

Meeting point: Parameters for the study of revival languages¹

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As language revival and revitalisation rapidly become primary modes of community-based work in Aboriginal Australia, the need for a theoretical foundation for the linguistic scenarios which emerge is becoming increasingly evident. Language revival presents a new situation for analysis, as the languages are simultaneously researched, learned and developed in a single, overarching and ongoing process. This brings to the fore the need to account for and implement 'vernacular' approaches to language as well as 'disciplinary', as the languages are simply not available for 'objective' academic study outside of community-internal motivations, processes and analyses.

In our work to develop such a foundation, the goal is to incorporate insights from a broad spectrum of research and experience from academic and community arenas, and from the meeting points of these to be found in collaborative community-based work. In this way we aim to develop a research methodology and epistemology which can benefit from ways of knowing and learning privileged in Aboriginal communities, as well as those of academic linguistics, and which respond directly to current developments in language revival itself.

Working in this way entails a base of reflective engagement with the ideological underpinning of both disciplinary and vernacular approaches to language, to be able to see possibilities for alternative or additional ways of viewing data and processes. Our hope is that this work will assist both communities and linguists to work more effectively – with each other, and with what is most needed at a given stage.

Introduction

In Aboriginal Australia, community-based language and linguistics work is increasingly targeted to language revitalisation and revival. The relative recency of this shift, however, leaves both communities and linguists working without an established foundation from which to understand the goals, processes and outcomes of this work. The most commonly assumed initial goals or ideals of language revival have been the restoration of the language as at the time of colonisation. This is taken by most participants to imply the lexicon and phonology, and by others also the grammatical and semantic structure, and/or the cultural meaning and

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knowledge embedded in the language. It is becoming clear, however, that at many levels, revived languages in present-day use are not going to be the same as their historical counterparts. This is for many reasons, starting with loss of language from community memory, limitations of historical records, and unprecedented levels of language mixing during the mission period. Then, the languages in the present reflect the means and priorities by which they are reclaimed, and changes – both planned (in particular, lexical elaboration) and unavoidable – in the genres, modes, domains and conceptual systems of language use in the 21st century.

The manner, means and timeline of the changes involved pose problems for linguistic theory in the recognition and characterisation of revival languages. Yet an adequately functioning theoretical basis is necessary for linguists to be able to work with such languages effectively. The many points of lack of fit between learned practice and what is useful and needed in this context brings linguists into direct confrontation with the ideological underpinning of the discipline – that is, the systems refined over decades which define and constrain what constitutes a language, an analysis, a valid data source, language change, and so on. On the other hand, language revival communities – as any communities in process of intensive or extensive language planning – are working on a daily basis with ideologies developed in the context of the work to maintain or reclaim cultural cohesion and continuity, individual and group identity, and authority in their own business.

In this light we can see ideologies per se as not only natural to social and intellectual life, but potentially important and necessary, as they provide frameworks for contextualising, and thereby guiding, ourselves and our purposes in various key arenas. What is important to understand from this, however, is that it reveals community linguistics work as deeply cross-cultural, requiring as it does a productive understanding and connection between sets of ideologies formed for very different purposes, from within very different social and intellectual heritages. While in the present day we are beginning to achieve far more balance in terms of people working with their own languages, these recent changes have as yet had very little impact on the ideological frameworks that guide the discipline more broadly.

The vision of our current project is, firstly, to develop a framework to describe current revival language practice in a way which is meaningful given the above cross-cultural conditions, and, particularly, meaningful to people on the ground working with language revival. A model in which only the historical language is valid misses what a literally descriptive approach could tell us about what is actually happening in these languages. The latter is a vitally important study, as 'the languages now emerging from the historical languages as well as from the culturo-linguistic pathways of the past 150 years or so encode much that is crucially important to understanding both the source and the pathways' (Eira 2010). The understanding of revival languages to be gained by this can then be put to work to assist both communities and linguists to work more effectively – with each other, with what is most needed at a given stage, with expressed and less overt goals, and with what is feasible. Finally, we are hopeful that this endeavour will have significant contributions to make to community linguistics work in other contexts, as the methodology we employed to respect

and respond to the views, experiences and analyses of the communities of use has ripple effects into the heart of linguistics theory and practice.

Meeting point

Language revival presents a unique situation for language analysis, in that language is researched, learned and developed in one single, overarching process. While there are many world situations in which language learning is accompanied by intensive language planning, it is highly unusual for those researching and learning the language to also be developing it and making the language planning decisions at the same time. This means that it is simply not possible to study the languages in any meaningful way without incorporating 'vernacular' approaches as well as 'disciplinary'. The languages are just not available for 'objective' academic study outside of community-internal motivations, processes and analyses.

For this reason, amongst others, we saw it as crucial to first prioritise the perspectives of Aboriginal people involved in language revival. To the degree to which our research was oriented to linguistics questions of description and classification, a rebalancing of the field of *what is possible to know* in this way was quite simply a requirement for the integrity and ultimate relevance of the research itself.

