⁹⁸

Rapid change in a language may require a re-think about which variety is used in some settings. The language of older people might be considered the proper and aspirational version that young people will have to work hard at learning. The language that younger people speak could be the variety that would enhance children's classroom learning experiences because it is what they fully understand. In NILS3, this was reflected where two responses were received for what may be considered two varieties of the same language; one spoken by the older generations (Manyjilyjarra) which is described as in decline; and one spoken by the younger generations (Martu Wangka) which is described as on the rise in terms of number of speakers. Several other respondents described similar situations for other languages.¹⁹⁹

To maintain strong traditional languages is to prevent these languages from further decline, and in the process find ways to further strengthen them by ensuring more opportunities for all generations to continue speaking the language.

"You mob gotta help us ...those songlines they been all broken up now ...you can help us put them all back together again"

When presenting major survey exhibitions, curators generally develop a concept, then consult from time to time with the artists and other stakeholders. *Songlines: Tracking The Seven Sisters* (National Museum of Australia, 2017) was different. Art historian Vivien Johnson describes the exhibition as a tour de force that: "...began when Anangu elder Mr David Miller, from the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in South Australia, asked a roomful of Canberra academics and museum personnel to help his people put their broken songlines back together again."²⁰⁰

In response, curators Margo Neal, Sita McAlpine and Christiane Keller asked: "...how do you bring back the ancient living breathing songline into a museum space, and how do you also realise this Anangu plea to preserve ancient songlines?"²⁰¹

The Seven Sisters exhibition was monumental, tracking the journeys of ancestor beings across three deserts and six language groups spanning Martu Country, the APY Lands and Ngaanyatjarra (NG) Lands of Australia's Central and Western deserts. Over seven years, senior custodians collaborated with the National Museum of Australia and the Australian National University to tell the epic story, associated with the Pleiades star cluster, that includes a chase across vast tracts of the country, a complex mix of courtship and harassment, a moral tale on kinship and law, and a creation story to explain how things came into being.

The story was told from the perspective of the people within the songline, using their languages and their ancient ways of passing on knowledge. Through full scale projections of custodians speaking in language, through art, dance, stories and song, the Seven Sisters songline has been recorded and 'put back together again' for future generations, and to share with all Australians and the world.

SUPPORTING LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE

There are many maintenance initiatives that support the continuing vitality of languages.

The language community should be able to choose to use their first language in all aspects of community life, and there should also be support for learning English

to a high standard, so people can access all available economic and social benefits and opportunities. There are some specific activities that help create an environment that nurtures the ongoing use of speakers' first language in rich and varied interactions and hence foster community language maintenance. These are detailed in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Initiatives supporting language maintenance

<p>Service delivery in language</p>	<p>In a language maintenance environment, the option of service delivery in people's first languages enables effective communication with service providers and improves access.²⁰²</p> <p>This is particularly vital for services for high stakes interactions, such as health and justice, in childcare and education settings for young children, and in aged care facilities.²⁰³</p> <p>This approach provides quality services and gives people access to services to which they have a right. Providing service delivery in people's first languages reinforces and supports the strength of traditional languages.</p>
<p>Creating situations where children continue to learn and use the language</p>	<p>Research since the 1970s has shown that mother-tongue medium instruction is an important precursor to successful second language literacy. Throughout the early years of education, lessons delivered through a child's first language, with a gradual, staged transition to English as a second language has been demonstrated to improve access to education, as well as English literacy.</p> <p>Using the children's first language as the medium of instruction has strong community and language maintenance benefits.²⁰⁴ It enriches the language through focus on the words and sentences needed to teach curriculum content. This includes adult speakers creating educational materials to deal effectively with new concepts, helping children enrich their first language by extending it into modern situations, and helping children deal more effectively with new (academic) concepts through the language they know best. This application extends Indigenous languages into all school curriculum situations. It lays the foundation for the entire speech community to develop shared terminology for contemporary issues, like severe weather events, health and nutrition decisions and civics issues.</p> <p>The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority provides the 'first language learner pathway' (i.e. mother tongue) in the school curriculum.²⁰⁵ In the classroom context, the students' mother tongue is fostered and maintained when they are able to use it for classroom learning. Their teachers, learning resources and curriculum delivery all do more than simply recognise the language.</p> <p>The Australian Government's <i>Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages</i> was developed as part of the <i>Australian Curriculum: Languages</i>. The Framework provides a way forward for schools in Australia to support the teaching and learning of Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages.</p>

<p>Creating situations where children continue to learn and use the language (cont'd)</p>	<p>The pressure to switch to speaking only English or a new language is reduced when there are teachers, resources, and a curriculum that all go beyond just recognising the student's first and main language,²⁰⁶ and actually use the language in the classroom for classroom learning.</p> <p>Using students' first language as the medium of instruction in schools benefits the community in that knowledge of their language becomes a desired attribute for teachers, and so speakers' roles as school teachers is more highly valued.</p>
<p>Documentation</p>	<p>While documentation on its own cannot maintain a language, the work of documenting a language can raise speakers' awareness of whether a language is being used by all generations and how it is being used,²⁰⁷ for example through sand-story telling or sign languages.</p> <p>Speakers have access to all kinds of useful and interesting language documentation. This safeguards knowledge for future generations, including documentation of on-Country knowledge and specialised concepts.</p> <p>Documentation enables the production of resources that can be used immediately, as well as providing information for the updating of resources and pedagogical materials, such as dictionaries for classroom purposes and health worker reference works.</p> <p>The development of literature includes the development of first language literature for all ages and the use of first language written, audio and visual materials, and phone apps for service delivery.</p> <p>Specific areas of community interest are purposefully developed using the mother tongue and disseminated through community education initiatives, for example emergency warnings.</p>
<p>Local recognition</p>	<p>Encouraging the use of traditional languages in the mass media such as in popular music, movies and television bolsters language maintenance, especially if that content becomes internationally popular.²⁰⁸ Many of Australia's famous media exports of Indigenous culture are in strong languages such as Yolŋu Matha and Western Desert. The music of Baker Boy, Yothu Yindi, Gurrumul and the Warumpi Band, movies such as <i>Ten Canoes</i> and TV shows like the <i>Bush Mechanics</i> series are examples.</p> <p>Local broadcasting delivered in local languages creates an ongoing vehicle for everyday language use. The importance of this was demonstrated in the 1980s and 1990s through the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme. From 2014, the ABC with the help of the Aboriginal Interpreter Service in the NT, began broadcasting an Indigenous language News Service in Warlpiri, Yolŋu Matha and Kriol.</p> <p>Encouraging incoming professionals coming to work and live in the community to learn the local language by making classes available promotes community pride and provides local employment opportunities.</p>



PART 2: BRINGING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES BACK

A RANGE OF SITUATIONS FOR INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages that are considered endangered or sleeping can be revived, renewed or reawakened. This process can vary depending on whether the language group is starting the journey with no fluent speakers, or with some. It has been demonstrated that it is possible to revive a language at either end of this continuum.²¹⁰

There are different categories used to describe where a language sits on the endangerment continuum, and what kinds of support activities are appropriate. In this Report the following terms are used:^{xvi}

Revitalisation: has a generation of older speakers left and children are likely to have a good passive knowledge of the language.

Renewal: there is still an oral tradition, but there are no fluent speakers, and children are likely to have little or no passive knowledge of the language.

Reawakening/Revival/Reclamation: there are no speakers or partial speakers and reliance is on historical sources to provide knowledge.

REVITALISATION

The results from the AIATSIS Survey indicate that there are around 78 traditional languages no longer being passed on to children but which still have a number of elderly speakers.²¹¹ The contexts of these languages are diverse, some having only one elderly speaker, some having hundreds, and many in-between. There are various strategies that can be used to strengthen these languages, depending on the precise situation. One strategy, the Language Nest, seeks to create a situation that re-starts intergenerational language transmission. This approach has seen a number of successes around the world.²¹² Another strategy is the Master-Apprentice approach, which brings together an adult learner to work intensively with a speaker in immersive situations and again, this strategy has seen some notable successes.²¹³

For some languages, such as Yawuru (spoken around Broome in Western Australia (WA)), the language had declined to a state where only a handful of older fluent speakers remained.²¹⁴ In recent years the community has

^{xvi} It should be noted that these terms may be used differently by other writers.



