“Don’t Paint it White”:
Differentiation and Continuity in Language Revitalization

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This thesis is my own composition and all sources have been acknowledged. It has been substantially completed during my course of enrolment for this degree at the University of Western Australia and has not previously been accepted for a degree at this or any other institution. It adheres to the rules relating to content, format of thesis, word limits and submission.

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Chapter 5 is a modified version of:

Abstract

The goals of language workers and community members often conflict in language revitalization work, frequently because of unrecognized differences in language ideologies. Researchers often assume that community members need education about language revitalization methods and don’t seriously engage with their concerns, and so these ideological differences become invisible impediments to the goals of researchers and community members alike. Outsider researchers have much expertise to offer, but only when ultimate control over the direction of language work is in community members’ hands. This thesis aims to illustrate the importance of conflicting language ideologies and language related goals in regards to maintenance efforts for the Wangkatha language of Western Australia. It specifically addresses conflicts between Wangkatha ideas about the orality of their culture vs researchers’ drives to develop written materials; between Wangkatha language socialization and revitalizationist pedagogy; and between traditional relationships between language, land and people and those that are pervasive in the wake of Native Title. The overarching argument is that when researchers fail to engage deeply with the goals of community members or with their own language ideologies, they may unwittingly jeopardize what is important for the community.

Chapter one introduces the topic of study, provides a basic overview of the community being studied, and locates this research in relation to the literature.

Chapter two places the study within the context of the sociolinguistic history of the research area. Wangkatha language is used largely to index an identity that has been threatened by assimilation since early contact. Differentiation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal is paramount. Therefore, preserving the language through anglicizing practices does not ameliorate the effects of past inequalities or improve the position of the language; rather, it promulgates inequality and, in one consultant’s words, threatens to “paint the language white”.

Chapter three discusses language graphization – that is, the ideologies and practices related to rendering language in writing. Writing is often considered necessary for successful language revitalization, but community members see serious risks in its implementation. It forces language into western contexts and even causes anglicized mispronunciation. Outsider experts can advise community members about the potential benefits of an indigenous orthography, but they cannot decide for them whether the benefits outweigh the risks and inevitable costs.

Chapter four discusses language in schools in the same light. While inclusion in schools can be extremely beneficial to a language’s status and ultimate survival, it can also usurp Aboriginal authority and confound appropriate language socialization and use. Enforcing pedagogically sound language teaching regardless of its effect on sociolinguistic practices not only limits the likelihood that the community will ‘be on board’; it imposes some kinds of change in the name of reversing other kinds of change, ever under the assumption that western knowledge (including pedagogy) provides the best answer.

Taking a somewhat different angle, chapter five discusses language mobilization. As with the above phenomena, when language is mobilized specifically for Native Title, focus falls on the structure of language to the near exclusion of linguistic practices and ideologies. Just as with language graphization and language in schools, the importance of sociolinguistic practice and comparatively invisible language ideology is rarely taken seriously; the importance of much more easily identified linguistic form is, on the other hand, magnified.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, my gratitude goes to the many Aboriginal people who were kind enough to share their ideas with me. They have been friends and they have been extremely patient colleagues. I can only hope that I have fairly portrayed a portion of the lessons they have taught. I am also grateful to the Karlkurla Language and Culture Aboriginal Corporation for taking me in and showing me the ropes.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

This thesis investigates the conflict between language workers’ tendencies to focus on increasing the use of language and community wishes to maintain language while preserving its place in their culture. The context of the study is revitalization and maintenance of Wangkatha language in Kalgoorlie, Western Australia, the field site for my research. In this context, ‘language worker’ refers to individuals who conduct language work in some official capacity, ranging from missionary linguists, to academic linguists conducting scholarly research, to workers in regional language centers, including Indigenous language workers. These categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive – many missionaries have advanced training in linguistics, some academic linguists work in regional language centers, and some indigenous people conduct scholarly research with University affiliations. These categories are useful in that they pinpoint major stakeholders in language work itself, and they help elucidate variation in perspectives on what language work is and what successful language work looks like.

While the goal of increasing language use and a desire to maintain its cultural position may seem virtually synonymous, closer analysis reveals that the strategies employed to increase language use frequently require a revision of cultural perspectives on how language is and should be used and transmitted – sometimes because language workers fail to take sociolinguistic factors into account when designing their approach to language maintenance, and sometimes because sociolinguistic practices rooted in traditional language ideologies have successfully transmitted language in the past but are indeed antithetical, or at least not well-suited, to language transmission in modern circumstances. This is not to imply that Wangkatha language ideologies are homogeneous, but rather that common themes do emerge among a significant proportion of Wangkatha consultants amidst the variation and, almost always, at least
some outright dissent. We can therefore usefully focus the range of these ideological differences as a contrast between language workers and the language community, while recognising that this is not a simple categorical distinction. Significant ideological contrasts in this context include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wangkatha language ideology</th>
<th>Language worker ideology / practice</th>
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<tr>
<td>Language should ideally be learned when one has acquired the cultural knowledge necessary to learn, use and claim the language appropriately.</td>
<td>Language will typically only be fully learned during critical acquisition periods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language is intrinsically linked to culture and therefore cannot possibly be separated from it.</td>
<td>Language is usefully decontextualized (for example, in texts) in order to facilitate its instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting language means maintaining its social and cultural authenticity.</td>
<td>Protecting language means maintaining its use as a full and independent system of communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language must be used in socially appropriate ways that respond to the immediate and often ephemeral social context.</td>
<td>Language is usefully rendered in immutable ways, such as in writing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In all cases, a middle ground between ideologies is difficult if not impossible to negotiate; the sociolinguistic components of language that most community members focus on, including the language ideologies themselves, are challenged by many facets of the approach that language workers tend to take. Meeting the requirements to help bolster speaker numbers can, therefore, actually work against the community’s more culture-based goals, just as maintaining cultural norms can work against maintaining the language. While it is often assumed that ‘saving’ a language will also help maintain the culture of the people who traditionally speak it, this analysis reveals that the two can actually be mutually exclusive. This thesis does not argue that language should be sacrificed for culture, vice versa or anything in between. Instead, it argues that if
language workers aim to participate in ethnic revival efforts and hope to make positive contributions to them, they must seriously consider and thoroughly investigate community concerns in order to ensure that community members, not language workers, are choosing which avenues to follow and which sacrifices to make.

The relationship between language workers, including the regional language centers, and communities in many ways reflects the bureaucratization of Aboriginal life. On this point, Macdonald (2013) discusses how historical and modern Aboriginal policy assumes that Aboriginal people will become modern, bureaucratic selves. Government funded language work is designed with this sort of self in mind, assuming work for wages, ‘fair’ employment and dispersion strategies that eschew nepotism, and regular honest reporting. It is assumed that traditional concepts of self will be abandoned for this model and its assumed superiority, with Aboriginal selves being traded for successful, upwardly mobile modern individuals. However, in his words:

Traditions are not packaged cultures that disintegrate in encounters with modernity; they are practices with histories, part of any people’s tool kit for addressing their present. (Macdonald, 2013: 401)

Traditional ways of thinking and ways of being have not been abandoned. They are often in conflict with the modernist, and frankly neoliberal, assumptions underlying development work in general. The irony in the language work context is that modern bureaucratized selves are demanded for work that aims to restore or maintain tradition. The strategies that work, including strategies about conducting linguistic fieldwork in the first place, assume that traditional selves are to be trained and transformed, for the sake of preserving other kinds of tradition. The conflict that results, and which may only manifest as a lack of grassroots support for language work, should hardly be surprising.
There is a serious risk here that indigenous practice will come to reflect western understandings – that ‘life might be said to follow modelling’ (Sackett, 2013: 355). Specifically in the Native Title context, where this risk most visibly applies, Sackett (2013) argues that conceptions of descent as provided in expert evidence do not transparently correlate to what is reported by Aboriginal claimants. It is argued in legacy anthropological accounts that land claims are mediated through patrilineal descent, by modern expert evidence that there are multiple pathways to land claims, and by Aboriginal testimony that blood is possibly the most significant factor. The lack of transparent congruence here, he argues, does not mean that the conceptions are mutually exclusive, and it does not reflect a break in tradition or a lack of cohesiveness. Instead, he argues, it reflects a reduction of pathways in a system that operates largely through cognatic descent in response to changing social circumstances. There is continuity at a deep level that often goes unnoticed in the wake of superficial variation. The details of the case go beyond the scope of this thesis. Here, it is most important in that western understandings of Aboriginal ways are mitigated by western worldviews and unquestioned ideologies. Conflict, unexpected rejections of well-intentioned work (as well as unintended consequences of it), and (most clearly) contestation in a native title context all take researchers by surprise because they haven’t engaged with the local culture or their own in critical ways. Misunderstandings happen because they fail to realize that their own approach and their own rationality aren’t culturally neutral.

To be very clear, this thesis should not be interpreted as an admonition against language work, or external involvement in general, and it specifically does not claim that the broad Aboriginal community in and around Kalgoorlie is particularly opposed to language work. Neither statement is accurate: language work often has substantial political, social, and even health benefits to community members, and many Aboriginal people in the Kalgoorlie area are very supportive of language work. In fact, some have
undertaken basic linguistic training in order to conduct such work effectively. However, most people who have conducted language revitalization work have encountered many detractors within the community, and few, if any, communities the world over are without complaint about the way language work has been done – even the language workers who are members of the language community. As will be discussed in the following pages, current work on the issues of language work focuses heavily on solutions that have worked for the majority of community members and on techniques that seem unsuccessful. There is substantial coverage of these issues in regards to the two major language work products discussed in this thesis: language graphization and language in schools. However, there is very little coverage of the meanings behind the complaints that remain. For this reason, focus in this thesis is on those complaints and on those detractors, and on what this also says about the silent non-engagers in the cultural activity of language revitalization.

**Wangkatha**

The research presented in this thesis aims to delineate some of the incongruity between language workers’ goals and those of Aboriginal people in a particular urban setting – Kalgoorlie, Western Australia. Located on the fringes of the Western Desert and 700km east of the state capital Perth, Kalgoorlie presents a good case study for this sort of research because, for the most part, the Aboriginal population there is cohesive while living in a setting of ethnic division. By far the largest town of the area, with a population of approximately 33,000, Kalgoorlie is considered the urban hub of the Eastern Goldfields. Aboriginal people travel there to make use of the services it offers – crucially including a well-equipped dialysis center. Additionally, many Aboriginal people have settled there at least semi-permanently from more rural Goldfields locations because of the availability of jobs, especially mining jobs during the resources boom
that began shortly before this research. The town was actually founded due to a resource boom – European settlement of the area began in the 1860s when gold was discovered, and occasional booms since that time have resulted in a multiethnic and multinational often transient population. Most Aboriginal people of the Eastern Goldfields have some experience with the Mt Margaret Mission, as a result of which most Aboriginal Kalgoorlians self-identify as belonging to the same collective – labelled as Wangkatha (sometimes among other affiliations).