In our model, we envision an expanded epistemology in which 'what there is to know' is *a priori* and paradigm-free. Approaches to science, or knowledge, necessarily develop in contexts of people, culture, and environment in the broadest sense. What we have rather simplistically called 'Western science' is one such epistemology, out of which core linguistics emerges, with a focus on analytical units, systematic patterns, the observable and repeatable, the forms of language and structures in which they appear, and so on. We have labelled another epistemology 'Aboriginal ways of knowing/being/learning/doing', out of which emerges approaches to language as revealed in our interviews, which we discuss further below. Our goals were to more adequately represent Aboriginal community perspectives within academic research, and in this way to make linguistics research more relevant to and useable by Aboriginal people reviving their languages. Our aim is to build a 'Meeting point' epistemology which can do justice to both streams (Figure 1):

This emphasis reflects an important principle that Vicki Couzens brings to this project, which she refers to as *wangan ngootyoong* ('respect', in her language, Keeraywoorrong) or *dadirri*, a Ngangikurungkurr concept recently brought into the public arena by Miriam Rose Ungunmerr's essay on deep listening (Ungunmerr n.d.). In Vicki's words,

My father told me as a young woman in my twenties... 'sometimes you have to wait, listen to people and let them feel that they own it, you sometimes have to wait'... Gradually over the years this awareness grew, I learned to listen, to hear people's stories and I learned to wait. The awareness is a living and growing process through which we attain learning and knowledge. This brings responsibility.

Couzens (2009)

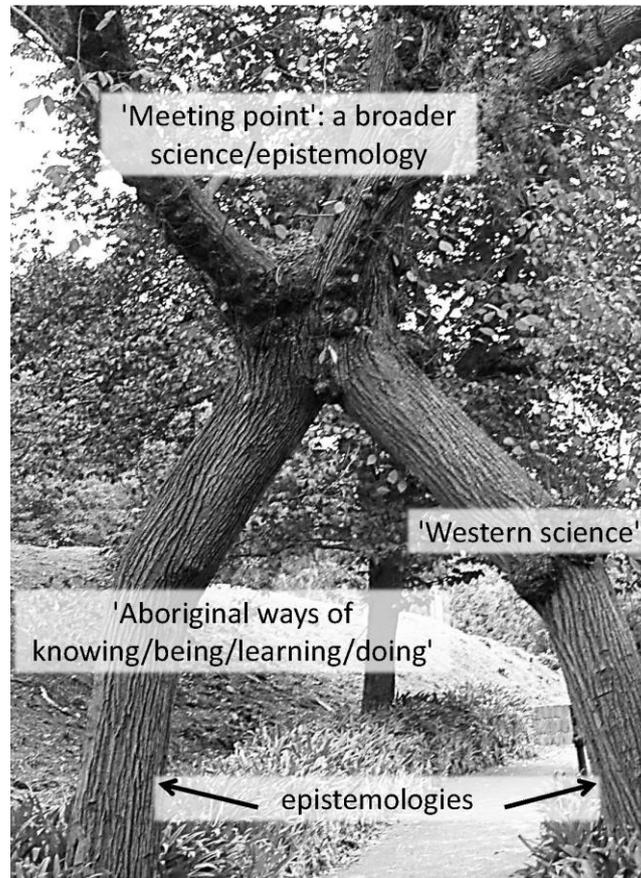


Figure 1. Meeting point epistemology tree

The principles encapsulated in Ungunmerr's essay are attracting attention amongst Aboriginal researchers in particular, for their potential in underpinning a research methodology seen as more appropriate for working with Aboriginal people and issues. Atkinson (2002) is an early example of an academic reworking of Ungunmerr's ideas. For her, in a context of working with family violence, a *dadirri*-inspired approach assumes –

- the diversity as well as the interconnectedness of Aboriginal communities,
- the principle of reciprocity in research,
- an attempt on the part of the researcher to maintain awareness of their own assumptions or biases,
- that learning comes from listening, without judgement or prejudice, and
- that the activity of learning introduces a responsibility to act with integrity and fidelity to what has been learnt.

These principles are highly relevant to our research: we intended that what people told us would inform what, how and why we were to carry out our analysis of revival languages. Our roles in communities and relationships with the people we interviewed require that what we produce is oriented to their needs at least as much as to those of academic linguistics. In particular, this mandated a model that was both concrete enough to be useable, and flexible enough to accommodate the variation in views and processes that we encountered. In setting

up the theoretical foundation for our project, our first priority was to listen to what was meaningful to our interviewees, and respond to what we learned in our research.

Foundational themes

To begin building our model, we first obtained over 30 hours of interviews with Aboriginal people involved in language revival, across 13 different language groups and three States. Those interviewed range from young adults through to the most senior Elders, who are involved as language workers, teachers, students of language and/or linguistics, participants in language committees or simply interested community members. We thematised the interviews, drawing out recurring themes to establish initial parameters for our analytical model. Using these themes, we are now developing a model for revival language data analysis, through intensive sampling of selected languages in the throes of language revival. This is an ongoing reflexive process in which initial results will feed back into the model itself. This phase will also see the incorporation of further insights from relevant linguistics subfields, including language contact, 'new' and 'mixed' languages, sociolinguistic typologies and critical applied linguistics.

The 'meeting point' concept of our project highlights interactions not only between community ideologies and those of linguistics, but also between preservative/restorative goals and modernising/progressive goals, between oral and written modes, between locating authority for decision-making with Elders, linguists, or particular historical sources, and so on.

The question of meeting points arises in relation to specific issues within the themes, with variation in how smoothly the different positions can currently meet. One goal of the larger project, then, is to consider further how to increase a productive mutual understanding at the more troublesome meeting points. For example, we identified 'developing new words' as a relatively smooth meeting point –

<i>community ways of thinking</i>	<i>MEETING POINT</i>	<i>linguistics ways of thinking</i>
getting inside the headspace of how Elders or ancestors think	new words following old patterns	identifying principles of word formation in old records (metonymy, shape metaphor etc.)

while there is more difficulty around smooth meeting of the 'bottom line' of authority in some cases:

<i>community ways of thinking</i>	<i>MEETING POINT</i>	<i>linguistics ways of thinking</i>
accurate language will fit with what is dreamed/culturally authorised/intuitively understood	different possible interpretations of sources etc. can be authorised/rejected/further modified according to community principles for determining what is correct	accurate language is largely determinable through records and comparing language characteristics

For the purposes of this chapter, we will explore just a few of the themes which emerged prominently from the community interviews. Our task was, firstly, to engage deeply with what people are saying, and secondly, to turn around to linguistics with the new understandings gained and consider what each theme implies for a meaningful linguistic study of revival languages.