MYTH: ONCE A LANGUAGE IS GONE YOU CANNOT BRING IT BACK

Modern Hebrew, the national language of Israel, is a good example of a language being brought back. It stopped being spoken as an everyday language more than 1,500 years ago but remained as a language of religious use. After 1880, it was revived as a language of everyday talk in the country that became Israel. But naturally, because of great changes in the ways of living and technologies, Modern Hebrew is very different from the Hebrew of the Old Testament.²⁰⁹ Today many Aboriginal languages are being renewed and reawakened. Like Modern Hebrew, today's renewed languages follow from the ancestral languages but have been adapted to talk about modern life.

been actively working to bring Yawuru back into use. Adult learners have worked hard with Elders to once again make the language a part of daily lives, and now the community is working together in schools and with families for children to learn Yawuru. For these languages in revitalisation mode it may be possible to restore intergenerational transmission, for example through a Language Nest, as is happening with Miriwoong in the eastern Kimberley of WA.²¹⁵

Whatever the exact context, for languages in revitalisation mode it is possible to carry out detailed language documentation which can create an extremely valuable body of material that will be available for whatever approach is taken, or for some future time when it might be necessary to renew/reawaken the language.

RENEWAL AND REAWAKENING

Some traditional languages that went through a period of having no child speakers are now being renewed or reawakened. This means that after a break in intergenerational transmission, sometimes over many decades, people are working to learn and use the language, and teach it to their children. Each renewal and reawakening language situation is unique.

For languages, such as Kaurna (spoken around Adelaide in SA), the language was not spoken at all for nearly 60 years, when people began using historical sources to reawaken the language.

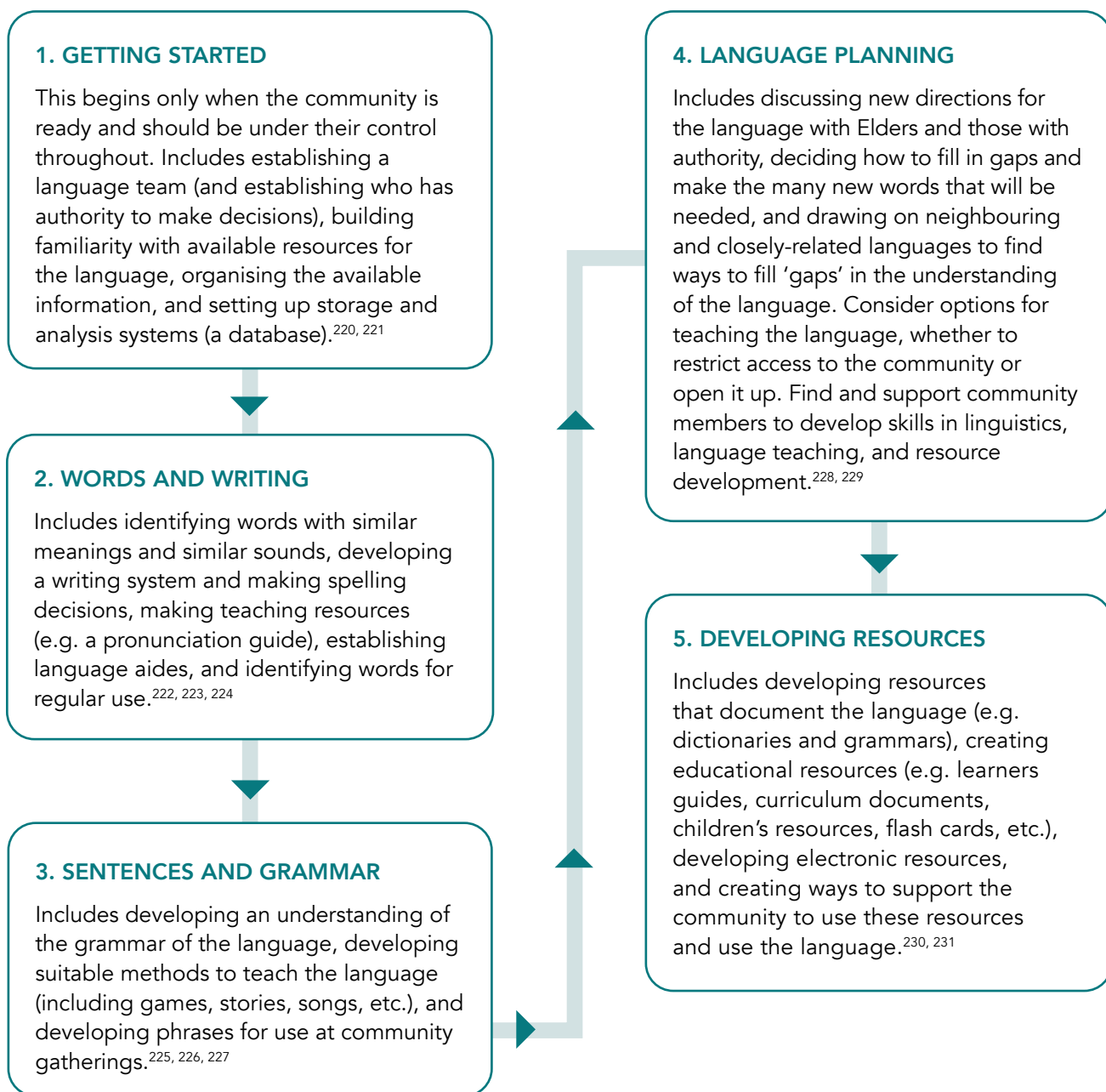
Some Kurna people have taken it upon themselves to learn, use and teach their language in their daily lives.²¹⁶

Another example of language renewal is Wiradjuri (spoken in NSW), where there are now TAFE NSW Certificate 1, 2 and 3 courses available, a Graduate Certificate delivered by Charles Sturt University, and schools in places such as Parkes, Wagga Wagga, Young and Narrandera are taking up Wiradjuri language education.²¹⁷

Reawakening a language refers to bringing a language back into use after a time when there was no inter-generational transmission and then no speakers (or at least, none available).

Drawing on the experiences of language reawakening work across Australia we can identify a broadly consistent pathway.^{218, 219} This language reawakening pathway is represented in Figure 4.2. While each step is represented discretely, in practice there is considerable intersection and overlap between each step in the pathway.

Figure 4.2: Steps to reawaken a language



xvii Graduate Certificate in Wiradjuri Language, Culture and Heritage

There are several requirements before this process can be undertaken.

The community must be ready to undertake the journey of language reawakening as this can involve dealing with memories, histories of trauma and other confronting matters that produced the need for this work.²³²

Reawakening a language is likely to be successful when language knowledge held by community members is able to be shared across the community.

There must be sufficient materials available to underpin the work of language reawakening. This work involves assembling all known materials, including knowledge held in the community. While it is likely to be useful to work with a trained linguist in this process, it is crucial that community members have the lead role both in guiding the work and in learning with the linguist.²³³

Historical materials were likely to have been collected by individuals with little or no knowledge of a language or awareness of effective writing systems or grammatical structure. For this reason, these materials may not provide an accurate representation of the language and need to be carefully analysed to work out what the language was like (i.e. asking the question “what did the recorder hear that led them to write this down in this way?”).²³⁴

This work supports the writing of a ‘grammar’, a document laying out a technical description of the language. It is essential to write this as clearly as possible.²³⁵ While few will be able to read this, it is necessary as it provides a detailed analysis of the language and lays out aspects such as the sound system. The linguist may be able to draw on descriptions of related languages to improve the analysis or at least to make educated guesses to fill the gaps. The grammar provides the information needed to produce the full range of materials to support language learning, whether by children or adults.²³⁶

As the above work is progressing, the community can be working to develop a better understanding of technical issues, such as the development of a suitable system for writing the language. This involves discussion of the likely sound system of the language and consideration of different potential ways of writing the language. The community should be provided the opportunity to develop an understanding of the relevant technical issues to inform their decision making on the writing system.²³⁷

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LANGUAGES COMING BACK

2018–19 AIATSIS Survey

It is difficult to distinguish from the survey results whether a language is in renewal or reawakening mode, but the NILS3 results presented in Table 4.3 show that there are at least 31 languages that have not been used for some time, but now have new speakers. That is, they are being reawakened.²³⁸ This is an increase from the results in NILS2 of 2014.²³⁹

2016 ABS Census

The 2016 ABS Census only gives indirect information about language revitalisation, reawakening and renewal, because the question does not distinguish between languages spoken as the main means of everyday communication, and languages that are being learned. However, from previous surveys and research it is possible to identify some languages with self-reported speakers as reawakened or renewed languages.²⁴⁰ The number of self-reported speakers, who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, for the top 10 Indigenous languages being renewed are set out in Table 4.4.²⁴¹

Table 4.3: NILS3 question 2: Which description best fits the current state of this language?