Generally speaking, Wangkatha people share a sociolinguistic history – they have all descended at least in part from members of the Western Desert language bloc, they have been subjected to the same contact influences, and they share the same broad experiences with language work. Importantly for this thesis, they also come from the same sociolinguistic reality of the Western Desert dialect mesh – affectionately termed a ‘dialect mess’ by some of its researchers (John Henderson, pers comm). In this region of Australia, proximal dialects share up to 80% of their vocabulary and are extremely mutually intelligible, and distinctive linguistic varieties can be spoken by as few as a dozen people. The minor distinctions that may exist between dialects of the same language can have social salience, denoting separate social groups that are very fluid but still socially important. In this complicated setting, terms like ‘dialect’ and ‘language’ are only problematically applied. In this thesis, the term ‘language’ invokes its Aboriginal usage, referring to a language variety at any level of specificity (e.g. language, dialect, register, idiolect). The term ‘dialect’ is typically only used when focus is on Western Desert language as a whole, to help distinguish between the hypercategory of Western Desert and the hypocategorical dialect groups within it. Sometimes, the term ‘dialect’ is used because it forms part of a conventional phrase – for example, when discussing ‘dialect groups’ or the ‘dialect mesh’. In this thesis, the
word is never intended to reflect linguistic analysis of mutual intelligibility or language relatedness.

The map below shows the location of Kalgoorlie relative to other locations that are also important to this research – most notably Mt Margaret Aboriginal community, formerly Mount Margaret Mission.

![Goldfields Map](image)

According to community report, the Wangkatha language group\(^1\) currently consists of approximately 3,000 members, and, according to 2011 census data, the language itself is spoken by 290 people. This actually puts the language in a relatively healthy status as compared to many Australian Aboriginal languages, many of which have less than fifty speakers. Wangkatha is technically considered a dialect of one of the strongest

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\(^1\) The designation of this group is fairly contested among consultants and in Native Title proceedings, as discussed in some detail in chapter 5.
Australian Aboriginal languages – the Western Desert language, which spans 1/6th of the continent and boasts 7,600 speakers according to the 2006\(^2\) census. However, the first language of most young Wangkatha people is Aboriginal English, with many exhibiting limited command, if any, of Wangkatha. Possibly for this reason, Wangkatha identity can be indexed through minimal use of Wangkatha language. In fact, many people apply the name ‘Wangkatha’ to a language variety that primarily places some salient Wangkatha words and phrases into otherwise English sentences. These permissive categorizations (of Wangkatha speakers and Wangkatha language) depend largely on context. In general discussions of identity, Wangkatha is typically a broad category; in discussions about language elicitation, it is much more narrowly defined; and in discussions of Native Title, it is quite politically defined. These matters are all taken up in greater detail in the chapters that follow.

Some nearby dialects of Western Desert stand stronger than Wangkatha and have garnered much more attention over the years. Pitantjatjara, for example, is reported in census figures as having 3,394 speakers, while Ngaanyatjara has 1,032. Both of these dialects are spoken in areas with strong ties to Wangkatha people and the Kalgoorlie area, and both dialects are quite similar to Wangkatha itself. For this reason, work on Wangkatha language shows significant influence from that done on Ngaanyatjara as it is spoken in Warburton, and a dialect closely related to Pitantjatjara spoken in Cundeelee. Missionary work on Wangkatha has been conducted by Wilf Douglas, who had previously worked in the Warburton area, and Brian and Dawn Hadfield, whose primary area of work was Cundeelee.

\(^2\) 2011 census data on this point has not yet been released.
At the time of this research, most language work on Wangkatha was being produced by the Karlkurla Language and Culture Aboriginal Corporation (the language centre). Karlkurla is the Western Desert language name for a local site (associated with karlkurla ‘silky pear’) and is reportedly the origin of the town name Kalgoorlie. The corporation had formerly been known as Wangkanyi Ngurra Tjurta (literally ‘speaking many places’), but the name was reportedly changed because very few people could pronounce it. The language centre was staffed primarily by Aboriginal people from the Leonora area – a point of contention because, in the view of many community members, Leonora people are Tjupany, and not necessarily Wangkatha. The language centre was also staffed by a non-Aboriginal linguist, without professional qualifications in linguistics, and worked closely with ex-missionaries, including the Hadfields, in producing language materials.

At the time that the research for this thesis was conducted, the most significant Wangkatha-related publications included two dictionaries – one written by the regional language center, and one written by an extremely determined community member – and a handful of storybooks. The Karkurla Language and Culture Aboriginal Corporation also produced Wangkatha language posters for local schools and medical centers. All of these materials fell under some degree of scrutiny, with accusations of language mixing and confusing spellings being nearly ubiquitous, and the qualifications of the materials’ creators being called into question in all cases except for the dictionary written by a community member. These misgivings about qualifications had nothing to do with educational attainment, but rather focused on the authenticity of the creators’ authority – that is, whether the people in charge of creating the resources were Wangkatha enough to do the job properly.
Methodology

Fieldwork for this degree began with an entirely different direction than that presented in this thesis. The original aim was language description – specifically, a description of Tjupany – a Western Desert language spoken 200 km north of Kalgoorlie. Early language elicitation work brought serious (and sometimes crippling) concerns about the representation of language into focus. Therefore what began as a language description project gradually became an analysis of the beliefs, ideologies and attitudes that emerge in and from language work, including language documentation and description. As the focus of research changed, so did the appropriate methodology and the disciplinary expectations for the final written product. In the end, research took on a decidedly ethnographic perspective through the use of sociolinguistic interviews that are informed and given context by observations in the field.

The change of focus was a result of ethical imperatives that followed from identifying contradictions between the original research project and what seemed to be the goals of the community. I am of the belief that, when confronted with goals that seem to contradict the actual work of language revitalization, linguists must remember that it is not their duty or place to ‘call to action’ or manipulate the communities ideologies in order to facilitate their own work - they must instead focus on local goals in order to avoid repeating the colonialistic practices of the past (Fife, 2005: 49, 51). It is the linguists’ place to help people make informed decisions about language and language work (Crowley, 2007: 49, 51; Loether, 2009), but this arguably should remain the extent of their influence. The researchers’ methods and goals must be re-evaluated

3 This fieldwork was conducted with UWA ethics approval.
in accommodating community input in order to honor the researcher-participant relationship (Dwyer, 2006: 38).

Even during early elicitation work, I in effect became a participant observer in the language work phenomenon. In discussing the possibility of undertaking language work, potential consultants often first asserted their attitudes about compensation and credit for their input, about protecting their responses from judgements by other community members, the (un)willingness of most Aboriginal Kalgoorlians to help with language work, the (in)appropriateness of my role or the language centre’s role in language work, and/or the (un)willingness of the government to provide real support for any Aboriginal ‘problems’. These issues are taken up in greater detail in their appropriate sections in the thesis. The point here is that language attitudes and ideologies presented themselves in the course of language description work - a familiar phenomenon that underscores the importance of a study of those attitudes and ideologies for language work.

When I shifted the focus to language attitudes, beliefs and ideologies, the initial elicitation-based methodology had to be reformulated. In order to capture people’s perspectives on sociolinguistic history and the phenomena surrounding language work, I designed semi-structured sociolinguistic interviews based on the observations I’d made in the field up to that point. The interviews incorporated questions about life history, group memberships, language use and proficiency, attitudes about varieties of language, and attitudes about elements of language formalization and language work - especially the orthography. Themes concerning purity and social justice also frequently emerged.

I conducted the interviews with 16 Aboriginal language consultants in and around Kalgoorlie. Most consultants were referred by the language centre, although some were referred by other consultants or Aboriginal organisations surveyed around
town. Selection criteria were rather open, mandating only that consultants initially self-identify as Wangkatha, at least in part. However, preconceptions among community members regarding the appropriate type of person for a female researcher to consult regarding language and culture mean that most consultants were women who were either of advanced age (typically 60 years or older) or who held some sort of position in Aboriginal affairs, education, or language or social work. Five consultants, however, were male, and two of those were in their twenties.

Given the evolving approach to data collection, processing the data has required a very balanced approach. Processing the data followed the norms of grounded theory research (Punch, 2005), starting with transcribing the recorded interviews, then coding those transcripts and the fieldnotes, then completing intermediary write-ups while finalizing analysis for the final thesis. Once the data is rendered through transcription and fieldnotes, coding it (that is, annotating it with keywords) helps to categorize the major themes that emerge from it. Some codes pertain to the overt expressions being made, while others pertain to ideologies that are thought to underlie them. I coded the data several times before identifying truly salient categories. At that point, I was able to assemble a ‘theme summary’ for each theme that proved prominent (sixteen of them), and discern the most important themes and relationships between them from those summaries. By the time I completed this step of analysis, I had been out of the field (and back in the United States) for a couple of years, so I was able to achieve the intellectual distance from the data that is often necessary to help step away from minute observations to identify broad themes. Rigorous study of the data helped ensure that those broad themes were in fact grounded in the data.

In the end, seven months combined fieldwork and 16 semi-formal sociolinguistic interviews between 2007 and 2009 have revealed the need for a broader
target for maintenance and revitalization than what linguists tend to focus on, and one that can sometimes be mutually exclusive with the regimentation and transmission of decontextualized language. In general, they were keen to talk about language, and many had done enough language work previously to have thought about the issues discussed before. Oftentimes their perspectives clearly reflected the sorts of language work they had done before; those who worked with language in education, for example, had very academic perspectives about Aboriginal English and, not surprisingly, believed that language should be taught in schools despite some community contention on the issue.

During the course of each interview, it often became apparent that consultants had not been pressed on their ideas about language before, with them periodically remarking that they had were not sure what they thought when a particular issue was pushed beyond common discourse. In general, they were glad to be pressed on the issues and seemed to value the opportunity to think more deeply about them and to have their thoughts valued. In one particular case, however, the consultants seemed annoyed at the interview in general, frequently arguing that all of the information being requested could be looked up in a book. A couple of other consultants, the oldest ones, had difficulty articulating ideas about language that went beyond observation because, it seemed, they had never really thought of it before.