Language = culture

...cause language is culture is language, language is land, land is language, family, language, family – if you can understand what I am saying, it's that spiritual stuff again, one can't live without the other – as I keep saying, language is our culture, language is everything, it's part of one another...

David Tournier²

The understanding that language is inseparable from culture is at some levels familiar in linguistics. However, what emerged from our interviews is that Aboriginal people can assume this at a level which linguistics has not come close to accommodating. Regardless of what might be assumed to be their English language-culture environment and education, many of our interviewees took for granted a broader definition of 'language', responding to our linguistically-oriented questions in terms of family, education, understanding of the land, song and so on. Some articulated this clearly as a deep layering of meaning implied or evoked by each word:

their name is not just reflective of what the animal does, it's reflective because the animal is also part of the spirit world and so sometimes the name, you can't really get a handle on the name until you realise that it's a spirit name for the animal.

Bruce Pascoe

A Language word references inward-spiralling layers of meaning. Starting with the form of the word, at the outermost layer, then its semantic meaning, the spirals move through the associated meanings of various senses of the word. For example, in Keerraywoorroong (Vicki's language), the network of words for 'wind' includes *lalarr koorn parrakee* 'north wind, hot wind', and *koorreen* 'south wind, south, mist'. So far we are still within the range of linguistic meaning. Next, we move to daily-life knowledge, such as methods for preparing food or medicine, and maintaining the growth of plants for such purposes. Keerraywoorroong *porran porran koola moothang* is a storm which destroys wattle blossoms (*moothang* 'blackwood', *koolang moothang* 'blackwood blossom'), thus indicating when a certain wattle is blooming, with associated seasonal events including the nesting season for swans and a plentiful availability of bream. This level raises all manner of cultural practice questions – who has what roles in gathering eggs or fishing for bream? What tools and techniques are used? Some of this might conventionally be included in an encyclopaedic dictionary, but clearly the scope for cultural learning is broad.

² All quotes are sourced from project interviews for which public access permission has been granted by participants.

Then there are Dreaming trails and stories linked with specific words. These take us still further, into deeper knowledges including values for relationships, and social and geological history buried in the Dreamings. In Gunnai/Kurnai, the Gippsland language, there is a major Dreaming concerning the ancestors Borun and Tuk. *Borun* means 'pelican' and *tuk* means 'musk duck'. In the present, however, use of the word *borun* or *tuk* necessarily evokes this Dreaming, which is often told, appears in art, and features on public signage in the country. This Dreaming holds buried knowledge about history, possibly encoding an ancient journey of one or more groups of people, and the evolving relations between different groups of people and their lands. The still-buried knowledge is part of what people are reclaiming when they reclaim the words *borun* and *tuk*. In the current situation, where loss and reclamation is so strongly in focus, it is possible that these layers of meaning are even more salient in the perception of the words than in the past.

Although in linguistics we are aware that these connections exist, we have not yet come to terms with their centrality to the very processes and goals of reclamation. To reclaim, say, 100 words in an Aboriginal language, is to undertake the work of reclaiming these inward-spiralling layers of meaning for each one. In this light, a crucial function of the form of the word is to signal all that is underneath. This has at least two important ramifications. One is that to reclaim 100 words is a substantial undertaking – countering the linguistics assumption that where only very scanty records of a language have survived, there is little point in attempting language reclamation. A second is that it is possible to carry out a very significant amount of language reclamation without even necessarily knowing the form of the words. Perhaps incomprehensible within linguistics at first, this view becomes recognizable in the context of Saussurean semiology, in which the system of signs is understood primarily as a conceptual system – the signifier being in some ways irrelevant.³ We will not pursue this analogy too far, however, as the *signified* in this epistemology is considerably broader than de Saussure would have recognised – nor do Aboriginal people necessarily agree that the *signifier* is arbitrary.

Both in standard English and in linguistics terminology, the word 'language' implies linguistic language. However, this does not map onto the meaning of 'translation equivalents' in all language cultures. Heryanto (2007), for example, describes the semantic history of *bahasa*, showing that the contemporary meaning 'language' developed after the introduction of that concept through European colonisation. The former meaning in Malay communities was a singular concept incorporating, 'religion, culture, manners, norms, speech' (Errington 1974, in Heryanto 2007), and intrinsically bound up with levels of status, integrity and stature. Similarly, it is clear in our interviews that the concept of 'language' and its reclamation extends deeply into cultural understanding and practice, in a way that goes beyond elements traditionally recognised as 'linguistic':

...when I'm at a conference and see 70-something Uncle sitting there and hasn't got no lunch, I just go over and say "Would you like me to go over and get you some lunch Unc? He goes "yes I would daught". I go get him some lunch and then I go get my lunch. That's what language is.

³ Thanks to Nick Nicholas for this observation.