Degree of Vitality	Description	Count
STRONG/SAFE	The language is used by all age groups, including all children. People in all age groups are fluent speakers	14
UNSAFE	The language is used by many age groups, but not all children are fluent speakers.	8
DEFINITELY ENDANGERED	The language is used mostly by the parental generation and older. Only people in the parental generation and older are fluent speakers.	13
SEVERELY ENDANGERED	The language is used mostly by the grandparental generation and older. Only people in the grandparental generation and older may still understand the language.	43
CRITICALLY ENDANGERED	The language is used mostly by the great-grandparental generation and older. Only people in the great-grandparental generation and older may remember some of the language and may not use it very often.	14
REVIVING/REVITALISING/ REAWAKENING	The language has not been used as an everyday language for some time, but some people are now learning and speaking the language.	31
NO LONGER SPOKEN [SLEEPING]	There is no one who can speak or remember the language.	16
N/A	Don't know	2
Total number of language varieties reported		141^{xviii}

^{xviii} These numbers include two creoles – Kriol and Yumplatok

Table 4.4: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander speaker numbers for top 10 languages being renewed

Language	State/Territory	Category	Number of child speakers (0–14)	Total number of speakers
Nyungar	Western Australia	Renewal	130	446
Wiradjuri	New South Wales	Renewal	126	436
Ngarrindjeri	South Australia	Renewal	102	301
Bandjalang	New South Wales	Renewal	23	105
Gamilaraay	New South Wales	Renewal	34	94
Gumbaynggir	New South Wales	Renewal	23	78
Yawuru	Western Australia	Revitalisation	18	57
Yorta Yorta	Victoria/ New South Wales	Reawakening	13	51
Kurna	South Australia	Reawakening	16	44
Paakantyi	New South Wales/ South Australia	Renewal	12	40

The fact that people report themselves as speaking these languages in the Census shows how much traditional languages are part of their identity, and how important the reawakening and renewing activities are.

Many people engaged in reawakening their languages identify with languages that are not explicitly listed in the ASCL.²⁴²

Ngiyampaa, a language of Western New South Wales

Ngiyampaa is not a separate language category in the ASCL,²⁴³ but in 2018, Lesley Woods, a Ngiyampaa woman, set up a Facebook page for Ngiyampaa people to share ideas about reviving the language. As of December 2019, it had nearly 300 members. The many things the community wants to do give a good idea about what is needed to begin reviving a language:

- Transcribing all the audio recordings made in the past
- Gleaning language information from historical written materials and standardising the spellings into the modern spelling system
- Developing a comprehensive dictionary
- Developing an online language teaching course (because many Ngiyampaa people live in different parts of the country)
- Developing language teaching apps.

SUPPORTING WORK TO BRING LANGUAGES BACK

Table 4.5: Initiatives supporting work to bring languages back

<p>Education programs and training</p>	<p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers are in a strong position to engage children and adults in language learning,²⁴⁴ which is necessary for language revitalisation and renewal, and should be part of the planning for reawakening a language.</p> <p>Language renewal and reawakening also offers opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language workers to document the language, discover materials about the language and create new teaching materials.</p> <p>This work requires training, as language teaching and language work are specialised areas. Many AIATSIS Survey respondents called for more training opportunities to support this work.²⁴⁵</p> <p>Of the 78 responses on this issue, 41 per cent said there were no training opportunities at all, 23 per cent said there were very few (or almost no) opportunities, and 31 per cent said there were few (or limited) opportunities. Just 5 per cent suggested the quantity of training opportunities was not limited to a small number.²⁴⁶ This was a qualitative question in the AIATSIS Survey, so responses should not be taken as representative.</p> <div data-bbox="464 1021 1449 1317" style="background-color: #e0f2f1; padding: 10px; border: 1px solid #c8e6c9;"> <p><i>Kuku Yalanji language renewal program</i></p> <p>Kuku Yalanji people worked together with Mossman State School and a qualified Kuku Yalanji teacher to introduce a language renewal program in 2017, starting with themes of self, family and place. After 18 months, the program was deemed a success. There was increased use of, and pride in, the language, increased community engagement with the school, better attendance, and far fewer instances of destructive vandalism.²⁴⁷</p> </div>
<p>Language resources</p>	<p>Through the AIATSIS Survey respondents provided a wide range of information about how members of various language groups were involved in the production, access and use of their language resources. Most responses demonstrated at least some involvement of community members in the production of language resources and in a number of instances showed active leadership by community. These resources include, but are not limited to, grammars, dictionaries, dictionary databases and texts.²⁴⁸</p> <p>AIATSIS is currently supporting the production of over 15 dictionaries, a number of which are listed on the AIATSIS website.²⁴⁹ In every case, community members are central participants in the work of creating the dictionaries and are very keen to see them published. These materials are key parts of the language support 'infrastructure' and are of use across the full spectrum of language endangerment contexts.</p> <p>The academic nature of some resources produced by people outside the community can limit their usefulness to community members.²⁵⁰ The comment on resources provided by respondents to the AIATSIS Survey indicates that involving community in producing language resources, and giving them access is crucial, but so too is ensuring that these resources are able to be actively used, to meet community language aspirations.</p>

<p>Language resources (cont.)</p>	<p>Accessibility of material is provided through a variety of means, including direct distribution, storage at a language centre or similar place, and online access. Accessibility can be hampered by limited internet access and loss of materials in community keeping places.</p>
<p>Archives and libraries</p>	<p>Archives and libraries are safe places that in many cases hold significant repositories of resource material about languages.²⁵¹ These are not always easily found but many collecting institutions have in recent years undertaken specific activities to rediscover what language materials are in their collections. For example:²⁵²</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The National Library of Australia Trove database is now using the AIATSIS AUSTLANG language coding. ▪ The National Archives of Australia has presented ‘Introduction to Archives’ sessions to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and communities, to raise awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collection items to assist communities in connecting to memory and culture. ▪ The Alice Springs Public Library has a local languages collection of early eader texts and books for adults available in up to 14 different Central Australian languages. ▪ The State Library of Queensland’s Indigenous Languages Project supports the revival of Queensland’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. Since 2006, the project has supported 105 languages and dialects. One example has been the Yuwibara language of the Mackay Region which was considered to be sleeping. Since 2015, the State Library, in partnership with Mackay Regional Libraries, has assisted Mackay communities to rebuild their language from historical sources. The outcome will be a community dictionary and language app with over 1,000 words from Yuwibara and neighbouring languages.²⁵³ ▪ The Better Beginnings family literacy program from the State Library of Western Australia²⁵⁴ encourages and supports parents to be their child’s first teacher, talking, singing, reading, writing and playing with their child every day to develop literacy and language skills from birth. The program reaches 95 per cent of families across WA with newborn babies, and 99 per cent of all kindergarten students. ▪ Since 2010, Better Beginnings has been working with early childhood practitioners, parents, health nurses, teachers and Aboriginal Medical Services in 130 remote Aboriginal communities to bring early literacy opportunities to children up to the age of five. Read to me, I love it! reading packs have been specially developed to support the requirements of children living in remote communities. In 2019–2023, Better Beginnings will build on this approach to include a focus on developing resources in Aboriginal languages to improve engagement in literacy and learning.

Archives and libraries (cont.)

Paper and Talk: the Australian Breath of Life Pilot

The 2019 Paper and Talk project was run by AIATSIS and Living Languages, and is based on the US Breath of Life Institute. Both programs, although on opposite sides of the world, have connected the custodians of Indigenous languages with materials about those languages held in national archives, while training them in linguistic analysis and other skills needed to interpret, use and apply the materials they find.

Paper and Talk participants learned practical skills in linguistics and exploring archives, so they could develop language resources to assist in strengthening or revitalising their languages. The participants left the workshop with new materials and information about their languages, new linguistic and research skills to share with their communities, and ideas for language projects.²⁵⁵

"We discovered amazing words that we thought were long lost to us. That my grandfather had used and my grandmother. It was an exhilarating two weeks and I felt like I was on a rollercoaster ride, and we found what would have been at least a couple hundred words." Caroline Hughes, Ngunnawal participant²⁵⁶

Revival through business / income opportunities

Language revival offers opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to engage in translation and interpreting, broadcasting, liaison positions, ranger programs and more.