**Traditions of linguistic fieldwork**

Hale et al (1992) were the first to present a focused piece on language endangerment to mainstream linguistics, although less formalized indigenous language documentation and description work had been underway for over a century before their special issue of the journal *Language* was published. They introduced fundamental concepts of language endangerment, incorporating discussion of the value of minority languages and the perspectives of speakers of those languages, culminating in a strong
call to action for all linguists to take to the field and gather precious linguistic data. Most treatments of endangered languages since have focused on the most effective method of documenting, describing and revitalizing them (e.g. Ratliff and Newman, 2001), the causes of language shift (e.g. Schmidt, 1991), indicators of a language’s vitality status (e.g. Fishman, 1991); and convincing government bodies and the population at large to value revitalization efforts (e.g. Dalby, 2003).

Not surprisingly, such work engenders many assumptions about the value of language and even the definition of a ‘pure’ indigenous language. Language workers, whatever their role, often focus so heavily on their own goals that they overlook those of the communities with whom they work. Documentary linguists typically enter into language work with linguistic preservation or maintenance as their goal, bringing with them a strong structural focus and, sometimes expectations that they employ some level of language planning that will help increase use of the language. Often these sorts of goals match well with the goals of community members, especially those community members who are involved in language work. However, the well-intentioned efforts of such scholars are not always welcome or appreciated by the broader community with whom they intend to work, and there are almost always nay-sayers within these ideologically diverse communities who have serious reservations about the work being done. These voices are typically ignored, with fieldwork manuals ubiquitously providing advice about how to avoid these sorts of conflicts rather than seriously engage with them. Even language workers who might come to question their original goals are often required by funding sources or academic expectation to produce language
It is from exactly these approaches that one hears of language efforts that have fought on through adversity within the community itself. For example, it is not uncommon to hear of successful language description that relied on one or a handful of dedicated consultants – in fact, this perspective is often put forth in discussion about the (lack of) need for strong grassroots support in order to successfully complete a language description project. While a language with only one or a handful of speakers remaining can obviously only be studied in this way, situations in which languages have a broader speaker base who are unwilling to do language work demand a serious scrutiny on the part of researchers.

Missionary linguists undertake many of the same processes as academic ones, although their strictly linguistic goals are in fact tools for their broader goal of successful evangelization. In these cases, missionary linguists are frequently faulted for using indigenous language as a vessel for a Western, Christian message, shaping the language to encode the necessary meanings as if these changes impose no linguistic hegemony. Samuels’ (2006) discussion of Bible Translation and indexicality on the San Carlos Apache Reservation is particularly relevant to the issues discussed in this thesis. Samuels identifies a number of competing ideologies about languages and semanticity among missionaries who had worked on the reservation, most crucially focusing on the practices of Phillip Goode, a former pastor of the area. Following common SIL practice, Goode developed proficiency in locating semantic ‘equivalencies’ between English and Apache. While his translations show nuanced understanding of the referential values of English and Apache words, he was ‘willing to discard [subtexts of indexical

\[^4\] See Grinevald’s (1998) discussion of general issues about linguistic work on endangered languages for more coverage of ‘the dissonance that generally develops between the values and goals of academia and the values and goals encountered in the field situation’ (156-7).
connections] in service to the meaning he wanted his interpretations to carry’ (2006: 534). Samuels contrasts Goode’s use of Apache in traditional genres, such as Apache Kid songs, against his use of Apache in Bible translation:

-In his [...] performances of Apache Kid songs, language was infused with form, genre, and history, as Phillip wove voice, feeling, melody, rhythm, and text into a richly layered, indexically saturated, indissoluble whole. In distinction, in his interpretive work Phillip took a much more semantically purified approach to language as a system of encoding and transmission. (2006: 534-5)

Adding to the point, Samuels continues:

- [...] the deep involvement in the nuances of semantics include a shift in thinking about language, so that it was NOTHING BUT semantics. Unlike his sung performances, in Phillip’s interpretive work, words and phrases didn’t have indexical cultural relations. They had referents. (2006: 535)

Samuels sees this general tendency towards referential, decontextualized language as extending to the classroom, where language is frequently taught in translations from English. In the case of the San Carlos Apache Reservation, this practice is preferred over the use of more traditional genres precisely because translations have lost many traditional associations: Apache language use that indexes traditional religious belief is seen as Satanic and dangerous, while Apache language use that has been semantically purified to convey a Western or Christian message is safe. Wangkatha views tend towards the opposite, where decontextualization from traditional indexicalities is seen to erode the value of the language and whitewash the language and culture. Moreover, they see the separation of language and culture as lending itself towards dangerous use of sacred language because people may learn the words without learning restrictions about their use. Thus, for the Apache in Samuels’ research, decontextualizing the language removes its traditional power; for the Wangkatha in this
research, the traditional power remains, but decontextualization limits the ability of language users to understand and respect that power.

Especially in empowerment and collaboration models of language work\(^5\), a general belief is often held that, if indigenous people attain some training in linguistics and some moral support from outsiders but otherwise maintain control over language work, these problems will be avoided. However, even linguists who are community members taking part in the discourse of language endangerment tend to focus on the revival of linguistic structure as an inherently valuable enterprise. These extremely denotational perspectives on language characteristically fail to account for broad community beliefs and goals related to language. This oversight, virtually endemic to the linguistic enterprise, could restructure indigenous language ideologies and sociolinguistic practices according to often foreign demands for language documentation, description and revitalization – whether the actual language work is conducted by foreigners or trained community members. A central argument in this thesis is that those ideologies and sociolinguistic practices are cultural traits every bit as much as languages are.

The study of language ideologies is relatively new, having been founded by Silverstein in 1979 and only taken up widely in the past couple of decades. Definitions of ‘language ideology’ vary quite widely, to the point that Kroskrity (2000) devotes nearly 34 pages to pinning down the essence of it from the emerging literature in the field. At their core, language ideologies can be usefully defined as a set of commonsensical assumptions about language that underlie language attitudes, language choices, and beliefs and actions regarding language. For example, Del Valle (2007) reports on an

\(^5\) See Czaykowska-Higgins’ 2009 attempt at a totalizing framework for collaboration models
ideology of ‘hispanofonía’ – that is, cultural and linguistic unity among Spanish speaking countries - which has instigated a remarkably divergent set of language policies through history. This ideology at one time inspired strict linguistic hegemony, with strong prescriptivist policies towards a standardized Spanish, in an attempt to unify under a single linguistic code. Social movements reacting against these policies have resulted in quite the opposite - a ‘total Spanish’ approach to language that sees the language as naturally diverse in its unity. Different populations within the Spanish speaking world are allowed space to develop individual language policies and prescriptive directives in regards to their versions of Spanish, all of which are subsumed under a hypercategory of Spanish. Language policies have changed quite drastically, but the underlying ideology of ‘hispanofonía’ has endured as the theme of unity continues.

Sociolinguistic practices have been studied for quite some time (nominally dating back to Labov’s work in the 1960s and 1970s, but extending far before then in description). However, focus on the maintenance of sociolinguistic practices amidst shift in more structural components of language is still relatively rare. Field’s (2001) discussion of the maintenance of Navajo discourse strategies merits particular mention because it specifically focuses on maintenance of tacit elements of Navajo socialization, such as hand gesture, pitch, turn-taking and participant structure in contexts of canonical language shift. Her focus is specifically on triadic directives, and her essential argument is that these tacit aspects of language are, among Navajo speakers, more resilient against change than language code is. She posits this argument as an answer to suggestions that ‘sociolinguistic change (meaning change in language use or attitudes) may precede change in language code’, which she attributes to Sapir 1949, Hymes 1966 and Labov 1972 specifically. Among the Wangkatha people consulted for this research project, her tacit categories prove to be a major underlying focus of complaint / attention. Overall,
consultants are at least vaguely aware of the tacit linguistic knowledge\(^6\) that has endured despite strong hegemonic contact with English speakers, and they fear that modern language work may revitalize language code at the cost of that resilient tacit knowledge. However, concerns like theirs are often taken at face value with minimal analysis if any, and are often disregarded in the course of language work.

A denotational focus in language revitalization work specifically is not problematic if the goals of the community happen to align with those of the language workers. In communities for whom revived fluency of the language code really is the primary goal, any ideological differences may only present themselves as technical difficulties in the process of language revitalization. However, for many language communities, language revitalization is not only a matter of re-establishing fluency in a vanishing language, but rather a matter of restoring and maintaining traditional sociolinguistic practices in a culture that is resisting globalizing pressures. The overwhelming ‘form and structure’ bias evident in most language work that has been done the world over does more than overlook such practices and ideologies; it also often demands a manipulation of them in order to ensure that strictly linguistic goals are met. Loether (2009) actually specifically lists this as a task set before language workers – in his words:

*How does a language activist with the goal of language revitalization in his or her community actually manipulate language ideology in order to facilitate the language revitalization process? The activist must first identify those ideologies*

\(^6\) Of course, the very nature of tacit knowledge is that it is taken for granted to the point of being difficult to discuss and even operating below the level of consciousness. However, statements related to these categories, such as those about walypalas’ (‘white fellas’ ie white people’s) inability to teach the language properly because the language relies heavily paralinguistic and prosodic features, indicate that Field’s tacit categories apply here as well.
that can prevent successful outcomes and then decide the best method to change these attitudes. (251)

Loether does specifically mention ‘ideologies that are clearly the product of colonial and hegemonic forces’, but does not offer satisfactory evidence that the ideologies he targets are indeed a product of colonialism, nor does he restrict his ideological manipulations to only foreign-born concepts. While his discussion of ideological transformation is by far the most transparent in the prominent literature, the same approach is frequently taken as a natural product of language work. Often, traditional language socialization is cast aside in favor of language courses, language nests, or whichever pedagogical approach professional language planners deem most effective for the transmission of fluent language. Language is molded to cover new domains, whether through lexical innovations to express modern concepts or even through graphization, in order to provide more opportunities for language use, regardless of the perceived appropriateness of these expansions. In many instances where obstacles to language work have arisen and been 'dealt with', what has possibly happened is ideological transformation: community members learned to accept counter-cultural practices because their own ideologies were deemed to be wrong. Thus a population that was always against language being taught in schools but finally sees the value of such pedagogy may have, through their own process of ideological clarification⁷, decided that their language-related goals really do require such an approach and have decided, on their own agency, to change language socialization patterns in order to optimize language transmission. However, they may have been convinced, through tenacious efforts of language workers, that their own ideas about language are wrong and must be

⑦ The concept of ideological clarification is itself somewhat culturally naïve, as it entails the idea that heterogeneity of ideologies or goals is necessary for unified action.
changed to achieve language-related goals as they are defined by those language workers. Language workers likely take a part in either process (whether in aiding ideological clarification or in driving community goals), but the agency they assume (or usurp) is clearly different in each circumstance.