To view and treat these aspects of language as integral to its description will require a shift of methodology, supported by a shift in theoretical frameworks, which entails a shift in ideology within the discipline. It seems to us that such a shift could alleviate the risk of reductionism which a linguistic approach to language revival appears to threaten, and thereby open the gates to greater inclusion of linguistics tools and knowledge in community language revival work. It suggests that a parameter of *reclamation of cultural knowledge* as well as linguistic knowledge is required for adequate study of a revival language. If language is really inseparable from culture, then what is being reclaimed is *all* the layers of meaning.

Reclamation in this multi-layered sense can mean that the linguistic layers proceed very slowly, and not necessarily as the highest priority. It is conventional in linguistics to assign studies of culture in language to sociolinguistics or other 'satellite' areas of the discipline. What we are arguing is that the stages and types of cultural reclamation must be accounted for within a linguistic description – in order to get a fuller picture of what and how much is actually happening, and to be able to support the process adequately and appropriately.

Lines of investigation which enable us to start incorporating this broader notion of language reclamation into the analysis of language data might include: the balance, or points of meeting and tension, between cultural and linguistic priorities and decision-making criteria in the language, nonverbal language components evident in or significant to language and cultural expression in the language community, ways in which the land of the language and people is reflected in language development and use, ways in which the link between language and identity affects decisions and processes as evidenced in language use, and ways in which the forms and instantiations of language function as identifiable expressions of identity at the levels of individual, family, community or other grouping.

Authority and protocols

...It's not my decision to make, that's the other thing a lot of people don't understand too, is that all aspects of Aboriginal ways of doing things – not only language: education, health, employment, housing – there's all those protocols, the cultural protocols that still exist today. People try to tell us that our culture is gone – people don't understand that our culture's been ingrained in us, and always will be and there are certain rules that are there, that have never been spoken about to you, but you know they're there.

David Tournier

It is crucial in both practice and analysis of language revival to account for the effects that protocols and authority have. The primary recognised line of authority may refer to a particular Elder or group of Elders, one or more ancestors or lines of descent, a trained language worker, teacher or linguist from the community, a reference group, an internalised sense of 'rightness', or a set of guiding principles. Elders may hold roles of decision-making or at least approval of directions chosen as part of their cultural authority role, independently of their linguistic level of language reclamation.

I think the most important thing is to for us to be true to ourselves and teach our way with our Elders. And whether that's our Elders want us to do a dictionary, or they want us to do these resources, or they want us to just go out there and speak language, then it is for us and our Elders to decide that.

Lynnette Solomon-Dent

A small subset of historical sources may be accepted as authoritative – because of familial links with the speakers represented, because of the circumstances and relationships contextualising the original collection, or as a strategy to make manageable the sea of records and their apparent contradictions. For some, authority is vested in a collaborative process whereby a linguist's interpretation of the archives, together with their knowledge of Aboriginal languages more generally, forms the basis for community-based language planning targeted to present-day purposes.

Any of these choices has immediate ramifications for what forms of language are and are not utilised. They largely determine the acceptable geographical limits of lexical sources, the degree of attention paid to reclaiming grammar, the acceptability of an orthography, and more. Aunty Dot discusses the role of authority in regard to sharing words across what linguistics would conventionally class as dialects:

I have to get permission to use another person's language as part of your language as well.

Aunty Dot Moffat

What for linguistics is simply words in a single language is highlighted here, and by many of our interviewees, as an issue for careful negotiation of protocols among different, community-defined, language groups. This is a clear example of the points at which an exclusively linguistic perspective can miss important explanatory factors defining a language and its use. A linguistic perspective alone does not allow us to make sense of all that happens in language revival. It can also risk characterising communities as making decisions out of ignorance, rather than seeing and understanding the bases on which those decisions are consciously made.

The location of authority emerges directly from the productive ideologies of the group, as selection of particular individuals, processes or sources embodies deep-lying principles of what is important, what is valid, and the accepted lineage of knowledge. This holds for both community and academic perspectives. In Tsimshian language revitalisation for example (British Columbia), an approved genealogy of speakerhood is essential for a given person to be seen as holding language knowledge. Compare this to standard practice within the academy, where it is a requirement to validate research findings in the context of previous research accepted as credible (Eira & Stebbins 2008).

Some sources of authority may even appear quite impractical from the perspective of an academic discourse.

I might go out bush and yell out in Dhudhuroa....listen Ancestors you can hear that? Can you hear that? Am I on the right track?

Tom Kinchela

It is important to recognise the overlaps and disjunctions between operative lines of authority in one ideological framework (such as that of linguistics) and another as just that – rather than, for example, disregarding factors which nonetheless continue to be highly significant to decisions and language outcomes. It is not essential that a non-Aboriginal linguist personally take on the same lines of authority implied by the quote from Tom Kinchela above. But it is vital to understand in very practical ways their importance in any language development decisions that are made. This could mean, for example, accepting that a feature of grammar evidenced in historical sources but dispreferred by living Elders may simply no longer be part of the language. This acceptance will include supporting the alternative new or emergent grammar at all levels.

A final point worth noting is the continuing practice of transmission of authority and responsibility in language to selected, known persons. This has implications for the identity of key people in a language program, and partly explains the tendency for family groups within a language community to interact with language in ways specific to themselves. Sometimes it may encourage the diversification of varieties within the language, despite the expressed unhappiness of many with this situation. Principles governing the transmission of knowledge at times come into direct conflict with the academic ideology that knowledge is an independent asset, to be preserved for, and made available to, an undefined posterity. This view of knowledge cannot be assumed to be universal, which has direct effects for access to language knowledge.

The language that you have that you were given, the language that you know, it has to be kept within your families or within your mob. All right. Your words are easy to identify, and different things that meant this and that. But that's only as a common thing spoken. When you go into the deepest language, nope it's not for sale at any price. Cause I've had, um, the linguist come down, and you get, um, botanists and they all want to know what this plant is and what it was used for, and I say Not for sale, sorry, sorry. Not for sale.