In addition to employment opportunities, such as language tour guides, translators and interpreters, language-based tourism also provides a vehicle for communities to carry out language revival activities. This can be seen in a qualitative study based in Canada which carried out visitor interviews about language, with a focus on cultural rather than economic benefits of tourism:²⁵⁷

In contrast to conventional approaches wherein Indigenous tourism, merely by its existence, is purported to be a tool for revitalization, language-based tourism programming is re-positioned as a strategic and intentional method in which the tourist becomes an active participant – contributing directly to the goals of language revitalization.

An earlier study in Canada also explored how Indigenous languages operate within tourism settings, and found that in these language revival contexts, the Haida had developed tourism initiatives that were economically, culturally, and environmentally sustainable.²⁵⁸

Engaging the broader community

The NILS3 survey found that in locations where languages are being reawakened, respondents reported wide non-Indigenous public exposure to the Indigenous language in forms such as place names, signage, and organisation names.²⁵⁹ They also reported on constant and increasing requests from the public and institutions for names, translations, Welcome to Country speeches, cultural performances and the like.



This chapter has outlined the extensive work involved in maintaining, revitalising or reawakening languages. This work is drawn on by organisations involved in designing and delivering programs and services, which is explored further in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVED SERVICES AND PROGRAMS



OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVED SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

KEY FINDINGS:



- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who speak language can experience difficulties with equitable access to services when they are delivered only in English.
- The diversity of language situations and contexts in Australia means it is impossible to have a 'one size fits all' approach to service delivery and program design.
- There are approaches available to guide how language is considered in the provision of services, designing programs and in supporting the vitality of language.
- There is a strong need for more extensive and consistent data on the state of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. Existing data collection methods do not, in most cases, recognise the complexity of language contexts in Australia or reflect the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS:

The NATSISS analysis shows:²⁶⁰

Among people diagnosed with long-term health problems, speaking Indigenous languages was associated with a five percentage point increase in the probability of reporting having difficulties accessing healthcare services.

Of those who experienced physical violence in the prior 12 months, the probability of reporting having problems accessing legal services was higher by five percentage points for those who spoke an Indigenous language. The effect was three-fold for those who lived in areas where Indigenous languages were spoken as second or subsequent languages.

In parts of Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience difficulty accessing government and commercial services because these services are only offered in English, and not in the traditional or new languages that they speak. The right to receive information about government services in an appropriate language has some basis in international law.²⁶¹ Practically, these needs can be addressed in three ways: by offering services in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages; by employing more interpreters and translators; and by improving the teaching of English in schools and through adult education.

Understanding that there are diverse language landscapes across Australia is fundamental to examining the role of languages in the delivery of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The use of languages plays a pivotal role in the adequacy of service delivery and so there are many opportunities to improve services for people that speak languages other than Standard Australian English. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people speak Standard Australian English as their first language, so the use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages will not enhance the communication of information, but they might find the use of language and culture a sign of respect for their Indigenous identity and Indigenous people more generally.



DID YOU KNOW?

There are subtle differences between a distinct form of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander English and Standard Australian English.

This may be different meanings for similar words or similar meanings for different words.

Even these small differences can cause disruptions to effective communication in service delivery.²⁶²

A strategy for incorporating these local ways of talking is to employ local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people in roles that interact with local Indigenous clients and to support them to speak in culturally appropriate ways.

term ‘high stakes interactions’ – those where the cost of communication failure is very high. These include:

- interpreter and translation services; and
- education and the curriculum.

Interpreter and translation services

Interpreters are people trained to take the spoken information or messages from one language and to relay the information in another language. Interpreting services support better communication in interactions such as the delivery of medical and legal services.

This is reflected in the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ Mental Health and Social and Emotional Well-being 2017-2023*, which identifies supporting access to language interpreters as a key strategy in detecting and preventing the progression of mental health issues and related problems, and for effective client transitions.²⁶⁴

Currently, there appear to be no tertiary institutions offering accredited courses in interpreting or translating in Indigenous languages. The National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) has been offering short introductions to interpreting in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and has produced short videos illustrating the role of an interpreter in a number of Indigenous languages to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be interpreters (Yumplatok, Martu Wangka, Pitjantjatjara, Wik Mungkan, Walmajarri, Ngaanyatjarra, Kimberley Kriol, Kala Lagaw Ya).²⁶⁵

HOW LANGUAGES ARE INTEGRAL TO SUCCESSFUL SERVICE DELIVERY

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people benefit from the recognition of and respect for their cultures, including their languages, and a consistent theme in recent government consultation reports is that culture needs to be embedded in service delivery. In addition, in some areas the language needs of the service recipients should also be recognised, although these are not always included in evaluations of service effectiveness.²⁶³

The ANU’s findings indicate that ‘languages’ are best included in the design of services, alongside and in addition to culture. This explicit treatment draws attention to the fact that implementation of particular communication needs (such as interpreters and employing people who speak the main local language fluently) should be differentiated from recognition of the importance of culture more generally.

Service providers should be aware of and target the language(s) being used for everyday communication by the majority of speakers in Indigenous communities. This approach would maximise opportunities for effective communication where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people speak their own languages, traditional or new.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS IN HIGH STAKES INTERACTIONS

There are certain initiatives that play an integral role, not only in the maintenance and revival of languages, but the provision of services and programs in what we can

How do you know when you need an interpreter?

If your service is delivered in English, consider whether your client:

- understands the full range of the English language, and
- is able to follow the speed and technical terms (eg. in the court, hospital, police interview, etc.).

If not, then you should:

- ask if they want an interpreter
- ask open-ended questions
- assess their comprehension, and
- assess their communication.

[Reference: Aboriginal Interpreter Services NT.GOV.AU, <https://nt.gov.au/community/interpreting-and-translating-services/aboriginal-interpreter-service/when-to-use-an-aboriginal-interpreter>]



Translation (writing a message from one language in another language) is another important consideration for ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have good information for making decisions. The process of taking an English script or recorded message and representing it in another language often involves a draft translation which is checked before proceeding to the final product. An example of translation for health services is *The Take Heart Important Health Message* video on the prevention of rheumatic heart disease which is available in Pitjantjatjara, Burarra, Ndjebbana, Torres Strait Creole, Kunwinjku, Murrinh Patha, Pintupi-Luritja, Tiwi, West Kimberley Kriol, Warlpiri, Anindilyakwa and Yolŋu Matha.²⁶⁶

Feedback from some service delivery sectors indicates that family members, or members of the community, are often called on to provide translating and interpreting services, citing an inadequate number of qualified professionals. There are some risks to engaging family or community members to act in the place of a qualified professional, including potential conflicts of interest.²⁶⁷ Family or community members are also not bound by the confidentiality codes that apply to qualified professionals.²⁶⁸

Interpreting services across a range of service delivery sectors are often provided by phone or videoconferencing. Interpreting services that can be accessed remotely may be beneficial in situations where there is inadequate access to local interpreters, although remote interpreting services are not always comparable to face-to-face interpreting services. For example, telephone interpreting services are generally only appropriate for short, non-complex communication, and cannot take into account non-verbal communication.²⁶⁹

Access to interpreting services provided remotely is likely to be dependent on appropriate access to telecommunications technology. This is particularly the case for videoconferencing, where a good internet connection is essential to provide the speed and data capacity required.²⁷⁰

The provision of culturally appropriate interpreting services is also a consideration in the disability sector. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience higher rates of certain vision and hearing disorders than non-Indigenous Australians, and in 2012-13 were more than twice as likely to have partial or complete blindness.²⁷¹ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience higher rates of disability than non-Indigenous Australians across all age groups. In 2012, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0-14 were more than twice as likely than non-Indigenous children to have a disability, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 35-54 years were more than 2.7 times as



MYTH: PEOPLE CANNOT TALK ABOUT COMPLEX IDEAS IN ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LANGUAGES

Every community of speakers develops words for things that are important to them. For example, Kunwinjku people of Arnhem Land have five different words to distinguish the ways in which different wallabies and wallaroos hop. English lacks single words for these differences. English speakers can describe the differences in sentences, and can make up new words for these ideas. Similarly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages (whether traditional or new) have rich grammars and ways of making new words which allow them to express ideas like 'mortgage' or 'universal declaration of human rights'. For example, many people in Arnhem Land suffer from a genetically transmitted disease called Machado-Joseph disease (MJD). Gayangwa Lalara, Julie Gungunbuy Wunungmurra, and Bronwyn Daniels wanted their communities to know what scientists had found out about this disease. They worked with the MJD Foundation to prepare videos in the traditional languages Anindilyakwa and Yolŋu Matha, the new language Kriol and in English, to explain concepts such as 'chromosome', 'gene' and 'genetic transfer'. Caroline Wurrumare has also translated a booklet into Anindilyakwa about MJD and its genetic transfer.

likely as non-Indigenous adults to have a disability.²⁷² The prevalence of disability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be recognised and provided for when planning service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Organisations such as First Peoples Disability Network Australia can be useful resources in planning for culturally appropriate interpreting services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability, noting that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may not identify as having disability.

