

Stage 2 Australian Languages – 2012

(All subjects)

External Assessment Cover Sheet

Assessment Type 3: Issues Study

SACE Registration Number:

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Issue: **Should Australian Kids learn Australian Languages?** _____

This **issues study** is assessed using the following specific features:

Communication and Target Language Study		Knowledge and Understanding		Investigation
CTLS1*		KU1	✓	I1
CTLS2*		KU2*	✓	I2
CTLS3*	✓	KU3*		

*Teachers must include at least one of CTLS1, CTLS2, and CTLS3. Please tick as appropriate.

*Teachers must include either KU2 or KU3. Please tick as appropriate.

AT 3 ISSUES STUDY. SEMESTER 2.

Investigate the role of languages education in relation to Australian languages, through the question, *Should Australian Kids learn Australian languages?*

Introduction

My interest in looking at the role of education in maintaining and reviving Australian languages came from an article I was shown from The Australian newspaper¹, "Should Australian Kids Learn Aboriginal Languages?" The statement that they should learn the languages was made by linguist Michael Christie, who had been nominated for Australian of the Year in 2011. The opening line of the article is, "Never, it seems, has there been such a widespread interest in preserving Indigenous languages around the world. Perhaps that is because so many of them have never been so endangered". This issues study is an Investigation of what the languages are like and how education can help the situation.

Background

In 1788, when England came to the 'unknown lands' now called Australia, the country was not empty. It was not *terra nullius*, as the British said. It was permanent home to hundreds of different language groups, and it had been like that for thousands of years if not forever, in the view of the original owners (**tjukuritja**, things 'of, associated with the Dreaming'²). The number of Australian languages has for a long time been said to be about 270³ but in recent times this number has changed to around 380⁴ distinct languages, in 27 language families. This does not mean that more languages have been found but that the way languages are looked at has changed.

What are the languages like?

Awareness of differences between languages has always been strong amongst Aboriginal people and group names were often based on the differences. The word **pitjantja** 'comes'⁵ in the name **Pitjantja-tjara** is an example; it differs from **yankunytja** 'goes, travels'⁶, and is a dialect/language name⁷. Around Port Phillip Bay people use the word **wurung** 'mouth, language' in their naming words. There are **Bun-wurung**, **Watha-wurung**, **Wuy-wurung** and **Thaga-wurung**, and each one draws attention to a language difference with the others⁸. They were four varieties of a single language. Melbourne sits on **Wuy-wurung** country, and those people lost the beautiful Yarra Valley and all the surrounding lands to the invaders.

¹ The Australian 25.01.2011.

² Goddard 2006:184.

³ Eg, Dixon 1991:2

⁴ C Bower, N Thieberger. June 21 2012. Accessed at <http://anggarroon.org/> on August 29 2012.

⁵ Goddard 2006:139

⁶ op cit:243

⁷ op cit:139

⁸ Dixon 1991:1.

Across Australia there are both differences and similarities between and within groups of languages. Terms for foot (**tjina**), hand (**mara**), and eye (**miil**) are widespread⁹. Pitjantjatjara uses **kuru**, not **miil**, but Arabana, to the east, uses **miltya** for eye and **miltyaardi** for eyeball¹⁰. The languages have “complex grammars”, and are described as being more like Latin and Greek than English¹¹.

Verbs in Pitjantjatjara have many different endings, as seen in **a-nanyi**, **a-nu**, **a-nkuku**, **a-nangi**, **a-nkunyija**, **a-ra**, **a-nama**, **a-nkupai**, **a-nkula**¹². These endings are used in Pitjantjatjara word-building, and give a range of time, command and other meanings.

Nouns also have endings that provide meaning in Pitjantjatjara sentences. The word **tjitji** ‘child’ can be **tjitji-ngku**, **tjitji-ku**, **tjitji-ngka**, **tjitji-kutu** or it can be **tjitji** by itself. In the sentence **tjitji-ngku kapi tjikini** ‘the child is drinking some water’, the special **-ngku** ending attached to **tjitji** shows that ‘the child’ is the subject or the doer of the action¹³.

For me, the languages are clearly interesting and important to this country and for that reason they are worth studying in schools – because of the endangered state they are in it is critical that schools support community and help to keep languages alive.

What can schools do?