**Academic analysis of language work**

Language endangerment and shift has been widely discussed in anthropological linguistic literature since Dorian’s (1989) seminal volume that laid out an in-depth discussion of the social contexts and structural changes associated with language attrition. Even in that volume, scholars were already questioning some of the assumptions made in approaching endangered language, most notably that loss of language equates or indicates loss of culture and that strict adherence to traditional language structure helps preserve languages. Similarly, various contributions to Hale et al’s (1992) call to action suggest ideological problems related to language work, such as England’s (1992) analysis of community criticisms of language work. Ladefoged’s (1992) response to Hale et al was an immediate refutation of many assumptions carried by the contributions of that volume, especially those that assumed that all indigenous people will suffer if their language is lost and that language revitalization can therefore be considered a humanitarian project among all cultures. His core argument focused on a kind of indigenous agency that was overlooked in the arguments about the importance of language to indigenous people – that they have the right to let their languages ‘die. Dorian (1993) in turn nearly immediately refuted Ladefoged’s views, incisively arguing that he had overlooked the power structures involved in language loss that might unfairly lead to indigenous people devaluing their own language. More discursive works are found in Duchène and Heller’s edited volume “Discourses of Endangerment” (2007) – for example, that the same rhetoric mobilized for endangered minority
languages is also utilized for the English-Only movement (Schmidt, 2007), and that the notions of purity and homogenism that are developed around minority language endangerment actually displace indigenous people from cultural membership (Jaffe, 2007).

Other scholars may not question the assumptions underlying language work so overtly, but offer analytic tools to pick them apart. Gal and Irvine (2000) identify language ideological processes that are central to language description, language change, and language shift, all of which are cornerstones of language maintenance and revitalization work. They identify three processes of linguistic differentiation: iconicity, erasure, and fractal recursivity. In iconicity, the language becomes an icon of the groups that speak it, meaning that opinions and attitudes about the people are applied to the language: that which is spoken by people who are thought to be unclean is unclean, that which is spoken by the uneducated is nonsensical, that which is spoken by the traditional is traditional. Thus, in the context of endangered languages, the language spoken by elders who are thought to live traditionally is often upheld as the most traditional and purest form of language. In erasure, linguistic features are ideologically or actually erased when they may threaten the veracity of the political and linguistic differentiations that are invoked in ethnolinguistic identity formation. Thus similarities between languages that are spoken by groups that are thought to be politically distinctive may actually be eliminated through language planning, blamed on recent mixing or inaccurate usage, or simply ignored. Differences in the speech patterns of people who are considered to be in the same political group are dealt with similarly. In the context of language endangerment, community members may hope that linguistic descriptions and language materials will explain away linguistic data that challenge ethnolinguistic identity formation, thereby erasing the complexity. In fractal recursivity, oppositions that apply at one level of a hierarchy are echoed at another – for example,
the oppositional defining features of nation-states are expected to also apply at the level in intra-national communities if they are to be legitimate. Thus the ideology that demands that each nation has a language also applies to minority groups within a nation, and much of the rhetoric of nationalism applies at all levels of collectivity – including indigenous groups and their endangered languages. Each must have their own, distinctive language.

Most who have thoughtfully conducted language work have probably come upon the same sorts of problems that surfaced during my research and have done their own thinking on these important matters. However, in-depth discussions focusing on a single population are relatively rare. The investigation presented here demonstrates striking parallels to those presented in Barbra Meek’s work on the Kaska of the Yukon. In her book “We Are Our Language”, Meek (2010) argues that the process of language revitalization is clearly affected by ‘the social practices, ideologies, and moments of disjuncture involved in its expression and aspiring expressiveness’. The phenomena that result in language shift often do so via such disconnections: external factors alone do not account for language loss; ideologies that continue to condition linguistic behavior do. When ideological and practical conflicts emerge - between competing ideologies regarding socialization, between conceptualizations of youth language and elder language, between perspective and practice – linguistic practices are often re-envisioned in ways that threaten continued use of the language itself. Meek demonstrates that language revitalization projects provide some of the best opportunities for investigating this phenomenon in (ideologies regarding) linguistic practice because language is so consciously conceived during these efforts. Furthermore, this kind of study is necessary to language revitalization efforts because they will not be successful if the appropriateness of the varied potential approaches has not been checked against ideologies and language socialization practices. Finally, and most relevant to this thesis,
the practices surrounding language revitalization can often present or reproduce disjuncture themselves.

The sociolinguistic context and history of Kaska is fairly similar to that of Wangkatha. In the Yukon in general, language shift is abundantly apparent, with only 15% of the Aboriginal population speaking an Aboriginal language as their first language. Kaska fluency shows the usual age gradation, where the most fluent speakers are elders and the least fluent are young adults. According to Meek, Kaska language has been forced into obsolescence due to a history of segregation and assimilation. The Canadian government sought to incorporate the Aboriginal population into the mainstream one, sending the children to boarding schools so that they could be socialized into mainstream culture. Language was a major target of these efforts, its use being prohibited in many of the assimilationist settings. Use of indigenous language to index aboriginal identity also lost value as that identity became increasingly stigmatized. Since the 1970s, the Canadian government has begun to celebrate its indigenous cultures, and so has attempted to restore them. Old assimilationist legislation and policies were abolished as new, reconciliation-centered ones were introduced. However, Meek notes, the attempts to revitalize the language that stemmed from this modern approach have not taken into account language socialization and ideological frameworks. Similar to the Wangkatha situation studied for this thesis, they have therefore resulted in and revealed significant disjuncture that often works against local goals for language maintenance.

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8 The term ‘Aboriginal’ is capitalized throughout most of this thesis because this is the accepted practice for reference to Australian Aboriginal groups; however, the term is not normally capitalized in reference to aboriginal Canadian groups, and so it is not capitalized in this thesis when reference is made to the aboriginal Canadian group studied by Meek.
Meek argues that language revitalization must preserve and revive not only grammar, but also the indexical context that constitutes meaning out of socially situated language. Meek observes that language revitalization work is always conducted within certain discourses that reveal underlying ideologies and goals regarding language work. The discourse around language work can be brought in by outsider experts or community members; problems arise when there are disjunctures between the two positions, and disjunctures indeed arise in nearly all cases, including those of Kaska and Wangkatha. Meek notes that, while experts tend to focus on the number of speakers and the number of languages remaining, community members focus on the knowledge that is and isn’t being transmitted. Compared to expert positions, then, local Kaska discourses about endangerment focus much more heavily on the transmission of cultural knowledge and practices, as do those reported for Wangkatha in the chapters that follow. Kaska elders assert a connection between language and history, arguing that the language should therefore be learned because it is in some way a key to one’s history and culture. Language, then, is not a denotational tool or a grammatical composition to these people; it is an embodied facet of traditional life and culture. However, language workers who focus on Kaska – and Wangkatha for that matter - tend to focus on the denotational and grammatical nature of the language in ways that omit or even contradict these social underpinnings. The disconnection between expert and local approaches to language work even results in different methods of measuring the success of language revitalization efforts. Expert rhetoric prizes the elevation of speaker numbers and improved performance on tests of verbal competence, while community rhetoric prefers improved social practice and demonstration of cultural knowledge.

Therefore, the exact opposite of Kaska community goals has emerged from expert-advised revitalization in many ways. Meek identifies such disjunctures in similar contexts to those found for Wangkatha – in modern transmission of language in
classrooms, at home, and even on ‘bush trips’; and in the graphization of language in materials development. In all cases, ‘expert’ forces – potentially including academic linguists, missionaries, and even trained community linguists - have catalyzed modification of traditional sociolinguistic practices in valuing the transmission of linguistic form over the continuation of language that embodies cultural practice, approaches to revitalization and quantifications of its success having ignored both the loss and maintenance of this most crucial role of language. In many ways, then, current treatment of Kaska language reflects exactly the sort of outcomes that Wangkatha consultants fear will occur with their language.

Classrooms, for example, may pass on some language, but they do so via artificial processes and framed in nontraditional pragmatics. Meek observes that, in classroom routines, Kaska children are primarily the receivers of language instruction without being called upon to speak more than isolated words or phrases. Over time, these practices have seeped even into home environments and bush trips that Meek observed – although it should be noted that Meek primarily observed language teachers in their home environments and bush trips. Nevertheless, Meek demonstrates that the regimentation of language in institutions in general results in significant disconnection between adult language practices and child language practices, between the language use children observe and the language use they are permitted to participate in, and between ideologies about language learning and the actual requirements for language acquisition. The clearly dichotomized roles of children and adults in regards to language use do, however, have reflexes in traditional practices of socialization. Children are

This conservative approach to language instruction in schools is used for many endangered languages, although better-informed models may do a much better job of achieving linguistic and cultural immersion.
expected to only speak when spoken to. However, the strict hierarchization of Kaska has been sharpened via institutionalization, and it prevents youths from improving and demonstrating their linguistic abilities. The failure to consider traditional ideologies about socialization therefore results in two kinds of problem – many elements of traditional socialization are invisibly lost as transmission takes place in artificial contexts (e.g. classrooms), and those that invisibly continue actually work against language transmission in those contexts. The same phenomena can be identified elsewhere (most famously as described by Kulick 1997), including among the Wangkatha.

Meek argues that socialization has always demanded learning the social rules surrounding language use, not just the (extremely limited proficiency in) structure and vocabulary. While some social rules surrounding Kaska language use are maintained, they are not consciously passed on. Instead, most language learning is framed within English conventions and pragmatics. For example, English dominates in the sorts of conversational exchanges that are taught in Kaska classes. Name exchanges (e.g. ‘What’s your name?’ ‘My name is…’) are among the first language lessons, and are repeated in many language reinforcement activities that Meek transcribes. These conversational exchanges rarely occur in Kaska because everybody knows everybody. However, they are common in English and, perhaps more to the point, common in texts for learning other languages (such as French), and are therefore taught in the Kaska classroom. Overall, language is cast as solely denotational, with little grammatical complexity or indexicality. Kaska materials reduce the language to a compilation of nouns and token phrases; consequently, while Kaska language is used frequently (even by children), it is used by them as isolated lexemes only. Any sociolinguistic conventions that are conveyed through language teaching assume an English model rather than transmitting Kaska ones. The dominance of English, in form and underlying
ideology, is reinforced, not interrupted. Meek thus demonstrates that institutionalization of the language has succeeded in celebrating the value of Kaska language and culture, but has constrained, not enhanced, the language’s conversational and grammatical repertoire, thus erasing the complexity of the language. Children, Meek says, can be said to be learning how to respond appropriately in an artificial (classroom) context, but are not necessarily learning to use Kaska appropriately, and the primacy of English is never challenged. Furthermore, Kaska, like Wangkatha, has found relatively new expression in written media – a form of expression thought unnecessary by some, and which continues to demonstrate the dominance of English in its framing. Kaska language is simplified in most written materials, and its renderings are typically mediated in English. Similar practices can be seen in other language revitalization practices as well, and Wangkatha consultants share insightful concerns that exactly this sort of dominant-cultural framing will take place when Wangkatha is taught in the classroom.