Uncle Albert Mullet

Authenticity

And then she said, oh, but the words should be dead. I said, yeah, I know, we got a sliding scale on that.

Uncle Lewis O'Brien

Authenticity is a topic brought into focus currently by the accelerating occurrence and heightened awareness of language contact, shift, rapid change, and revitalisation, as highlighted in Amery (2001), Thieberger (2002), or Goodfellow (2003). It has clear and direct connections with the lines of authority operative in the community, as outlined above. Our interest here lies not so much in engaging with the debates on what constitutes authenticity, as in recognising that the assessment of authenticity can have different ideological foundations.

Appropriate cultural process is for many a condition of authenticity, so that work done on a linguistically sound basis which is seen as overlooking protocols, key people or thorough community consultation may be suspect if not ignored for language reclamation purposes:

And that may be the correct pronunciation, but my Elders, they've always taught me it's Dhurga so that's what I call it. And I don't know but my Elders are important to me, what they have taught me is important, and okay I know that the audio and the other sources are important but I certainly don't want to disrespect my living Elders and say you don't know what it is, it is this.

Ursula Brown

Definitions of authenticity are closely entwined with attitudes to language change. Very broadly speaking, three general ideological positions can be identified. It should be understood that these are by no means mutually exclusive in practice:

Purist. Many Aboriginal people entertain a strong desire for an authentic language defined according to a view of pre-colonisation language practices as internally homogeneous and clearly bounded. Some may be hesitant to approve learning and teaching until a comprehensive certainty about grammar, meanings, sounds and so on can be attained. Loanwords from related languages or English are strongly dispreferred, and clean boundaries around what is and isn't a given language are desired. A purist position commonly characterises the start of the language revival journey, which may then be reviewed and relaxed as part of the process of coming to terms with both linguistic realities on the ground, and the status of language records and memories. Linguists may take up a purist position in the sense of viewing what can be reconstructed as the language at the point of colonisation as the only, or at least the ideal, goal of language reclamation.

Middle-of-the-road. Many communities take a compromise view in which the cultural and linguistic basis of the language should be solidly in place as far as possible, but balanced with the priority of using the language, which necessarily entails some compromise to a historically-oriented ideal. This view may license, for example, the use of wordlists from a more extensive area than does a purist approach, or may accept that people will at least initially pronounce the language on an English model or on the basis of 'spelling pronunciation'. Many linguists working in this field also take a position in the middle, working towards a more historically-evidenced version of the language while also supporting the acceptance and practice of recent and contemporary knowledge.

I was saying: we need to have people pronounce our language right. And we need to have fluency as a measure to tell us that we're doing okay. And we stuck pretty hard to them, that, you know, these are important features of our language. Well, the experience taught us several different things about these complexities. Firstly, fluency. That people are actually shying away because they weren't fluent. And the insistence on fluency was a hindrance as well as a positive. But what we did find was that we had to give up some of these ideals, but we were very rigorous on, all introductions should be done properly.

Dr Lester-Irabinna Rigney

Focus on now. Other Language programs have a future-oriented approach to language change, which places use of the language and its function for people in daily life at the higher end of the priority scale. This approach promotes the use of what is available at a given stage, encouraging people to speak whatever they can as best they can, assuming that linguistic understandings such as grammatical structures will develop more slowly and cumulatively, and accepting the cross-fertilisation of languages that occurred both for historical contact reasons and as a result of more recent forced relocations, mixing and separations of peoples. An emerging shift within linguistics is beginning to allow for better accommodation of this end of the scale also, recognising and validating a difference between more analytical goals of historical reconstruction and more functional goals of reclaimed or recreated languages (Walsh 2005).

I don't see a problem with today's Wathaurong people saying, no, we haven't got a word for swimming, and we're going to use the one that this mob uses, cause we would have heard it anyway. And the fact that we don't have that word is a tragedy, but we've got to live, now we have to overcome tragedy as we've always done, we are survivors. So the way to do it is to say we are going to have a word for swimming, you know, we insist on the right to have a word for swimming, and we're gonna choose this. And that's part of your cultural survival.

Bruce Pascoe

These three positions, intended as broad characterisations only and not as cleanly-defined categories, imply different priorities, yardsticks, and criteria for success of a language reclamation endeavour. They are, in other words, functional, productive ideologies, which provide people with a working foundation for how to proceed, in a given phase of reviving their language.

Lines of investigation targeted to authenticity and related issues of authority could include: attitudes to the loss and mixing of the languages resulting from colonisation in relation to the language in the present, aspects of language which are the focus of *correctness* for cultural appropriacy purposes, the primary location of authority for the language program as a whole, for key individuals within it, and the pattern of other sources of authority (for example, a hierarchy of authority, or reference to one authority source for particular questions and a different source for other questions) – and, of course, how these patterns of authority can be traced in language outcomes.