Another area of concern regarding Indigenous languages in service delivery is aged care. Research into bilingual situations for the elderly show that language proficiency is affected both by normal ageing and the development of dementia, and that even with normal ageing it can become difficult to maintain more than one language. People can revert to their childhood language even with a lifetime of dual language use.²⁷³ Good communication with people in aged care requires recognition of language needs. This is highlighted in research into improving dementia care in the Kimberley, where both caregivers and service providers commented on the inadequacy of interpreting services.²⁷⁴

In 2016, it was estimated that around 22 per cent of the Australian Indigenous population were being considered in planning for aged care services.²⁷⁵ Indigenous Australians in permanent residential aged care tend to be substantially younger than non-Indigenous Australians, and have a greater incidence of dementia.²⁷⁶ These higher service demands in both residential and home care environments were noted by the Australian Government Department of Health in 2019, with the *Actions to support older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*, which identifies the need for action by governments, mainstream aged care providers and specialist providers, to respond to these higher service demands.²⁷⁷

These issues are also being experienced overseas. A study in New Zealand on the quality of life of Māori in aged care found that increased Māori language and cultural engagement was associated with higher quality of life for older Māori.²⁷⁸

In Australia there are a number of providers of interpreter and translation services. For example, the Northern Territory's Aboriginal Interpreter Service offers video and face to face interpreter services, but in cases of remote communities this can involve delay depending on access and technology availability. Aboriginal Interpreting WA provides interpreters accredited by the NAATI.²⁷⁹

Education and the curriculum: a special case of service delivery

Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attend mainstream schools and are taught a curriculum delivered through English, but there is a need for greater recognition of the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children learning English as an additional language or dialect.

In some communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have taken the lead; for example, the Warlpiri controlled Warlpiri Education and Training Trust:

Supports partnerships for training and education so all Warlpiri people will have better knowledge through Warlpiri culture and two-way learning. Our vision is for future generations to be strong in their knowledge of culture, country and language, to be strong role models and to stand up for our communities.²⁸⁰

In some schools, local staff are employed who can facilitate communication between students and teachers. A small number of remote schools have official bilingual programs, which have been shown to benefit students in numerous ways.²⁸¹ All these programs would benefit from having more trained local staff who speak the local languages, as well as having explicit training in English teaching.

Indigenous Australians identify the advantages of teaching children in their own mother tongue:

“Teaching in our own language, teaching Anangu culture and teaching the children to read and write in Pitjantjatjara / Yankunytjatjara will also open up their spirits (down deep in their roots) because this will give them the courage to try new things for themselves. It will help their confidence also when they have someone close by and continually supporting them.”

(Katrina Tjitayi in a lecture on ‘red dirt curriculum’)²⁸²

The ANU found that there were opportunities for the education sector to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

First step: recognise and respect Indigenous students' first languages and intentionally use them for learning, at the very least informally through adults who can understand and bridge between students and classroom curriculum learning, but also formally where communities support mother tongue education.

Second step: collect data on the English proficiency of Indigenous students who speak an Indigenous language as their mother tongue. Understanding Indigenous children's English proficiency levels is essential both for teaching English purposefully (i.e. not just using the language of English, but teaching it) and for indicating the teaching approaches that will support English language learners to access all the subjects of the curriculum.

Third step: ensure students who speak Indigenous languages can gain qualifications as speakers of their own languages.

Fourth step: dismantle the barriers for Indigenous language speakers in gaining a tertiary or vocational qualification in teaching, including teaching through their own language(s), and teaching English as an additional language or dialect.

Where education meets interpreter/translation training

A new development which brings together high school education and interpreter/translation training is the Translation Tracks course, a VET pathway in the senior secondary years, piloted in Central Australia with Arrernte and Alyawarr. It provides high school students with the opportunity to enrich their home language, learn more about English through investigating miscommunications, and gain an understanding of the interpreter/translation profession through workplace visits and through developing language resources.²⁸³

APPROACHES TO ACCESSING SERVICES

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who speak an Indigenous language as their first language are significantly more likely to report having problems in accessing services, even when accounting for the remoteness factor.

Services are often delivered by English-speakers and there may be little consideration of whether the service recipients have acquired English to the level required for the interaction, or of whether they could be helped by having an interpreter or language speaking assistant. Problems accessing services can partly be attributed to the remote locations of the majority of this group, where services are more limited for the entire community.

Across the country, innovative solutions are being developed to enhance access to services in remote locations; for example, the development of the Northern Territory's *Aboriginal Recorded Voice Announcement system*, by NEC Australia and Stratum Information Communications Technology. The system enables Indigenous Australians in the Northern Territory to engage with emergency services in language, ensuring appropriate access to these services and reducing the burden on other emergency service centres typically accessed via Triple Zero.²⁸⁴



CASE STUDY:

Purple House in Alice Springs²⁸⁵

Purple House is an innovative Indigenous-owned and run remote dialysis service, aged-care and social support provider and bush medicine enterprise, which operates in a range of communities across the remote regions of the NT.

Prompted by the question, “Why should it be on just the Aboriginal community to learn English? We should be learning their language too”, the Purple House team is developing Luritja language translation software in cooperation with Luritja people to make communication between language and non-language speakers easier. The funding they have received under the ILA Program has allowed them to employ Luritja people (some board members and dialysis patients they work with) to develop language resources that support doctors and health staff to better communicate with Luritja speaking patients.

A program such as this is valuable to the Luritja community. It focuses on the use of language for practical communication in the workplace such as translating documents and medicine labels, but also exemplifies respect for traditional language and gives language a higher status in the workplace.

It is a practical tool that aims to be implemented within not just the walls of Purple House, but across many businesses. This program creates job opportunities for community members, stimulates and gives purpose to patients who sit within Purple House for dialysis for five-hour periods and ultimately brings the community together.

This project aims to improve the social and emotional well-being of dialysis patients through meaningfully engaging them in the language initiative as well as contributing to the cultural safety of the environment, which for many patients, is away from their Traditional Lands.

It is also hoped that their physical health and receptiveness to treatment will improve as a result of the improved engagement and communication.

At a broader level, the project also aims to contribute to reconciliation and increased cross cultural understanding by employing patients to work directly with medical staff, facilitating a strong cultural knowledge exchange in addition to the capturing, documenting and teaching of the language.

Are the right questions being asked before setting up and during the evaluation of programs and services?

What is the traditional Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language of the area?

What are the main languages spoken by people in the area – traditional, new, or both?

Is English spoken as a first or second language?

How will the initiative recognise, respect and respond to people with these language repertoires?

BARRIERS TO SERVICE DELIVERY

The *My Life My Lead* Report states that despite improvements, poor access to health and effective ‘wrap around’ services contributes to the significant health inequities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.^{xix} Barriers to access include a lack of cultural safety, poor health literacy and the need for interpreting and other language services.²⁸⁶

The NILS3 survey raised that one barrier for service providers is that new languages may not have a widely recognised name in the community – so speakers might use various descriptive phrases to indicate their language variety, in lieu of a standardised name.²⁸⁷

Such local namings and descriptions do not appear on official language lists and so service providers will not be alerted to speakers’ languages. For example, the creole spoken at Yarrabah is becoming known as Yarrie Lingo because of a community poster project conducted there

^{xix} ‘Wrap around’ describes a collaboration or ‘joining up’ of services to provide multi-layered support for children and their families. Reference: Australian Institute of Family Studies, *CFCA Paper No. 9*, 2012.



about a decade ago.²⁸⁸ This name has not yet appeared as an option on official language lists. Another example of where there are no codes on the ABS list of languages is for new languages spoken by Aboriginal people on Cape York, although these are the dominant languages in the area.²⁸⁹ When a language is not classified, it becomes invisible for the purpose of service delivery.