Meek makes special effort to clarify that transmitting only tokens of grammar would suffice if that limited use of indigenous language were intended to serve only as a token of Yukon Indian identity. However, she has argued that internal ideologies see the goal of language revitalization as including the acquisition of social and cultural information through language. Existing language learning routines and materials do little if anything to transmit this kind of information. On the whole, Wangkatha consultants demonstrate the same sorts of reservation that Meek identifies – they desire the maintenance or revitalization of traditional practices, some of which correspond directly with those reported by Meek and some of which do not. They fear that the treatment of language so far, ranging from early missionary work to modern language revitalization efforts, will result in the same sort of decontextualized transmission as is reported for the Kaska. Meek’s study therefore does more than provide a parallel study.
to that reported in this thesis; it also successfully demonstrates the validity of consultant complaints that linguists are typically trained to overcome, not seriously accommodate.

The situation reported here for the Wangkatha is, like that reported by Meek for the Kaska, one of significant disjuncture. In both scenarios, ideological conflict began in early contact, when traditional practices were, in Meek’s word, ‘ruptured’. Attempts to remedy the damage done in the past by restoring traditional language and traditional culture maintain that rupture; it seems that only select cultural attributes can be maintained or revived, and it is typically institutionalized experts who are doing the selecting. Some tradition is championed, some is ignored and, as Meek observes, the practices that are reinvigorated as part of tradition themselves become part of ‘the establishment of new language practices in everyday interactions’ (163).
Chapter 2. Sociolinguistic history

As in Meek’s account, understanding of the current setting of disjuncture among the Wangkatha begins with an understanding of the community’s sociolinguistic past. Traditional practices have clearly been altered through contact, and many stated concerns and goals among Wangkatha consultants show a desire to reinstate traditions that have been marginalized. This chapter aims to identify the sociolinguistic traits that have endured through contact and those that seem to have changed and, according to consultants, need revitalizing. First, the context of the traditional Western Desert and very early contact is described. Then, the contested relationship between Mt Margaret Mission, the probable birthplace of Wangkatha language and identity, and its Aboriginal relationships is analyzed, with special focus on the role of Aboriginal agency, acquiescence, and modern social rights activism. Finally, the sociolinguistic changes that seem to have taken place are identified and explained.

Traditional Western Desert

The Western Desert cultural bloc, of which Wangkatha forms part, spans one sixth of the continent of Australia. Before contact, Western Desert populations were not corporate in nature, meaning that they did not operate as long-standing economic or political units; rather, emphasis was placed on individualism and autonomy of personal actions, residence, and even localized affiliations (Myers, 1986: 18) that in many ways operate differently than elsewhere in Australia (Sutton, 2003, 2007). Across the Western Desert, more than a dozen mutually intelligible languages were spoken (Dixon, 2002: 683-4) and multiple ephemeral groups existed at any given time. However, as Myers (1986: 27) observes,
[...] there were neither significant physiographic barriers to movement that might have restricted contact among populations, nor were there marked cultural discontinuities.

Hansen’s (1984: 7) remarks about language demonstrate that it operated like other cultural attributes, creating no uncrossable boundaries between groups,

Whilst [...] linguistic differences existed they were not considered as any barrier to communication or socialization, as the differing speech affected approximately 20% of their speech. 80% of their speech was common.

Languages across the Western Desert were largely mutually intelligible for this reason, although less proximal languages shared less linguistic similarities; in comparison, languages neighboring the Western Desert (most notably Wangkatjunkga and Warlpiri) are different to the point of having significant grammatical differences, while still sharing many lexical elements. Thus ethnolinguistic identity in the Western Desert was not based on absolute categories or on unpassable boundaries, but rather on individualized connections in an arena that allowed for remarkable variation. The Western Desert group, however, was probably more clearly bounded as a whole in the pre-contact era. Languages within the Western Desert area were composed of overlapping lexemes and remarkably similar structural elements; however, as will be explained later, such structural focus on languages overlooks the critical social knowledge that had to be maintained in order to use language appropriately.

Dousset (2013), in fact, argues that the question of boundedness is actually irrelevant in the Western Desert context, where culture is defined not through boundaries or exclusive memberships, but rather by the ‘interaction and interdependence’ (351) of social actors in a network. Those social actors include people, but also objects, discourses and narratives, all which interact – ‘moving, reshaping, extending, and retracting’ (349) - in a way that defies boundary-drawing. In his analysis,
societies are not discoverable, and culture is discoverable only through an analysis of these actor interactions, not through carefully defining memberships. For him, questions about the borders of the Western Desert cultural bloc and about borders within it are not valid; the idea of corporate memberships does not apply (344). The Western Desert is an alterity that does not fit the model of Herderian groups. But his own model does not reflect that held by many Aboriginal people themselves in the modern context.

Within traditional Western Desert society, as with all languages, the value of language balanced the need to communicate against the need to manage social relationships through appropriate language use. Traditional practice heavily emphasized accommodation and multilingualism so that any linguistic differences did not negatively impact people’s ability to communicate. Intergroup communication strategies were necessary in part because the Western Desert people were extremely nomadic. In traditional Western Desert roaming patterns, most cohesion was found within small core groups comprising 3-12 people (Long 1971: 265, as cited in Hansen, 1984: 5). These small units would frequently meet up and camp together overnight, share resources, and travel together, and even larger gatherings would occur for significant ceremonies. These common interactions required competent communication between groups of people speaking different languages with generally high degrees of mutual intelligibility.

These demands for communication could be intensified in extreme circumstances. During particularly devastating droughts, groups would typically congregate around remaining waterholes, working together and sharing resources in order to survive the harsh conditions. In these cases, groups may have cohabitated for extended periods that would have required very fluent conversation indeed. Under normal circumstances, however, movement of groups occurred for two major reasons:
an ongoing search for food and water; and political upheavals, wherein groups moved to avoid fighting. Movement of individuals, typically undertaken by men who left their small family group to travel afar, was also commonplace. In fact, Hansen (1984) argues that local groups did not have permanent membership, meaning that individuals might spend extended periods of time in other groups and perhaps over a number of groups. Their journeys could be enormously extensive: Hansen (1984: 7) reports one man’s 700km trip on foot.

Traditionally, individuals were never expected to give up their own languages, which were seen as markers of identity. Instead, they were expected to learn new languages as they encountered them – consultants argue that accommodation to the local language was an absolute expectation whenever the languages spoken were less mutually intelligible. Through traditional roaming practices, this expectation could easily result in a command of a handful of languages, and language learning was expected to take place throughout a person’s life. In this way, communication was ensured, respect to local traditional land owners and the languages associated with the land could be demonstrated, but individual linguistic identities could be maintained. The importance of languages in forming identity is visible in the group naming practices in the Western Desert. The names of many Western Desert dialect groups, past and present, are often derived from words that distinguish one group from another - shibboleths (McConvell 2002: 271). Often, the suffix –tjara ‘having’ was added to the end of a word that was seen as distinctive in the speech of the referents. For example, the Yankunytjatjara have the stem ‘yanku’ for ‘go’, whereas the Pitantjatjara have ‘pitja’ for ‘go’ (Goddard, 1985). These descriptive names were extremely ephemeral in some cases. Some might endure because the salience of the distinction they made endured, but other may be innovated during a conversation and discarded at the end of it (Miller, 1971: 75).
The existence of these naming patterns also demonstrates the extreme familiarity that Aboriginal people had with the languages of the people surrounding them and the importance of linguistic patterns in questions of identity. Command of each other’s languages or reliance on mutual intelligibility did not ensure quality communication. Familiarity with neighboring groups was also necessary in order to make appropriate use of language - even when speaking mutually intelligible languages. Every group had secret-sacred words, if not entire secret registers, that could only be used by qualified members of the population. For example, the word for ‘initiated man’ is considered secret-sacred by some groups and can therefore only be pronounced by initiated men. However, the designation of secret-sacred words varies by group; the word for ‘initiated man’, which is identical in many proximal languages, is not secret-sacred among the Wangkatha, but is among some of their neighbors. In order to avoid causing severe offense and potential retribution from neighboring groups or, according to some consultants, even the spirits of the language, it was absolutely necessary to be aware of the changing nature of these words depending upon one’s location and one’s interlocutors. Additionally, traditional Aboriginal groups practiced tabooing of words, whereby words identical or similar to the name of someone recently deceased became unpronounceable. This practice - still often observed in modern times – meant that words that were pronounceable one day could be unpronounceable the next, but only when speaking with specific people who were closely affiliated with the deceased. In order to achieve true linguistic accommodation, then, people also had to keep track of the ‘current events’ of neighboring groups. Among Western Desert peoples, then, the role of mutual intelligibility in facilitating communication can easily be overstated; knowledge of linguistic forms was never enough for socially appropriate communication. Similarity in form in no way guaranteed similarity in appropriate use. This is part of the reason that the current focus on form is so misguided in this
population particularly – it overlooks the elements of language that have traditionally posed the much greater learning curve in successful intergroup communication.

Traditional linguistic practice emphasized linguistic accommodation, extensive knowledge of the social workings of neighboring groups, egalitarianism, and control over the dissemination of protected information (that is, secret-sacred words). Many of these practices can still be seen in modern times, although it is often feared that the practices are fading. Crucially, the emphasis of language workers tends to fall on strictly linguistic attrition, discussing social factors only as indicators or explicators of language shift. Social factors, however, are not just evidence of shift – in many cases, they are exactly the extra-linguistic phenomena that have undergone shift or are feared to be doomed under continued interference from outsiders. With their focus on language structure, language workers often miss or ignore the extra-linguistic traits that have been threatened and, to some extent, maintained – traits that can be valued, and even sources of great pride, to the community that has maintained them. Therefore, despite the obvious destructive consequences of contact, the analysis presented here reveals a much broader picture of ongoing sociolinguistic hegemony, selective maintenance, and rarely recognized rejection of subversively imposed practices and ideologies. Contact with European settlers no doubt had tremendous impact on Aboriginal life, and linguist scholars who discuss the social history of Australia as a recipe for language loss quite accurately identify environmental factors that have been extremely detrimental to the transmission of the indigenous languages. However, a more individualized examination into the situation among the Wangkatha suggests a more nuanced interpretation, where pressures and (intentional and unintentional) circumstances presented obstacles against continued language transmission at the same time that they created impetus for rebellion in the form of ethnic pride and, eventually, revival. There is no question that historical policies have been blatantly assimilationist and taken their toll; however, Aboriginal
agency has not resulted in helpless abandonment of language and culture, but rather a system of decisive bargaining between identity maintenance/re-envisaging and negotiated co-existence.