A model for analysis

Considering the themes which emerged from our interviews in this way, we are now beginning to work with the following as broad starting parameters for the study of revival languages (Figure 2):

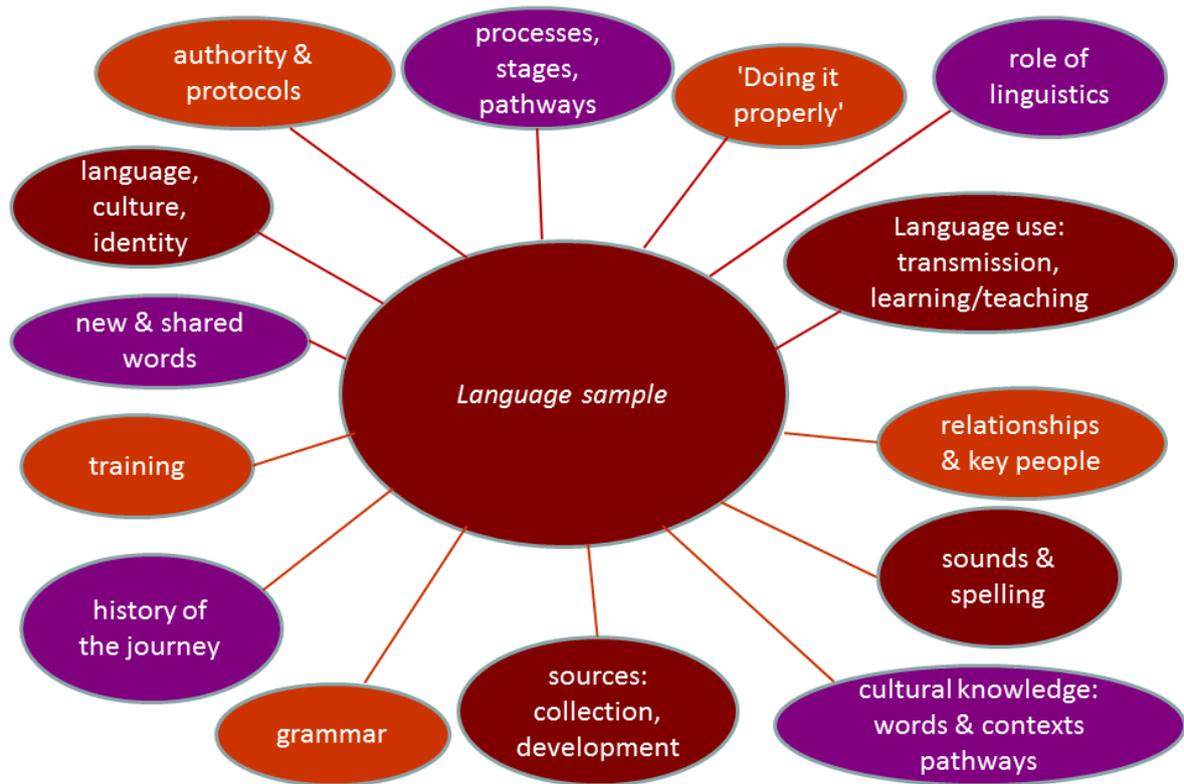


Figure 2. Parameters for the study of revival languages

In order to demonstrate how this model might work, we have selected as a sample for analysis the opening speech Vicki Couzens gave at an initial presentation of the 'Meeting point' model at the Australian Linguistics Society conference in 2009. Our challenge is to incorporate the perspectives and priorities highlighted for us by our interviewees in a study which is also directly linguistic, thereby contributing both to the theoretical understanding of revival languages (and thereby the capacity of human language in general), and to the practical needs of language revival processes.

In considering Vicki's speech, our overarching question is – *What does this sample show about the language for each of the parameters we are considering?* We have selected a number of the parameters proposed in Figure 2 for our discussion. (See Eira & Couzens 2010, for a comprehensive description and discussion of all the parameters, including extensive extracts from interviews and possible questions for a descriptive investigation.)

Example 1. Vicki Couzens, Acknowledgment of Country speech

<i>Ngatanwarr</i>	<i>wooka</i>	<i>ngootoowan</i>	<i>ngathoongan.</i>	
greet	give	2PL.POSS	1PL.INC	
<i>Ngathook</i>	<i>mayapa</i>	<i>wangan</i>	<i>ngootyoong</i>	<i>wanyoo</i>
1sg	make	hear/understand	good/healthy	PREP
<i>kulin</i>	<i>alam meen,</i>	<i>koorrookee,</i>	<i>ngapoon</i>	<i>ba ngarrakeetoong.</i>

person	ancestor	MM	MF	and many/family/crowd
<i>Mayapa</i>	<i>wangan</i>	<i>ngootyoong</i>	<i>wanyoo</i>	
make	hear/understand	good/healthy	PREP	
<i>kulin</i>	<i>meerreeng</i>	<i>makatepa.</i>		
person	country	today		

We greet you all.

I pay respect to the Kulin ancestors

the grandmothers, grandfathers and families.

Pay respect to the Kulin people and Country today.

New and shared words

A range of strategies for lexical development are evident in this speech, including the creation of words, collocations and phrasal lexemes, and semantic and/or functional extension of existing words.

Ngatanwarr is now commonly used as a greeting. The word is listed in the community dictionary (Krishna-Pillay & Gunditjmara Aboriginal Cooperative, 1996) as *ngatanwarr* 'greeting salutation', from Dawson (1881) <gna tanwarr>, and analysable as *ngata-n-warr* 'greeting-?HORT-2DU'.⁴ The word form, then, is not a product of recent language reclamation efforts, but its conventionalisation as a greeting probably is, and allows its use generally, obviating the need for alternation of pronominal suffixes.

The collocation *mayapa wangan ngootyoong* is an intentional, new construction, comprising [make [hear/understand good/healthy]] 'pay respects'. Vicki particularly liked the word *ngootyoong* when she found the stem *ngooty*⁵ glossed in the dictionary as 'cure', adding layers of meaning to her new phrase. The suffix *-n* is included on *wangan* largely because of the word's attestation in this form in Dawson (1881). Dawson (1881) is Vicki's preferred primary source, due to the confidence inspired by James and his daughter Sarah (both contributors) having taken time to learn the language themselves, through their extended relationship with key people such as Kaawirn Kuunawarn and Yarruun Parpur Tarneen. The phrase appears in this speech in both declarative and imperative moods, differentiated by the presence or absence of the 1SG pronoun.

