

PRINCIPLES OF LANGUAGE REVIVAL

OLD INTO NEW

People need Language that's relevant for their lives today. People want to carry forward as much as they can that is precious in and about Language from the past. Sometimes it's hard to see how both of these things can happen together.

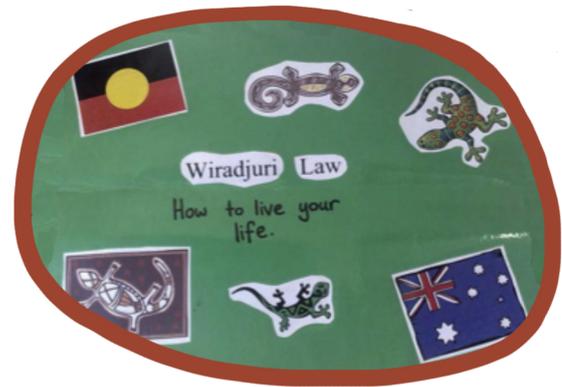
The cultural knowledge and practices that emerge as people work at Language revival have deep significance for many in the community. The spiritual aspects of this work connect to healing and need to be treated with respect. But people also love to have fun and joke and need to be able to get on with their everyday lives at the same time as they learn language.

People want to use Language to talk about mobile phones, birthdays, and daily business in the office. They want their kids to be able to read, sing familiar songs and use social network technology in Language.

They also want to connect with their Country, their Ancestors and the stories that teach Land and Law, care of and survival in the local environment, and the ancient sciences of earth, water and sky. Aboriginal languages are both old and new, and there is room for all of this in Language revival.

Language contexts

It can be useful to think about the purpose and context of something in Language. Different aspects of Language can all be included in different ways, as appropriate to the feeling and the purpose. For example, in many communities there are a range of everyday expressions that everyone knows – for family and foods, greetings, joking around and going to the toilet! It may make sense to keep using these just as they are – this is language that is already there in the community. It's used in amongst English, it may not be pronounced like it once was, some of it may be shared across several Countries – but it's a living part of present day culture.



Poster made by Parkes school children

"I see the language as a real way of contacting the spirits as well. I see romance and spirit as being part of the language and part of the culture. And you don't have to go all airy fairy about it. You just have to say, 'I love knowing the name of the fish that I catch and why that fish is important to the culture because it teaches me about Country'." - Bruce Pascoe

"Because that's what people, even the old people, say all the time. 'We'd love to go back to the old language. And this is the way we were taught that knowledge'. But they understand implicitly, when they start to think about it and talk about it. They know it needs to grow and change." - Kevin Lowe

But there are also more serious uses of language that seem to deserve greater care. Examples include Welcome to Country speeches, which people might revise over time until they are satisfied that they have expressed everything that's important in language that shows appropriate respect for the Old People. Other examples of this type might include speeches made at funerals or during other important gatherings. Performances that involve reviving cultural practices might also be associated with more careful use of language.

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THINKING ABOUT THE AUDIENCE

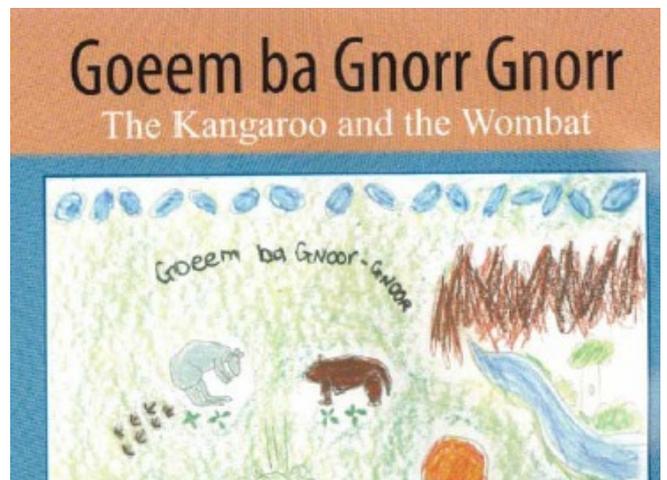
Language in use is built of sounds, words, parts of words, and the grammar patterns that hold it all together and make the meaning clear. But in language revival, it's also common for people to adjust the Language they use to their audience. For example, in a story for people who haven't done much Language yet, a writer might choose to follow grammar patterns from English to make the text easier to understand. The same writer might do something more complex in another setting.

In the following two projects, both mentored by David Tournier, the complexity of the language is at quite different levels:



Koim: Ngarrwa-at bengoot tarndyon dyeerm-nuk deerdabeel?
Kangaroo: Know-2PL 2PL old frog-3OBJ big
'Have you seen how big that old frog is?'

The story of Dyeerm as told by the Indigenous students of Iramoo Primary School



Goeem ba gnorr gnorr tateei bernerring geetyaweel.
Kangaroo and Wombat were once great friends and they shared eveything.

Goeem ba Gnorr Gnorr - By the Indigenous Youth of Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre

"I think Revival Language is about, 'How do I say hello? How do I say goodbye? How do I know what your name is in Language? How do I introduce myself?' If I went somewhere else and I've got this native speaker who can speak their own language, and they introduce themselves, I feel I'm missing out on something by saying, 'Oh hello, I'm Lynne'. Oh, hello, that's a foreign language. That wasn't in Australia. So I wanna be able to say, 'Wunman njinde, ngaju budjeri, ngetal makthar Lynne'. And use those gestures that goes with that. So that they know and understand what I'm saying. And I understand what they're saying even though I've never heard their language before, because I'm looking at our body language, and I'm looking at our gestures." - Lynnette Solomon-Dent

"It was the idea of creating some dances and the whole dance just popped into my head like this little vision and then I needed a song. Because they didn't tell me the song. So I had to create, thinking about how to go and collect the grass, and then we split it, and then we weave it, then we gather things, food, in it, or use it. So part of the dance is about that gathering. And so it's talking about women and what women do and women's knowledge of Country and plants, and our place, our roles, as the nurturers and family and things like that. So it's all the stuff about cultural reclamation and that reconnecting and strengthening and bringing that knowledge out into the light." - Vicki Couzens