Early contact between Aboriginal and European Australians resulted in the dislocation and subjugation of Aboriginal populations across the continent. Upon arrival in Australia, explorers claimed that the original inhabitants of the land had no sovereignty over the land in ways which corresponded to European property rights. This claim of *terra nullius* permitted settlers, under British law, to claim Australian land for their own purposes without compensating the Aboriginal population or forming any treaties. Settlers, including pastoralists, miners and traders, treated the land and its inhabitants primarily as objects to be utilized for financial gain, with little or no regard for Aboriginal land rights or ecology (Stanton, 1984: 46). They monopolized resources such as food and water, whether for their own use or to sell them for profit, making these life necessities scarce for Aboriginal people attempting to maintain a traditional lifestyle (Stanton, 1984: 46). While some individuals were able to maintain traditional lifestyles, even into the 1980s, the vast majority of Aboriginal people moved to the fringes of towns in order to gain easier access to provisions. Well-meaning aid, in the form of supplies, ration stations, and other systems of outreach, were offered as a response to the perceived self-destruction of what was seen to be an inferior culture. Missions were also established to help reach out to these populations. While varying in policy regarding the acceptance of traditional culture, the missions shared the ultimate goal of evangelizing the Aboriginal people and helping to assimilate them into Western culture (Stanton, 1984: 48). The missions themselves were often made ration stations, offering supplies to Aboriginal people who attended church, claimed to convert to Christianity, and did some work around the grounds.
Because Aboriginal women were often sexually exploited at this time, a population of children from European/Aboriginal mixed heritage began to grow. These children, whose non-Aboriginal fathers almost never claimed any form of custody or responsibility, presented an ethical dilemma to Europeans. They had witnessed the harsh living conditions of Aboriginal people for some time and, in many cases, had decided that the Aboriginal population was doomed to extinction; they were horrified to think that a child who at least partly shared their own ancestry would be subjected to the same conditions and suffer the same presumed fate. Furthermore, ‘full bloods’ were considered genetically incapable of assimilation, and therefore were thought to be beyond saving, while those of mixed descent were perceived to be more amenable to Western acculturation. Separate policies emerged for the two different Aboriginal groups: ‘full-bloods’ were ‘protected from interference’, as non-Aboriginal influence was seen to at best delay their inevitable demise and, at worst, contribute to it by introducing them to vices. ‘Half-castes’ were assisted in assimilation, the path that was considered optimal for them (Griffiths, 2006: 12). The Aboriginal people effected by the policies and practices that aimed to support this latter goal are referred to as the Stolen Generation. During the Stolen Generation era, roughly spanning from the introduction of the Aborigines Act of 1905 to the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act of 1972, Aboriginal children were removed from their parents and placed into various foster institutions and non-Aboriginal families in order to be socialized outside the influence of their traditional culture. In Western Australia, as elsewhere, the state government devised a dormitory system under which Aboriginal, primarily mixed descent, children would be ‘salvaged’ from their Aboriginal culture and taught to function in Western society. Some parents placed their children in the institutions voluntarily, albeit often under some level of duress. Other children were forcibly removed from their parents.
and placed into (sometimes very distant) institutions, where they might never see their families again.

Mt Margaret Mission, the primary institution of this sort in the Goldfields, was the strongest shaping force for those who currently reside in Kalgoorlie. Mt Margaret was founded in 1921 by Mr. Rodney Schenk, a German missionary. He founded the mission intending to hire Aboriginal workers to maintain the grounds and to educate, evangelize and assimilate his Aboriginal students. Originally, settlement at the mission was relatively voluntary, with Aboriginal people relocating to the area in order to access provisions and employment (Stanton, 1980: 119). Aboriginal Australians also preferred the policies of Mt Margaret over the notorious Moore River Settlement, to which Goldfields Aboriginal people had been removed before. At Mt Margaret, parents were permitted to see their children and Aboriginal adults could live in a mission camp near to the student dormitories. Physical needs were also carefully attended to, although any practice of Aboriginal religion was strictly prohibited. Thus, while the mission clearly followed the assimilationist ideologies of its time and some children growing up there never saw their parents, the environment there was much better than at other institutions. In fact, Mt Margaret is considered the most successful of Western Australia’s missions in many respects – for example, it had one of the highest conversion rates and boasted one of the most effective training facilities for Aboriginal workers; furthermore – especially in more recent times - ex-residents of the mission have often found employment in Aboriginal Affairs or related fields. Given the limited options Aboriginal people had at the time, Mt Margaret was a relatively attractive choice.
Language at Mt Margaret Mission

Despite common positive perspectives on mission life, when focusing on language at the mission, many consultants mirror\textsuperscript{10} academic discourse in focusing heavily on prohibitions against Aboriginal language. Schmidt (1991) identifies the dormitory systems at Australian missions as major contributors to language loss because they interrupted the intergenerational language transmission held sacred in language revitalization since Fishman’s (1991) treatment of the topic, and the National Indigenous Languages Survey Report (2005) identifies intergenerational language transmission as the number one indicator of language vitality\textsuperscript{11}. Even at Mt Margaret, children had strictly limited access to their relatives (and therefore to the languages they spoke), and children from diverse linguistic groups were combined in a way that inhibits the development of canonical speech communities\textsuperscript{12}. Furthermore, English was clearly the preferred language of the mission, being the only language that could generally accomplish communication with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike. For what is likely the first time in the lives of most residents, a lingua franca emerged and with it, clear stratification between languages and populations.

Recognizing the imbalance of (linguistic) power at missions in the past, some consultants argue that language was more or less outlawed at Mt Margaret, or at the very least heavily discouraged. Others remark that Wangkatha was the most natural language at Mt Margaret Mission.

\textsuperscript{10} This isn’t to say, necessarily, that their views have been influenced by academic discourse, although this is a possibility.

\textsuperscript{11} Other NILS indicators include the absolute number of speakers, the proportion of speakers, the domains and functions of the language, response to new domains and media, materials for education and literacy, language attitudes, status of language documentation, and language programs. These categories have resonance with the discussion in this thesis because most of them demand a reconfiguration of the way the community relates to language in order to ensure that the language is successfully revitalized.

\textsuperscript{12} While the sociolinguistic environment of the traditional Western Desert hardly amounted to canonical speech communities either, communicational norms followed established patterns that were largely obliterated in the mission setting.
language in the Mission, being used constantly among Mission children. Significant disjuncture between perspectives on language at Mt Margaret emerges, and it demands analysis. While all consultants who discuss it agree that early contact had catastrophic effects on language and culture, perspectives regarding the impact of assimilationist policies at Mt Margaret specifically show significant divergence. Some focus on the positive and emphasize Aboriginal agency through past oppression, while others protest the injustice of former policies and take decidedly activist stances about them.

For example, consultants vary quite widely in their perspectives about language policy in the Mission. One says that people who were placed in the missions weren’t allowed to speak their language, so most people who formed the Stolen Generation don’t speak it. According to her, they may have a few words and some basic phrases, but they’ve lost all conversational ability. Other consultants report that Aboriginal language was spoken around the mission, but its use was restricted. One, for example, says that Wangkatha was spoken around the mission among the children, but they did all of their schooling in English. They might even use some language in the classroom, but all their subjects were taught in English. Most ex-residents agree that children were allowed to speak their language on their own and with their families living around the mission, but they had to speak English only in school because it’s the only language the teachers spoke.

This one-sided accommodation is normal in situations of unequal contact, but completely alien to traditional sociolinguistic practice in the Western Desert. Giles and Powesland (1975) have found that accommodation is mostly likely to occur when at least one population has cause to desire the approval of the other, and will occur in the direction of the population from which that approval is sought. Therefore, if an Aboriginal child desires the approval of English speaking missionary staff, he or she is
likely to speak in English even if that staff has proficiency in Wangkatha. In many cases, accommodation is so one-sided that the majority population doesn’t even learn the minority language – they are never expected to accommodate to it. In general, majority languages tend to dominate in these situations because most contact will take place in majority-dominated domains, meaning that most contexts of code-choice occur when the majority language is strongly preferred (Kerswill, 2002: 9). This is overwhelmingly the case across Australia where, in the words of Brandl and Walsh (1982),

[I]t has been quite unusual in Australia for non-Aborigines, either as guests in Aboriginal communities or as hosts for Aborigines, to make any appropriate linguistic accommodation (74).

The resulting dominance of a single language was without precedent in Aboriginal society, where accommodation was absolutely required but in ways that were more based on location and changing social factors than on stable social stratification. This has serious implications for language vitality because, as Mufwene argues (2002, 2005), accommodation is the driving force of language change – the exact willingness to accommodate that had led to multilingualism in traditional Aboriginal Australia could now be seen to lead towards language attrition.

Despite the preponderance of negative perspectives on the impact of contact and mission life on languages, as noted above, many ex-residents assert a very different view of language at the mission, claiming frequent language use there. Some say that they couldn’t help speak the language because the environment was filled with Aboriginal children, sharing that they even speak Wangkatha when meeting with old mission siblings now. To them, Wangkatha is simply the most natural language amongst mission ex-residents. While most report that they had to work around some
restrictions regarding language use, they see these restrictions as matters of simple logic rather than linguistic hegemony. The Schenks followed a mission model whereby ‘acceptable’ elements of Aboriginal culture were to be embraced while unacceptable ‘satanic’ elements were to be eradicated, and native languages were seen, even in early times, to be the languages of the native soul. This stance was only strengthened in the changeover of leadership when Wilf Douglas, an SIL missionary, added his linguistically-inclusive input. It’s not surprising, then, that language was permitted and even encouraged unless it was seen to hinder the acquisition of English and acceptance of Christian life. According to her daughter’s book, Mysie Schenk originally intended to learn and translate texts into the local language (Morgan, 1986), and Mrs. Bennett, teacher at Mt Margaret from 1931-1941, published arguments that Aboriginal native languages are highly inflected in contrast to Aboriginal English (Bennett, 1935). At least some early mission staff, therefore, demonstrated respect for Aboriginal languages and even intentions to acquire them, whether or not they followed through. In fact, consultants generally agree that the missionaries themselves spoke a little bit of language, but they vary in their estimations of the missionaries’ proficiency. However, the context of language use seems to have been rather changed from its traditional uses. As discussed previously, language was primarily used at the mission for proselytization – hymns and bible verses were translated in order to aid in the evangelization of mission residents whose ‘heart language’ was not English. It was considered necessary to modify the language so that it could encode Christian values, so the semantic mappings that Aboriginal words conveyed had to be adapted to a Western, Christian message.