In regard to *ngootoowan* 2PL.POSS: no personal pronoun is listed in the dictionary for 2PL, although in Blake (2003) it is *ngutuwar*. As the community dictionary is a primary reference in this community, the use of *ngootoowan* effectively constitutes an instance of meaning extension in the face of limited lexico-grammatical resources.

Cultural knowledge: pathways

The first thing to note is that acknowledging country is in itself a reclamation of cultural practice. Samples of the exact words and phrases were used in the past, or the specific

⁴ The morphemic breakdown and verb gloss are from Blake (2003); the glosses for the suffixes are our suggestions.

⁵ Word-final palatals are spelt with the 'y' of the digraph first in this orthography.

components required for such an acknowledgment in this region, is not to our knowledge recorded, so what is reclaimed here appears to be primarily the *genre* of a speech event. Today, the components of an acknowledgment of or welcome to country have become fairly standard across community groups, suggesting that either the general principles of what they involve may in fact have been retained despite the loss of passed-down conventional speeches, or rapid tacit agreement has developed across a broad area as people have heard the speeches of others in recent cultural revival history.

Secondly, the content of the speech clearly invokes a relationship between people, language and land, bringing this back to the foreground as a crucial consideration for any formal event. Acknowledging ancestors and Elders also invokes a particular orientation of respect which differs from the respect conventions of 'mainstream' Australia. The convention now in speeches of this genre is to acknowledge 'Elders, past, present and future'. In Vicki's expression of this general meaning, she specifically highlighted *koorooke* (MM) and *ngapoon* (MF), which additionally reflects the matrilineal outlook of her people.

Authority

It is not uncommon in language revival processes for the main responsibility for the work to fall on the shoulders of a very few. Creators of texts may be working more or less alone, basing their decision-making authority on their right as Traditional Owners of the language, or in some cases as authorised language workers who refer to an Elders or Reference group in the broad sense, but not necessarily for a specific text project. Similarly, Vicki will consult with key community members, in particular her father Uncle Ivan Couzens, but this is a procedure more of protocol than detailed language construction. For that, she relies primarily on herself in her authority as Traditional Owner, and on her experience in language work over some years. The importance of Uncle Ivan is both as an icon of the family status in the language community and as the initiator of very significant milestones in the language reclamation process – particularly the development of the community dictionary.

Authority systems are especially crucial when a desired meaning is not simply available to look up in a dictionary. In these cases, Vicki's conceptualisation of the process is *dreaming* the words and phrases. By this, she means the interweaving of a wide range of principles, including the construction of words according to semantic and morphological principles – but requiring that their choice and development resonate with her intuitive or spirit sense of what is appropriate at the time. This is *wangan ngootyoong* or *respect* in operation – recognising that language is not only linguistic but also cultural, actively recognising the authority of language custodianship. While keenly aware that in a linguistic sense the language is still undergoing development, such as in the use of primarily English grammatical systems in this version of the speech, Vicki is proactive in using the language as it is at a given stage, so long as this level of community and/or intuitive authority is respected.

Secondary to this authority system, selection of words is constrained by what is available in the dictionary. Then, choices are made from within that, according to criteria such as the specific language identified by a given source (in this case, preferring Keeraywoorroong over related languages also included in the community dictionary), and simple practicalities such as ease of pronunciation.

Sounds

The sounds of words are a particular focus for many people reclaiming their language, as there is a general awareness that the sounds originally differed from those of English, yet the new generations of speaker/learners are L1 English speakers. (It should be noted, however, that some of the phonology and phonotactics of heritage languages is retained in Koorie English.) In addition, Elders who are the cultural authority on language have often themselves learned the words of their language from written records, although some have childhood memories of hearing their own Elders speak in Language. For these and other reasons, current practice can vary considerably from the linguistic reconstruction of the words from historical sources. Where individuals elect to re-learn the historical phonology, a hierarchy of priority begins to emerge, based on criteria such as salience, ease of pronunciation (from an English base), iconic differentiation from English, and disambiguation (see Reid 2010 for an extended discussion of related issues).

In Vicki's speech on this occasion, she focussed on the reclamation of initial /ŋ/ and the dental stop. These are highly salient in terms of position in the word and type of articulation respectively, and draw attention as a learning focus for new speakers. The stop is quite distinct not only from the English alveolar, but also, importantly, from the English dental fricative otherwise implied by the digraph <th> used in this orthography. In contrast, the historical palatal stop was pronounced throughout as English <j>. This shift is common in reclaimed languages of the southeast, although speaker/learners may be aware of its earlier articulation. Vicki suggests here that economy of effort is an important, though not always conscious, principle of language reclamation. As the easier (for L1 English speakers) articulation triggers no disambiguation issues and no ripple effects in the phonological system, there is no practical need to focus on the earlier articulation in this case.

Rhotics in southeastern Australia are typically problematic for reconstruction, so they tend to all be pronounced as either an Australian English approximant or a trill. In this speech, Vicki selected the latter, which then became an indication of 'a non-English sound'. She left the final /r/ of *ngatanwarr* unarticulated, probably by analogy with vowel-final Australian English pronunciation of orthographically r- final words.