Although education has almost forever excluded the languages, schools have recently started to do lots of supporting things to help. In the mid-1990s a national project identified four major program types that made it possible for all languages to be learnt in schools, according to their ‘strength’, to “fill a significant gap in the provision of languages education in Australia”¹⁴. A student resource book was prepared as part of that project. Schools can now work with communities to set up programs that maintain, revive, or teach strong languages as second languages, and work with languages that don’t have much left behind. In 2012 a national project is establishing an Australian Curriculum which includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. These will now all have shared guidelines. Schools can use these to introduce language programs in partnership with communities.

What are the risks?

There are many risks but they can be worked through. They would include lack of knowledge about the languages in schools, lack of interest, lack of language resources, lack of experience through the long time that schools have not been in education, and maybe even fear about schools from language people in communities who would mostly be old people. Schools can try to overcome these by following protocols when they set programs up, by encouraging people into schools, by moving slowly and starting small. Writing is a big part of what schools

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Hercus 1994.

¹¹ Dixon 1991:3

¹² Goddard 2006:xii

¹³ Dixon 1991:3

¹⁴ Nathan (ed) 1996

do and maybe some time would need to be spent with a new language coming in, to plan around spelling and writing. That's where language specialists could help.

Conclusion

The situation of Australian Indigenous languages is critical. The strongest are endangered and the weakest have very little information and knowledge about them left at all. Schools can do quite a lot to help but they need to work in partnership with communities and not try to control language programs. Schools are places where lots of languages are taught and so they know what to do in order to teach languages well. There are many reasons to study the languages at schools, and one of these is about the learning challenges that the languages bring – they are interesting and complex and they provide windows into the kinds of people that the speakers of the languages are, and the way they see the world.

Bibliography

Book

Nathan, D. (ed.). 1996. *Australia's Indigenous Languages*. SSABSA. Wayville. SA.

Booklet

Dixon, R.M.W. 1991. *Aboriginal Languages*. Aboriginal Australia Culture and Society Series. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. Woden. ACT.

Dictionary

Goddard, Cliff. 2006. *Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara to English dictionary*. IAD Press. Alice Springs.

Grammar

Hercus, L.A. 1994. *A Grammar of the Arabana-Wangkangurru Language Lake Eyre Basin, South Australia*. Pacific Linguistics Series C-128. Canberra. Australia.

Newspaper Article

Accessed at <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2011/01/australian-linguist-thinks-kids-should-learn-aboriginal-languages>

Online website

C Bower, N Thieberger. June 21 2012. Accessed at <http://anggarrgoon.org> on August 29 2012.

Assessment Comments

This example is illustrative of an A+ grade. This investigation examines the role of languages education and research in maintaining, reviving, and reclaiming Australian languages.

Communication and target language study: the report demonstrates detailed explanation of the critical nature of Australian languages, perceptive analysis of issues related to the maintenance of Australian languages through education and well-informed discussion regarding the associated benefits and limitations.

Knowledge and understanding: the investigation demonstrates detailed knowledge of the differences and similarities between and within groups of Australian languages and individual ideas and opinions are clearly based on well-considered evidence. The piece exhibits insightful understanding of appropriate and norms and protocols related to the language groups highlighted.

Investigation: This is an insightful investigation into the role of education in the revival of Australian languages which is clear, well-structured and well supported by evidence from a range of texts. It demonstrates informed discussion on the complex issue of the language maintenance and the changing way Australian languages are viewed.