New languages might or might not be consistently recognised or named as languages separate from a source language. For example, for a variety of reasons, in responses to language surveys Gurindji Kriol, Light Warlpiri and Modern Tiwi might not be distinguished from their traditional source languages. For new

languages with vocabulary predominantly drawn from English, 'English' might be considered the most accurate response in lieu of anything more appropriate.²⁹⁰

While many traditional languages and some new languages are listed in the NAATI online database,²⁹¹ only two practitioners are listed for Pitjantjatjara, and none for Murrinh Patha or Aninindilyakwa, or for Kriol (Kimberley, Roper River or Fitzroy Valley). This represents a decline over time, given that Kriol-English interpreters from Ngukurr were part of the first cohort of Diploma of Interpreting graduates from the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (NT) in 1995.



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CASE STUDY:

Ngukurr – where community is revitalising traditional languages and services in Kriol are needed

In the community of Ngukurr in eastern Arnhem Land the first language of children is Kriol. Community members are affiliated with a number of traditional languages from the region, including Alawa, Mangarrayi, Marra, Ngalakgan, Ngandi, Wubuy, Rembarnga, Ritharrngu/Wägilak and Warndarrang.

Most Ngukurr residents have family connections to many of these traditional languages, and possibly to others further afield. In Ngukurr, traditional languages are usually learned as 'additional' languages, by people who gradually and continually add knowledge of these traditional languages over their lifetime.

Kriol is the everyday language for Ngukurr residents. It has a long history with children recorded using Kriol since 1918. Kriol is largely accepted as a language in its own right in Ngukurr and Kriol resonates positively and proudly within the community as the local way of talking.

The Ngukurr Language Centre includes Kriol as one of the local Aboriginal languages it serves,

although it is not specifically funded for this. As the primary, everyday medium of communication in this community, Kriol is the language spoken in family and community circles, as well as the language through which children learn about their world and are taught their culture and their traditional languages. As with any language spoken from birth with family and community, speaking Kriol also reflects a person's sense of identity: there is a recognisable Ngukurr/Roper way of speaking Kriol.

Despite Kriol being spoken community-wide, and Kriol being contemporary Australia's largest new language, residents at Ngukurr cannot rely on accessing services in Kriol, their first language, even in high stakes interactions. Typically, Kriol speakers who wish to discuss matters in Kriol rely on informal arrangements with family and community members rather than the purposefully appointed Kriol-speaking staff who are responsible for ensuring the clear communication of vital information to the community.

There are growing calls for increased access to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interpreters, particularly in the health industry. This was seen in the review of the accessibility of Indigenous language interpreters conducted by the Commonwealth Ombudsman, which found that unique challenges in the Indigenous language interpreter area mean that government agencies and individuals are frequently unable to access interpreters.²⁹²

In the justice and health areas, interpreters require extensive training on specialist terminology and relating these to Indigenous language and concepts. Jobs in these sectors are complex and require ongoing training.²⁹³ The absence of qualified interpreters can increase the risk of litigation arising from miscarriages of justice.²⁹⁴ In the course of its inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs received evidence around the poor Indigenous interpreting support in the justice system. Some Aboriginal people do not fully understand either the court processes or the outcomes of those processes, and interpreters are often unavailable or underused. Difficulties in arranging interpreters to be available for court proceedings within a short time sometimes result in clients remaining in custody.²⁹⁵

In the education area, there is also a shortage of teachers who speak Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander languages.²⁹⁶ Like interpreters, they need to work to develop specialist terminology and explanations of curriculum that relate to concepts in local languages and society. They need to develop particular skills in team-teaching and managing a bilingual bicultural classroom, and in working with language teaching resources that are more limited than those available to teachers of English.

There are limited opportunities to study Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander languages at university.^{xx} Additionally, some teacher programs have been closed down which in the past created a generation of trained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers. The benefits of having local teachers who speak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are clear: children will engage more, and learn more, when they understand what is happening in the classroom; when they have teachers who can act as role-models; and when they have teachers who stay in the communities.²⁹⁷

Providing services in the languages which best suit the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is essential. However, recognising the importance of language, even when it may not be spoken, is equally essential. The following chapter provides some guidance to governments and other organisations on how to incorporate language into their work.

^{xx} In 2019 the University Languages Portal of Australia <https://www.ulpa.edu.au/where-can-study-indigenous-languages/> listed only one language in which students could take a major, Yolŋu Matha.



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CHAPTER 6

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF THESE FINDINGS



PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF THESE FINDINGS

This Report shows the continuing decline in the use of Aboriginal and Torres Islander languages, a shift which has been identified in a number of reports since 2001, including the National Indigenous Languages Survey series (2005 and 2014).²⁹⁸

It shows that in some, but not all areas, Aboriginal and Torres Islander people are reawakening and learning their heritage languages. It also shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are a strength for communities and can enhance resilience and employability.

The links between language and well-being have been explored. The need for further research into the connection between language and well-being was identified in NILS2,²⁹⁹ and even before this NILS1 asserted that to enhance opportunities for employment of Indigenous people as language workers and provide career pathways for Indigenous people with linguistic skills, there is a need for a whole-of-government approach linking language activities and other activities such as education, arts and crafts, media and land management.³⁰⁰ The findings of this Report support these previous recommendations.

Key to ensuring the maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and enhancing the well-being and employability of their speakers is the availability of training.³⁰¹ This is essential for interpreters and translators,³⁰² for teachers,³⁰³ and for learners of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, both in communities where people are learning their heritage languages, and in communities where the language of everyday talk is a traditional or new language.

A consistent issue in this and previous Reports,³⁰⁴ is the limitations of the available data on who speaks particular languages and to what extent. The language repertoires of individuals vary considerably. But it should be possible to provide descriptions of the language ecologies of communities and towns across Australia in order to target the implementation of policy geographically. As part of the NATSISS work, ANU researchers came up with a first pass categorisation of ABS statistical areas as to whether the dominant languages were traditional languages, new languages, or English. This categorisation could be built on as a tool for developing communication strategies.

The approach developed by the ANU for this Report, which provides a way to understand the many language situations in Australia through identifying the diversity of languages, the socio-cultural purposes, language repertoire and language ecology, has some practical elements.

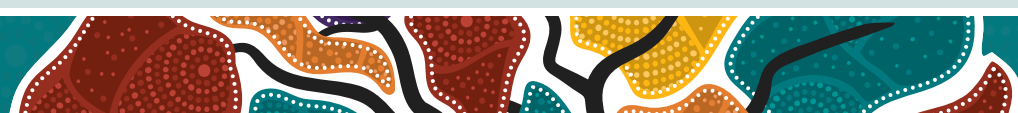
PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO SUPPORT LANGUAGES

1. Recognising that Aboriginal and Torres Islander languages are part of Aboriginal and Torres Islander people's identity, culture and heritage, regardless of the extent to which they speak them.
2. Recognising that Aboriginal and Torres Islander people value their traditional and new languages as part of who they are, their identities.
3. Recognising that Aboriginal and Torres Islander people may:
 - a. learn a traditional and/or new language as their first and main language and use it for everyday communication
 - b. learn a traditional language as a second language, or
 - c. not speak standard English.
4. Recognising that good communication through using people's first and main languages is a powerful way of showing respect for speakers and their languages and identifying their needs and aspirations.
5. Recognising that both good communication and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Islander languages, culture and heritage are essential in the policy cycle.