The disparity in perspectives, some of which focus on the unity of Mt Margaret residents and others of which focus on the assimilationist goals of the institution, can partly be attributed to a desire to assert Aboriginal agency. While immediate action to identify and reverse the negative effects of oppressive policies is often seen to be the
most agentive response to current circumstances, focusing on the elements that have been maintained despite these policies refuses to cast Aboriginal people as hapless victims of their past. A focus on the positive aspects of their past life at the mission highlights the power of Aboriginal people to make a life out of the circumstances they’re given. Young people are much more likely to be politically active – a position that may inspire them to focus on the negative realities of past mission policies in demanding compensation. Furthermore, because national discourse on the subject is based on the stereotypical institutions of the Stolen Generation, which had more restrictive policies than those at Mt Margaret, their claims may even be somewhat exaggerated in this context. Meanwhile, many older consultants (including the entire population that grew up in Mt Margaret) are reluctant to say anything negative about life there, focusing instead on their relationships with other mission children and the language use between them. One consultant, for example, says that,

_We were all happy in there. We couldn’t be anything else. We had, just gotta put up with what we come across._

Later, when asked whether she would have liked to eat her parents’ food (but was prohibited from doing so), she responds,

_I suppose. I don’t know. Can’t remember that. I don’t like saying too much in that thing._

Similar conflict between perspectives can be seen in evaluations about the future of the language. Despite their observations that conversational fluency is not widespread in their immediate surroundings, some (especially older) consultants assert their faith that the language will continue to be spoken. This stands in stark contrast against the more prevalent (locally and globally) view that indigenous languages are perishing, but demonstrates the ideological commitment many Aboriginal people have to asserting
their agency in determining their own circumstances and their own futures. The optimistic especially place faith in rural locations, where language is still commonly spoken, and youths who, some believe, are bound to gain full proficiency as they age.

While refusal to discuss negative occurrences at Mt Margaret by those who actually lived there does serve the purpose of focusing on Aboriginal agency, it also follows the practice of secrecy and acquiescence. Liberman (1980) provides extended discussion of this sort of phenomenon among his Kuwarra informants, who resided in Leonora and the lands to the north and west of it. He reports that years of subjugation resulted in an extremely imbalanced relationship between European and Aboriginal Australians, and that imbalance surfaced in discourse practices between them. Kuwarra culture survived to the extent that it has because the Aboriginal population there in general adopted the practice of superficially acquiescing to the demands of pastoralists and government officers while maintaining strict secrecy about the culture they continued to practice. His older and more traditional informants continued this practice during his research; it was younger, more urbanized Aboriginal people who fought for Aboriginal rights and demanded recognition of past and continuing atrocities. Older consultants in general failed to speak up about past atrocities, continuing their tradition of apparent acquiescence. Speaking specifically about land rights, Liberman (1980: 129) notes that many older Aboriginal people have remained silent as sacred sites have been demolished. He continues,

In fact, complaints against infringements upon sacred sites in the region have usually originated from part-European Aboriginals who have no formal association with the sites involved. It is not that the more traditionally-oriented Kuwarra are not deeply concerned, it is only that they have learned not to argue with Whites. This has caused some Europeans to believe that the traditional Aboriginals really do not care about the sacred sites involved and are only ‘put-up’ to express concern by more politically-minded Aboriginals.
This general tendency is identifiable among Aboriginal people of Kalgoorlie today, and can be applied to expressed concerns about language and expressed outrage at former policies that have contributed to its demise. It most certainly does not indicate that mission life was free from the oppression that younger generations protest against.

The obvious result of these differing perspectives is some level of dissonance within the community, and even within individuals. For example, one consultant demonstrates extreme difficulty in account for the two approaches. He says that ‘they’ wanted the Aboriginal people to speak English so that their culture and language would die out. Children there were taught English and expected to speak English but (of course, he says) spoke language to each other during their free time. He wavers a bit in talking about whether the missionaries themselves wanted Aboriginal people to speak English outside of class.

*Now I don’t know for sure whether the missionary, they wanted them to speak their language or speak English, but, I, don’t know. That’s a good question because I don’t know how fluent, but as I said early on, that the missionary did want, people that went to that mission, they wanted them to speak English only.*

Possibly, his own experiences (observing some use of Wangkatha around schools and among the old Mt Margaret group) are somewhat at odds with the common knowledge perceptions that float around the community (that missions aimed to eradicate languages). As a result, he wavers between his understanding that the missionaries wanted to stamp out the language and his observations that children seem to have spoken some language around the mission, and some missionaries even learned to speak a little. This disjuncture is replicated at all levels of the community, where no single account seems to find peace with the two perspectives.

Difference in opinion can also reflect difference in personal experience. Many who have entirely negative perspectives about the impact of mission life on the
language did not grow up there, while most who show positive perspectives did. It
seems that those who grew up in the mission have access to a more comprehensive
account of happenings there, which enables them to focus on the positive aspects of
mission life when such a focus is deemed socially appropriate. Those who did not live
there focus on the negative aspects that dominate more general rhetoric of contact and
the Stolen Generation – aspects that are certainly more salient in most modern contexts.

Both accounts are indeed reflected in modern Aboriginal life. It appears that,
while Aboriginal language and culture was maintained to some extent at the mission, its
nature was very much changed there. In many ways, the changes reflect framing in
English ideologies and practices – including for the Wangkatha language group itself. It
is impossible to know for sure whether Wangkatha was ever used as an ethnonym by
Aboriginal people before contact because early records are too marred by ideological
assumptions. It is, however, known that Matthews (1907) recorded ‘Wangkata’ as the
word for ‘people’ in the Cosmo Newberry region near Leonora. When the Schenks
arrived in the area in 1921 to start work on Mt Margaret Mission, they concluded that
Wangkatha was the name of the most populous group of the Eastern Goldfields, and
they referred to their missionary population by that name thereafter. This crystallized
naming practice regarding mission language and culture had an immense effect on the
self-identification of mission residents. Demographic shifts resulted in a Ngaanyatjarra
majority in the mission during early years, and Douglas’ language materials were based
on Warburton language rather than Mt Margaret language, but the materials at the
mission still labeled the language as Wangkatha. Even if the language at the mission
shifted to primarily Ngaanyatjarra or any kind of mixture, even if children at the
mission actually maintained distinctive mutually intelligible languages, their language
use was called Wangkatha. Myers (1986: 28-29) describes a similar situation that
confronted the Western Desert people currently referred to as ‘Pintupi’:
Even their name is an artifact imposed on them by changing conditions. Though known in the area where they came to live as ‘Pintupi’, most say they never used this label to refer to themselves before contact with whites. While they speak a common language, with some dialectal differences, the people called the Pintupi did not represent a single social entity, neither as a tribe nor as a language group.

Reference to dynamic social groups, involving changed constituencies and spoken forms, was normal in traditional times; however, the prolonged use of a single fixed term was not. Therefore, in addition to the extremely well-attested social harms of institutionalization across Australia and even the world over, the Mt Margaret group can be shown to have been brought into a modernized identity through the interference of non-traditional practices in a way that endures to the present day. While Aboriginality has survived, it has in many ways been altered in its maintenance.

Changes are also evident in the language itself. The language that actually emerged from the mission is often reported to be heavily mixed. A few consultants note that speakers of Mt Margaret language mix together Western Desert languages indiscriminately, and others say that they command only ‘snippets’ of language and must rely heavily on code-switching to English. Still others believe that Wangkatha is a simplified language – one consultant in particular notes that it sounds like a child’s language because that was what its (child) creators spoke. One consultant even argues that the Mt Margaret people commandeered the term ‘Wangkatha’. According to this perspective, while Wangkatha language and identity may have existed prior to contact, its current composition has been influenced heavily by contact phenomena. Spelling of

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13 While it could be said that their newly negotiated linguistic identity, with fixed naming, was a traditional response to the abnormal aggregation of people at Mt Margaret, the aggregation itself was the result of Western interference.
the language name also reflects this viewpoint: the spelling ‘Wangkatha’ is used for Mt Margaret language and identity, while ‘Wangkatja’ refers to a different group that lacks Mt Margaret associations. The names are often actually pronounced differently to highlight this distinction, even though the spelling difference primarily reflects confusion and variation regarding the laminal distinction in some south-western Western Desert languages. Evaluative statements about the speakers themselves are quite rare – even if they are seen as mixing the language and possibly taking part in a new linguistic identity in the process, they are also seen as having done what they could to preserve at least some of the language in extremely oppressive circumstances. They are therefore far more likely to be credited for the language’s partial survival than blamed for its demise – blame, if it is placed anywhere, goes to the oppressive policies of the times.

Whatever its nature or origins, it cannot be denied that Wangkatha emerged from the mission as a secondary lingua franca or koine among Aboriginal residents. At this point, it’s useful to discuss some basic tenets of code choice and how they seem to apply in the Mt Margaret situation. It is well-understood in the sociolinguistic literature that every individual commands a complex linguistic repertoire that can be used for diverse social positioning strategies (Woolard, 2004: 2), whether that repertoire comprises various registers, dialects or languages. It is also known that speakers are not ‘linguistic automatons’ (Cameron, 1990) devoid of linguistic free will – they make conscious choices about language use in an ongoing effort to establish optimal relationships with interlocutors and the society around them. Mt Margaret residents’ selection of English in some settings and Wangkatha in others is therefore clearly a matter of choice. Reasons for choosing English appear abundantly obvious – it was (and still is) the language of power, required for interactions with the mission staff who controlled most aspects of Mt Margaret children’s lives. The children could feasibly
have refused to learn the language, or refused to use it even if they did pick it up
naturally, but the practical value of acquiring it was virtually overwhelming. This
practical value underscores Mufwene’s (2003) observations about the real reason for
many minority people to learn a majority language – not because they necessarily aspire
to assimilate, but because the majority language provides access to something they
desire, such as material goods, high status, or new social relationships. They may also
acquire the dominant code in order to avoid negative consequences. It becomes
remarkable, then, that Aboriginal language was not completely abandoned but instead
was used on mission grounds despite almost universal proficiency in English. The
maintenance of Aboriginal languages can be explained to some degree through the
access children there did have to their relatives – if the relatives had limited command
of English, another code would have been necessary for communication with them.
This, however, does not explain why Wangkatha was reportedly used among mission
children who all spoke English or why it is still the ‘most natural’ language to use when
reuniting with mission siblings who typically are more proficient in English than in
Wangkatha.