Performance Standards for Stage 2 Australian Languages

	Communication and Target Language Study	Knowledge and Understanding	Investigation
A	<p>Appropriate meaning conveyed, using a variety of familiar and some less familiar structures, according to program type. Some accurate attempts at more complex structures and creative use of language, according to program type. Accurate control of language, according to program type. Accurate pronunciation, with consistent fluency if appropriate to program type.</p> <p>Accurate and detailed analysis and relevant explanation of aspects of linguistic structures and features in familiar and unfamiliar texts.</p> <p>or</p> <p>Detailed, well-informed, and perceptive analysis and relevant explanation of aspects of the nature of language change or language contact phenomena, with reference to familiar and unfamiliar texts.</p>	<p>Insightful understanding of, and consistent respect for, cultural norms and protocols appropriate to specific communities.</p> <p>Knowledge and understanding of aspects of the target language compared to one or more regional languages or other Australian languages, with individual ideas and opinions clearly based on well-considered evidence.</p> <p>Perceptive understanding of a variety of ways in which culture is expressed through language use.</p>	<p>Clear, well-structured, and insightful investigation and discussion of one or more issues in Australian languages, using a variety of examples from historical, current, and/or possible future contexts.</p> <p>Clear, well-structured, and insightful investigation and informed discussion of the sociocultural features of one or more Australian languages, with conclusions clearly based on evidence from familiar and unfamiliar texts.</p>
B	<p>Appropriate meaning conveyed, using a variety of simple and mostly familiar structures, according to program type. Mostly accurate control of language, according to program type. Some attempts at more complex structures and creative use of language, according to program type, with some accuracy. Mostly accurate pronunciation, with some fluency if appropriate to program type.</p> <p>Mostly accurate analysis and relevant explanation of aspects of linguistic structures and features in familiar and some less familiar texts.</p> <p>or</p> <p>Clear and well-informed analysis and relevant explanation of aspects of the nature of language change or language contact phenomena, with reference to familiar and some less familiar texts.</p>	<p>Thoughtful understanding of, and consistent respect for, cultural norms and protocols appropriate to specific communities.</p> <p>Knowledge and understanding of aspects of the target language compared to one or more regional languages or other Australian languages, with some individual ideas and/or opinions based on consideration of evidence.</p> <p>Considered understanding of a variety of ways in which culture is expressed through language use.</p>	<p>Mostly clear, structured, and well-informed investigation and discussion of one or more Australian languages, using some examples from historical, current, and/or possible future contexts.</p> <p>Mostly clear, structured, and well-informed investigation and discussion of the sociocultural features of one or more Australian languages, with conclusions supported by evidence from familiar and some less familiar texts.</p>

Communication and Target Language Study	Knowledge and Understanding	Investigation
<p>C Appropriate meaning conveyed, using simple and highly familiar structures, according to program type. Variable control of language, with reliance on rehearsed patterns, according to program type. Some limited attempts at more complex structures, according to program type, with some accuracy. Pronunciation is generally understandable.</p> <p>Generally accurate analysis and relevant explanation of some aspects of linguistic structures and features in simple and familiar texts.</p> <p><i>or</i></p> <p>Informed analysis with some considered and relevant explanation of aspects of the nature of language change or language contact phenomena, with reference to mostly familiar texts.</p>	<p>Understanding of, and consistent respect for, cultural norms and protocols appropriate to specific communities.</p> <p>Knowledge and understanding of aspects of the target language compared to one or more regional languages or other Australian languages, with some ideas and/or opinions linked to evidence.</p> <p>Understanding of some of the ways in which culture is expressed through language use.</p>	<p>Appropriate and generally informed investigation and discussion of one or more issues in Australian languages, using mostly familiar examples from historical, current, and/or possible future contexts.</p> <p>Appropriate investigation and informed discussion of the sociocultural features of one or more Australian languages, with conclusions supported by mostly familiar examples.</p>
<p>D Some meaning conveyed, using simple and highly familiar structures, according to program type. Control of language not sustained, using only rehearsed patterns, according to program type. Pronunciation is sometimes understandable, but limited by errors.</p> <p>Identification of aspects of linguistic structures or features in a simple and highly familiar text.</p> <p><i>or</i></p> <p>Identification of one or more aspects of language change or language contact phenomena, with reference to a simple and highly familiar text.</p>	<p>Some recognition of, and respect for, cultural norms and protocols appropriate to specific communities, with inconsistent application.</p> <p>Identification of one or more aspects of the target language compared to a regional language or other Australian language, with some attempted reference and/or connection to evidence.</p> <p>Identification of some basic ways in which culture is expressed through language use.</p>	<p>Identification and some description of an issue in Australian languages, with attempted use of highly familiar examples from historical, current, or possible future contexts.</p> <p>Identification and some description of one or more sociocultural features of one or more Australian languages, with some attempted use of familiar examples.</p>
<p>E Limited meaning conveyed, using simple and highly familiar structures, according to program type. Control of language not sustained, according to program type. Pronunciation is limited by repeated errors.</p> <p>Attempted identification of an aspect or aspects of linguistic structures or features in a simple and highly familiar text.</p> <p><i>or</i></p> <p>Attempted identification of one or more aspects of language change or language contact phenomena, using a simple and highly familiar text.</p>	<p>Some acknowledgment of the need for cultural norms and protocols, with inconsistent application.</p> <p>Some recognition of an aspect of the target language compared to a regional language or other Australian language.</p> <p>Identification of one or more ways in which culture is expressed through language use.</p>	<p>Some recognition, with limited description, of an aspect of an issue in Australian languages.</p> <p>Some recognition, with attempted description, of one or more sociocultural features of an Australian language.</p>