These approaches point to three areas of focus for future work, as shown in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Areas of focus for future work

<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">1</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">Respect and recognise individual language situations</p>	<p>For first language speakers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, the highest form of respect is allowing people to choose the language in which they communicate.</p> <p>The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people speak Standard Australian English as a first language. They may also be reawakening or learning traditional languages. Respecting the significance of traditional languages as part of cultural heritage is important.</p>
<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">2</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">Engage early to design fit-for-purpose services and programs</p>	<p>To achieve inclusion and equity across linguistically diverse situations, policy makers and service deliverers should engage actively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to understand the roles of traditional languages, new languages and Englishes.</p> <p>In all situations respect can be shown by making languages more audible and more visible.</p> <p>Languages can be made more audible through use in schools, in broadcasting, and in public events, such as through acknowledgments of Country. This reflects the findings of the 2014 national survey (NILS2), which recommended wider promotion of the importance of using traditional languages at home, and especially with children.³⁰⁵ The earlier survey in 2005 recommended the use of Indigenous languages in public functions such as government consultations, legal and health activities.³⁰⁶</p> <p>Languages can be made more visible through naming of places (including dual naming), organisations and programs.³⁰⁷ Seeking permission from appropriate people to name something with a word from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language is a way to show respect.³⁰⁸</p> <p>For good communication, policy makers and service providers should find out what languages are spoken in relevant communities, and work with communities to find the best choice of language and best means to design the policy or program. This may include employing interpreters and translators and will include embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in all levels of education.³⁰⁹</p> <p>For people who are reawakening or learning traditional languages, support for this can be embedded in many ways, from schools, adult education, and universities, to ranger programs, broadcasting and arts projects.</p>
<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">3</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">Embed Indigenous language recognition in policy and evaluation processes</p>	<p>Policy makers ensure equity and justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by actively co-designing policies and programs in which languages, traditional or new, can be used across people’s lifetimes in their communities.</p> <p>This means building in recognition, respect and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages across the policy lifecycle, from design, to implementation, to evaluation. Recognition, respect and support are needed across many sectors: early childhood education, schooling, training, health, aged care services, legal, social and financial services and employment settings.</p>





METHODOLOGY FOR THE REPORT

Australia needs a strong evidence base to support policies on Indigenous languages, and to test and evaluate what has gone before. Much of the data on the state of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in Australia is based on the National Indigenous Languages Surveys (NILS) of 2005 and 2014.

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, formerly the Department of Communications and the Arts (the Department), the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and the Australian National University (ANU) collaborated on the production of this Report, which builds on and updates the work from the previous two National Indigenous Languages Surveys and contributes to the strengthening of the evidence base.

THE DEPARTMENT

The Department is the Australian Government's lead policy agency for Indigenous languages. In 2019, it led the Government's Action Plan for the International Year of Indigenous Languages. These actions related to:

- support for the revitalisation and maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages
- access to education, information and knowledge in and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, and
- promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and values.

This Report fulfils the Government's commitment to update knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. The Report has been produced in a collaboration between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, academia and the private sector to articulate the current state of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, as well as articulate how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages link to individuals' and communities' social and economic well-being.

AIATSIS

AIATSIS designed and deployed a survey to build on the work of the previous AIATSIS language surveys and capture data that could be used to assess the state of each language. The survey consisted of 19 questions which collected data on:

- distribution of generational use of language (contributing to assessment of Indicator 1 – intergenerational language transmission)
- estimations of speaker numbers: in total, by age, and by proficiency (contributing to assessment of Indicators 1 and 2 – intergenerational language transmission and absolute number of speakers)
- proportion of people in the language group that speak the language (contributing to assessment of Indicator 3 – proportion of speakers)
- how and when the language is used (contributing to assessment of Indicators 4 and 5 – domains and functions of a language, and response to new domains and media)
- gender distribution of speakers
- existence of, and engagement with, language activities, resources and documentation (contributing to assessment of Indicators 6, 9, and 10 – materials for language education and literacy, type and quality of documentation, and language programs), and
- training opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

As there was no way for this project to develop the sample frame to survey individual speakers (as would be required for conventional survey methodologies), AIATSIS targeted respondents who are thought to have sufficient knowledge of language communities in order to collect the data. These respondents were communities, language centres and other organisations carrying out language projects; and linguists who specialise in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. The survey was deployed on 29 November 2018 and closed on 14 April 2019. A total of 171 submissions covering 141^{xxi} language varieties were received and analysed. The data was cross-referenced with other survey data and responses on the same languages were compared.

^{xxi} 171 valid survey responses were received bearing 140 unique AUSTLANG codes and one with no AUSTLANG code.

This research methodology was endorsed by the AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee and the National Indigenous Languages Report Indigenous Advisory Group (established by AIATSIS).

ANU

The ANU conducted a comprehensive literature review and data analysis to produce an evidence base for the Report that articulates the benefits that flow from Indigenous languages, particularly in relation to well-being. This analysis is based on reviewing qualitative studies and case studies, and a multivariate regression analysis of data from the 2014–15 NATSISS.³¹⁰

LIMITATIONS OF THE DATA

The National Indigenous Languages Report presents an overview of the state of Australia's Indigenous languages using the best available data collated by the Department, AIATSIS and the Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language and Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the ANU. Despite this, issues exist that need to be considered.

Both the search of the research literature and the data analysis work conducted for this Report emphasised difficulties with the quality of the Indigenous language data collected in large-scale surveys not dedicated to this purpose, and in many research and government reports, because they do not distinguish between types of Indigenous language (traditional or new) or between language contexts (first or second languages, within a specific language ecology). Some major language data issues are listed and briefly explained here. A more in-depth analysis of the issues is contained in the accompanying papers by AIATSIS and the ANU.

AIATSIS identified three issues with the data collected for the third National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS3). These issues were:

- a. complexity associated with defining a 'language variety' given that respondents to NILS3 may name language varieties as separate languages, rather than using a collective term
- b. complications when assessing proficiency and comparing proficiency across the NILS series (due to different measurements of proficiency being used), and
- c. issues arising when attempting to definitively grade the vitality of a language.

The ANU literature review identified that the usefulness of survey data was limited by the coverage of censuses and other surveys. An inability to reach remote and rural areas,³¹¹ the undercounting of children within data,³¹² and issues with how respondents understand questions and engage in self-reporting reduced the usefulness of surveys.³¹³

The absence of definitions within surveys was also identified as an issue by the ANU. The failure to define well-being, bilingualism and how different languages are named limits the usefulness of some surveys, including the 2016 census.³¹⁴ A failure to disaggregate responses from Indigenous students who speak English as their mother tongue, from those who speak languages other than English and are learners of English also had implications for the validity of data in school domains. This is because data on Indigenous languages, traditional and new, have not been collected in national education data sets, nor has English language learner data.³¹⁵ This lack of visibility is exemplified in the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) reports where a 'category of misdirection'³¹⁶ obscures the common sense notion that the most important factor in a test in English would be whether the student speaks English.³¹⁷

Finally, the ANU also identified limitations in the NATSISS that restrict the capacity of the data to establish a causal relationship between language and well-being. Limitations included a failure to differentiate between traditional and new languages, measurement errors and reporting bias resulting from self-reporting and estimates of the effect of language on well-being being undermined by the small sample of respondents that spoke an Indigenous language as their first language. The well-being measures were determined by the data set and, although not unreasonable, do not necessarily reflect all components selected in other well-being frameworks.





Aboriginal	The original inhabitants of mainland Australia and surrounding islands except the Torres Strait (the area lying between the tip of Cape York and New Guinea). The term 'First Nations' is increasingly used to refer to both Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. 'Indigenous' may be less favoured when the more specific term (i.e. 'Aboriginal' or 'Torres Strait Islander') is appropriate.
Aboriginal English	Aboriginal English refers broadly to varieties of English used by Australian Aboriginal people. Just as there are Australian ways of speaking English that are different from, for example, the English spoken by people in Scotland, there are also Aboriginal ways of speaking English. Aboriginal English varieties are different from new languages like Kriol.
ABS Census	Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census. A national survey conducted every five years by the ABS on behalf of the Australian Government. It collects demographic information about every person in the country and includes questions about languages spoken.
Australian English	A broader term than Standard Australian English and includes the closely related varieties of rural English and urban Englishes spoken by many Australians.
biculturalism	The ability to engage in the practices of two societies.
bilingual education	Teaching that involves two languages. In the context of bilingual programs in Aboriginal languages and English, 'mother tongue medium instruction' is where the children's first language is the initial language of classroom instruction and literacy learning, and the quotient of English is increased annually, by graduated steps.
bilingualism	The ability to use two or more languages to some extent.
biliteracy	The ability to read and write in two or more languages.
clan	An Australian Indigenous territorial descent group, functioning as a basic unit of social organisation.
code-switching (broad)	People switch varieties (or 'codes') when they change from the way they talk at home to a different way of talking or a different language in another situation, e.g. in a law court.
code-switching (narrow)	This occurs when speakers use different languages in the same conversation, for example, where one person asks a question in one language and the answer is given in another.
contact languages	See 'new languages'.