A commonly-held community view is that it is not possible to really know how the words were once pronounced. In regard to vowels, at phonetic level in fluent discourse, a realistic linguistic evaluation would probably have to concur with this. Vowels today can be highly variable, responding partly to word- and sentence-level stress and English models. In Vicki's speech, the short vowels generally approximated the historical [a, u, i], with a tendency to raise and lengthen the long vowels (orthographic <ee> and <oo>) at the ends of words.

In line with the principle noted above of *re-dreaming* language, Vicki also talks about the need to listen to the land for the sounds to use in the language. As an illustration or example, she points out how the wind is the same everywhere, but sounds different in a particular landscape because of the trees, or hills, or water there. This correlates well with the approach of some to *sing* their hearing of the land, whether or not they also have language to sing with. It also engenders significant interest in onomatopoeic words, such as the names of some birds.

Stages and pathways

On a linguistic level, Vicki intends that there will be changes to the speech and its variants as the language develops. She is particularly interested in researching word order, and more intensive implementation of suffixes. Although a sketch grammar is available in Blake (2003), only at language program or authorised speaker/learner level is it feasible to review and implement this and other possible inputs, at word level, for each required context. There is also the question of grammatical 'gaps' in the records, and Vicki is looking at ways to fill these, at the same time developing principles of validation for such *re-dreamed* grammar.

There are elements in the current speech which Vicki is uncertain of at this stage, such as the use and meaning of *wanyoo*. This highlights an important principle of language reclamation – to use the best available at a given time, always keeping in mind that it may be advanced to a new stage later. Without this principle, language reclamation would rapidly come to a standstill in many places, as the status of historical records and current understanding entails that both community and linguistics knowledge are a work in progress.

I just teach em and it might be based along English way, because that's how they're trying to fit it in, into their English structure. If you don't do it along that line that they're comfortable with and then I try to do it in the proper Aboriginal grammatical way then they're just all mixed up. So we just wanna get 'em talkin'.

And all of that will come eventually. Like this is the proper way that you actually put those things, and this is the marker that you add to it. But we never go there until they're really comfortable.

Lynnette Solomon-Dent

The window provided into present-day Keerraywoorroong by this one sample reveals characteristics that are strongly conditioned by the particular pathway of language revival taken by the Gunditjmara language program so far. In the first place, certain pathways were motivated by the very low levels of language knowledge active in the community when the program started. Archival rather than contemporary sources were prioritised, triggering in turn the centrality of writing and orthography, and a dictionary as the main linguistic source for building language. Secondly, linguistic analysis of the sources was outsourced to a linguist, which is a common but not inevitable choice. This then is reflected in orthographic choices and the component elements assumed for the dictionary. The community target audience and consultation is apparent primarily in the plain language of the dictionary, the choice of illustrations and a Foreword by Uncle Ivan Couzens.

Emerging standards for speeches and other relatively fixed texts undoubtedly reflect the very small number of people actively involved in language development to date, as well as the prevalence of one family in that number. This may shift in future as more people and organisations take on a more active role. One possibility on the table is differentiated language development for some aspects of language, for different culturo-linguistic groups within the region.

Conclusions: ideology and linguistic analysis

Through this examination of one text for one language, it becomes apparent that a wide comparison of language samples and languages could readily allow identification of basic pathways, stages, patterns of lexical development, priorities for cultural reclamation, relationships between oral and written language and so on. We see it as intrinsic to each point of the analysis to account for the many aspects of language traditionally put aside as 'extra-linguistic'. These are predominantly the aspects of language that people talked about in our 30+ hours of interviews, and they are integral to the language forms appearing in current language data. Many of these factors are tied firmly to prevailing ideologies, whether intentionally and fluidly designed for the purpose, or inherited as part of the legacy of being a colonised people reclaiming culture, identity and language.

Perhaps one of the most important overall points to emerge from the study of Vicki's speech is that every aspect of her speech is motivated. A view from a conventional linguistics perspective might assume that the historical grammar and phonology are the goal, leaving anything outside of this as understandable only in terms of lack of knowledge or experience in the language. This view is specific to one ideology, with an authority system which privileges analysis of recorded language forms, on the basis of previous analysis of language data in the same broad language family. We have shown, however, that there are many factors consciously involved in the design of this particular speech, which are based in quite different ideologies – including different lines of authority, the importance of relationships both past and present, and of certain cultural meanings. To make sense of this piece of language data within linguistics, then, requires a much broader view of what is involved in linguistic analysis. It requires a deep listening at discipline level, to hear what other ideologies are important and relevant to our understanding.

It is our hope that this research ultimately will have multiple benefits in several directions. A thorough-going description of 'what revival languages are like' will assist both linguists and communities to work with such languages more effectively. If we know what kinds of elements are more readily 'relearnable', or more readily combined, for example, we can promote these elements or combinations as early language revival targets. If we know the likely linguistic corollaries of particular language revival pathways, then we know how to vary recommendations for priorities for different language revival situations. An analysis of contemporary use of revival languages will also have the effect of validating the languages as they are and as they are being developed. But in our view these sorts of goals are only really possible by recognising the ideologies which inform a linguistics approach as well as those underlying community views and practices, and finding ways to open out linguistics ideologies to accommodate those of community language revival at the core of our methodologies. It is this which will enable greater understanding of less visible or less directly linguistic parameters such as cultural reclamation or stages of language revival, and how they function to shape the actual language forms produced. In our view, it is this *wangan ngootyoong*-informed methodology – the practice of engaging respectfully with diverse ideologies – which gives us the tools to develop broader epistemologies, intertwining the best

of Western scientific traditions with current and reclaimed Aboriginal approaches to knowledge and research.

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