creole	A creole language is a language which has developed, often rapidly, from the contact between speakers of more than two languages and becomes the mother tongue of a speech community. It has properties from contributing languages but is a full and autonomous language. In Australia 'Kriol' is the name of one creole language which emerged from contact between speakers of traditional Aboriginal languages and speakers of English via an earlier bridging stage of 'Pidgin English' (see 'pidgin').
Country	Also called 'traditional Country', or 'homelands'.
demographic	Quantifiable characteristics of populations such as age, gender, language background, level of English proficiency.
dialect	This term, unlike 'language', describes a particular relationship between two language varieties which their speakers think of as belonging to the same language. For example, Scottish English and Australian English are dialects of English. Speakers of different dialects can understand each other, usually fairly easily. There are some data problems that revolve around the concept of dialect. For example, sometimes, a particular dialect holds a lot of significance for its speakers and they prefer to be seen/counted as separate from the other dialects of the same language - this can make speaker numbers of the overall language look much lower. There may be other values attached to the term 'dialect', for instance that the variety is not a 'full' or 'proper language'. It would be incorrect, for example, to refer to all traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages as 'dialects'.
domains of use	In sociolinguistics, domains of use specify places where different languages might be spoken, e.g. at home, the classroom, online, the workplace, etc.
Elders	Elders are those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members in the older generation who are recognised as cultural authorities by their communities and/or respected as rightful owners of their group's complex cultural and linguistic knowledge.
endangered language	As well as considering other indicators of language endangerment such as the absolute number of speakers, an endangered language is primarily a language where intergenerational transmission is broken. That is, the language is used mostly either by the parental generation and older; the grandparental generation and older; or the great-grandparental generation and older. Children are not fluent speakers.
Englishes	This Report recognises that there are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of speaking English, which differ somewhat from Standard Australian English. In this Report, 'Aboriginal Englishes' refers to English varieties spoken by some Aboriginal people; and 'Torres Strait English' refers to an English variety spoken by some Torres Strait Islanders. These Englishes are different from new languages.
English medium classroom	Classrooms which use the English language (which usually means a standard variety of English) as the medium of instruction. This means that all subject areas, such as mathematics, science or music etc., are delivered (i.e. taught, discussed, assessed) via spoken and written English.
First Nations	The original inhabitants and landholders of the Australian continent. The term recognises the different language groups as separate sovereign nations and is increasingly used to refer to both Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Also First Peoples.



first language (or mother tongue)	Refers to the language(s) learned from birth, typically used as an everyday means of communication. A person can have more than one first language. In other contexts, the term 'First Language' parallels the use of the term 'First Nations'. That is, in these contexts, the term is used as a marker of identity. 'First Languages' in these contexts refer to traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages that are intrinsically linked to traditional lands. The two meanings may not overlap.
heritage language	A language that is associated with a person's family, which they may or may not speak, and which is usually distinct from the national language(s).
home variety, home language	A person's first language, spoken in the home.
Indigenous	A term that refers collectively to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Other terms may be preferred when the more specific term (i.e. 'Aboriginal' or 'Torres Strait Islander') is more appropriate. 'First Nations' is increasingly common as a collective reference to both cultural groups, but the longer expression 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' may still be recommended for some contexts.
Kriol	The name of one new language which emerged in northern Australia. It has different varieties often named after the location e.g. Fitzroy Kriol, Ngukurr Kriol.
language	A system of communication involving words and/or signs used by a community.
language ecology	The configuration of languages that are spoken in a particular place.
language maintenance	Continued use of a language, despite competition with the majority language to become the main/sole language.
language revival / revitalisation / renewal / reawakening / reclamation	The process of relearning and reusing a language which had been minimally used or not used. Different programs and groups prefer specific terms. Typically, 'reclaiming', 'reviving' and 'reawakening' are the terms for processes when there are no speakers who learned the language from birth or people who remember the language; 'revitalising' is when there are still some first language speakers. 'Renewal' and 'reawakening' are general terms which also cover revitalisation and revival.
language shift	When a speech community (gradually) comes to speak another language for most, if not all, of its communicative and other cultural and symbolic needs. 'Language shift' is one of the processes involved in the development of a creole which by definition has mother tongue speakers.
language variety	A community's conventional way of talking.
literacy	The ability to encode and comprehend a spoken language through its writing system. (In some research, the term 'literacy' also includes the wider social practices associated with using literacy.)
mixed language	Mixed languages arise in contact situations, with parts from two or more source languages: for example, having the nouns from one language and the verbs from another language. Examples in Australia are Light Warlpiri and Gurindji Kriol. See also 'new languages'.

mutual intelligibility	Two dialects or varieties are mutually intelligible if the speakers of the two can understand each other.
NAPLAN	The Australian Government's National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy.
NATSISS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey. The NATSISS is a six-yearly social survey with a sample of over 11,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in private dwellings across Australia.
new languages	These are Australian languages that have formed historically from two or more other languages, often in a context of sudden and sustained contact between speakers of a number of languages. It is a very broad term, including creoles, mixed languages and historical pidgins. Present day Australian new languages include Kriol, Yumplatok/Torres Strait Creole (also called 'Broken'), and Light Warlpiri.
proficiency	Proficiency (sometimes also called 'fluency') refers to the general underlying ability of people to speak a language. Mother-tongue speakers are typically fully proficient in their language. When applied to 'second/additional language proficiency' this term describes the general level of ability that the learner has acquired at that particular point in their learning trajectory.
reawakening	Reawakening a language that has passed out of active use usually involves research of historical records and archives in order to rebuild the resources of the language, as well as learners committed to building their language repertoire and re-introducing their language into aspects of their lives. It is sometimes called 'revival' or 'renewal'.
renewal	Refers to a situation where there is still an oral tradition for a language variety, but there are no fluent speakers, and children are likely to have little or no passive knowledge of the language.
revitalisation	Refers to situations in which a language variety has a generation of older speakers left and children are likely to have a good passive knowledge of the language. Revitalisation typically involves building younger people's proficiency.
reawakening/revival/reclamation	Refers to a situation where there are no speakers or partial speakers and reliance is on historical sources to provide knowledge.
second language	Refers to any language(s) that a person is learning or has learned in addition to their first language. Second languages can be learned to different levels of proficiency.
socialisation	The process of acquiring the language(s), practices, values and beliefs of a society.
Standard Australian English	The range of formal varieties of English spoken in Australia, used by governments, universities, schools, etc. in most published documents and formal speech.
Standard English	A cover-term which includes the standard languages of the United Kingdom, America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and so on, all of which derive from British English dialects.



(relatively) strong language

As well as considering other indicators of language endangerment such as the absolute number of speakers (a stronger language usually has more speakers), a relatively strong language is primarily a language where intergenerational transmission is maintained. That is, the language is used by all age groups.

Torres Strait Creole

See Yumplatok.

Torres Strait English

The variety of English that is spoken by Torres Strait Islanders, particularly on Thursday Island, the administrative centre of the Torres Strait. It is different from the new language Yumplatok/Torres Strait Creole. Just as there are ways of speaking English that identify speakers as coming from New Zealand or Ireland, so Torres Strait English is a way of speaking English in the Torres Strait.

Torres Strait Islander

Torres Strait Islanders live on the islands of the Torres Strait, the expanse of water separating the north-eastern tip of the Australian mainland from the island of New Guinea. Approximately 20 of these islands are inhabited and over the past 50 years or so, many Torres Strait Islanders have migrated to the mainland, creating large diaspora communities especially in Queensland. Nowadays, an English-lexified creole, Yumplatok, is the most common language of Torres Strait Islanders.

traditional languages

These are Australian languages spoken by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people prior to colonisation, or the directly descended varieties spoken today. Also called heritage languages, First Nations Languages, and other terms. The term is used only to describe a type of language; individual languages have specific names.

Yumplatok, also known as Torres Strait Creole

The name of the new contact language that is spoken by Torres Strait Islanders living on the islands of the Torres Strait and in diaspora communities on the Northern Peninsula Area of Cape York and elsewhere the mainland, particularly coastal towns and cities of Queensland. The name, 'Yumplatok', created by its speakers, literally means 'our language' and is gradually ousting the most widely known term 'Broken', while 'Torres Strait Creole' is a more academic name. Closely related varieties to Yumplatok are spoken by Aboriginal people on the top third of Cape York: Cape York Creole, Lockhart River Creole and Napranum Creole. These along with Yumplatok have been collectively termed the 'north-eastern affiliates'. They are related to new contact languages spoken in Melanesia, including Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea, Bislama in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands Pijin.



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