The works of Labov provide the most obvious sociolinguistic framework for
analyzing the relationship between the two languages and the society in which they are
spoken. His prestige theory suggests that some languages hold overt prestige,
dominating high status domains and enabling social mobility. Other languages hold
covert prestige, fortifying friend and family bonds. Labov primarily studied registers or
dialects of the same language to come to his findings, comparing attitudes about
Martha’s Vineyard vernacular (1963), non-Standard New York accents (1966) or
African American English (1972) to those about Standard American English. Later
sociolinguistic studies, primarily matched-guise experiments, have likewise found that
speakers of standard languages are considered to be more educated, successful and
wealthy, while speakers of non-standard languages are considered to be more friendly. Application of these findings to the Mt Margaret situation supports the acquisition of English as the overt prestige code that provides access and status, and maintenance of Wangkatha as the covert prestige code that marks interactions (or, more to the point, the interlocutors within them) as familiar. LePage and Tabouret-Keller (1985) focus more on the specific identities that speakers index with their code choice, finding that linguistic identities are essentially made up of a series of constitutive linguistic acts. People negotiate their social identities via their language choices because different languages (or registers or dialects) index the various identities they have at their disposal. Use of Wangkatha in the mission, therefore, isn’t simply about marking interactions; it is about asserting one’s Aboriginality – an especially crucial task in the more general environment of Australia at that time, which, by many accounts, attempted to eradicate the culture.

It remains remarkable, however, that the children of the mission worked to mark their Aboriginality despite the stigma against it. Some did reportedly choose to eschew the identity, or at least chose not to pass the language on to their children for fear of the stigma. However, it seems that the majority did see value in the identity that was worth fighting for, albeit in the privacy of the family situation. According to Hansen and Liu (1997: 571) this type of choice can partially be explained by their exclusion from wider society on ethnic grounds. Segregation promotes cultural maintenance because there is little benefit and considerable risk associated with assimilation to the majority population. This segregation also promotes the ‘separate sense of identity’ (Mufwene, 2003: 15) that may be necessary for the maintenance of a minority identity and language in face of a dominant other. Fishman (2011), for example, observes that German was not well-adopted among Yiddish-speaking German Jews during the Holocaust partially because speaking German was not enough to protect them from the stigma of their
ethnic identities. During the Stolen Generation era, Aboriginal Australians were likewise incapable of fully escaping the stigma of Aboriginality because their appearance remained Aboriginal. Even Aboriginal people who embraced the Western lifestyle were still not expected to achieve equal status with the non-Aboriginal population\textsuperscript{14}, meaning that true acceptance into the overt prestige identity was unattainable. Classes at Mt Margaret, for example, were intended to help the Aboriginal students integrate with non-Aboriginal populations by training them to do household work and station labor – the situations thought to be their best fit at the time. Learning English was crucial to these tasks, but abandoning Aboriginal language (and the claims to identity that go with it) would have meant that they didn’t truly fit in either population. In fact, one consultant says that this is exactly the case for non-speakers even today – they still don’t fit in white society but feel like less of a person in Aboriginal society because they don’t have their language.

The value of Aboriginal (specifically Wangkatha) language and identity can actually emerge as a result of conflict and oppression. Barth (1969) identifies contact as the catalyst of ethnicity – according to him, ethnic identity can only be defined in opposition to an ‘other’, so it can only emerge where multiple identities become present. Thus, the imposition of Western culture can be seen to have actually created a pan-Aboriginal (or at least pan-Goldfields) ethnicity spoken in Wangkatha. In many ways, then, Wangkatha can be considered a koineized linguistic identity. Linguistically speaking, a koine is a contact language made up of dialects of the same language. Like any result of language contact, its formation depends upon the social relationships of

\textsuperscript{14} Even legally, the rights of Aboriginal people were limited until 1967 under state law, and the only way they could achieve the full rights of any other citizen was through a formal application process. This in addition to social stigma.
speakers. Kerswill (2002: 4) notes that koines can only form when speakers, ‘waive their previous allegiances and social divisions to show mutual solidarity’. Especially because the linguistic forms in these situations are mutually intelligible, a lack of solidarity with each other would mean that individuals from varied groups would all speak to each other in their own language with no social or communicational need for accommodation. When a need or desire for solidarity among groups arises, mutual accommodations eventually result in linguistic convergence (Mufwene, 2002). The same might be said about cultural convergence and ethnolinguistic identity. Wangkatha ethnolinguistic identity seems to have formed in Mt Margaret because pressures (both internal and external) supported a unified Aboriginal identity among residents. Wangkatha, above any specific Western Desert dialect or other language of the region, became the Aboriginal language of the children of the mission.

Furthermore, oppression can strengthen that identity because it tends to create impetus for participating in ‘affirming social situations’ (Howard, 2000: 375) against that oppression. In her study of Scottish Gaelic language obsolescence, Dorian (1982: 53) associates lowered social status with promotion of language use because it establishes that language as a marker of solidarity with an oppressed in-group. In Mt Margaret, then, reported use of Wangkatha could be seen as an act of identity in opposition to assimilatory pressures. When ex-residents talk of using language together, especially because, in one consultant’s words, they ‘gotta be blackfellas’, they imply that maintenance of language was an inevitable component of forming and maintaining bonds between Aboriginal children. Use of Wangkatha, then, could have taken form in part as a protest against anti-Aboriginal policies and practices of the times, in addition to marking modern Aboriginality.
Overall, Wangkatha language has been severely impacted by external pressures throughout the history of contact; however, it has been re-envisaged and reshaped to signify Aboriginal identity throughout that period. Change has most certainly taken place, in form and practice, but these changes have been mediated by Aboriginal agents. It would be naïve to claim that the current state and practice of the language is one that the Mt Margaret children intended their day-to-day language choices to result in, but it is equally negligent to overlook the role they did play in their own sociolinguistic reshaping. That being said, significant disjuncture emerges among consultants’ opinions and perspectives on their sociolinguistic history, with most people at least attempting to take one side or the other.

**Sociolinguistic changes**

As has been argued, past policies can be seen to have simultaneously contributed to language attrition and created impetus for language veneration. They can also be seen to have imposed drastic changes to sociolinguistic practices. In fact, the introduction of language veneration itself is a change to language ideologies. Efforts abound to revitalize the language (and others endangered through the same processes). In contrast, little focus falls on the revitalization of appropriate language use even though changes to many sociolinguistic practices can easily be identified.

Accommodation practices have been highlighted as a point of contention between Aboriginal tradition and western norms. Linguistic accommodation is often considered important in the traditional context because of the often attested link between language, land and culture.

Most consultants focus upon the role of linguistic accommodation in showing respect, a strong traditional norm - learning the local language is typically demanded as a sign of respect for the traditional people of the land, and for the equal value of all
languages. This common theme simultaneously expresses Aboriginal attitudes about
the deviant behavior of white settlers (past and present) and mandates for Aboriginal
people travelling around. Traditional practices of accommodation contrast sharply with
the attitudes of incoming Europeans during contact, who typically only learned
Aboriginal languages inasmuch as they were absolutely necessary. Colonizers expected,
and still expect, Aboriginal people to learn English in order to function in the land that
was taken from them, and they have often viewed Aboriginal languages as inferior to
English. Ideologies about the importance of accommodation as a symbol of egalitarian
language attitudes do not seem to have changed – many consultants stress that no
language is more valuable than any others, and many condemn unequal treatment of
languages. It is unfair, many say, that Wangkatha gets little or no coverage in schools
while languages like Indonesian do. It is unjust, some say, that the original languages of
Australia are not protected in its constitution. It is unreasonable, they say, that longer-
term visitors in remote Aboriginal lands expect the Aboriginal people to learn English
without even attempting to learn their language. However, whatever their beliefs and
ideologies, their practices enable the one-sided accommodation they observe. It can
easily be argued that Aboriginal people in urban settings are not in a position to refuse
to learn or even use English, and it can hardly be argued that they should not learn it.
However, it is abundantly evident that traditional sociolinguistic practices of
accommodation and attitudes about linguistic equality have been severely altered, and
this alteration relates to the failure of outsiders to show traditional respect linguistically.

In addition to changes in accommodation patterns, modern influences have also
changed the relationship between language and identity. While language was always
important in identity construction, its use now forms part of a strong dichotomization
between Aboriginal identity and white identity, and language mixing is often equated
with identity mixing. This dichotomization is likely a reflection of and response against
past segregationist and assimilationist policies, resulting in modified use and evaluations of language. For almost all consultants, Aboriginal identity is interpreted to be mutually exclusive with any other identity. Aboriginal heritage takes precedence over any other genetic lineage when determining one’s identity via bloodline, and people with even minimal Aboriginal ancestry are encouraged to embrace that above all others. Even identifying as ‘part’ Aboriginal can come under serious scrutiny. Most crucially, self-identifying as white is almost universally seen as unacceptable, and even claiming mixed Aboriginal/white identity is generally discouraged. This type of strongly delineated identity is claimed by most to have existed in traditional Western Desert because marriage rules based on a strict kinship system are said to have avoided the modern confusion – people entered into the correct identity by marrying and having children within the constraints of Aboriginal Law. Modern practices, including formerly impossible or illicit intermarriages and children of unprecedented mixed descent, have resulted in many people who find serious difficulty determining their identity via traditional methods.

While some ambiguity about distinguishing different Aboriginal identities arises, the most salient distinction, and the one of greatest focus in this thesis, is that between Aboriginal identity and white identity. Urban Aboriginal Australians are often portrayed as struggling to balance their traditional values with an antithetical modern lifestyle – a reflection and catalyst of strong dichotomization of these two identities. The schism in part serves as a response to social history. First, because many mixed ancestry children of the Stolen Generation were the products of the rape or sexual bartering of their mothers, their white fathers - who rarely took any part in their upbringing - are almost universally disregarded. For many people, then, the ‘white’ component of their ancestry has no relevance to their actual parenting. However, some (especially younger) consultants do recognize their white fathers but still self-identify as Aboriginal, and
identifying their white fathers does not seem to impact their ethnic identification. Regardless of any ethnic mixing that may be detected in a person’s lineage, Aboriginal identity must take precedence.

The drive to recognize exclusive Aboriginal identity can be partly explained through other assimilationist practices. During the Stolen Generation era, some Australian states, including Western Australia, offered citizenship to Aboriginal people who were seen to have adequately assimilated into Western culture. In accepting that citizenship, they waived their rights to interact with any Aboriginal people who were not either immediate family members or citizens themselves (Liberman, 1980: 124). Any celebration of Aboriginality was prohibited to this new sort of citizen, a caveat that was at the time seen as another positive step in rescuing the salvageable from their inferior culture. Other policies attempted to force miscegenation in order to ‘breed out’ Aboriginality. Aboriginal people were not permitted to marry anybody with a higher Aboriginal blood quantum than they had. Thus, historically Aboriginal people were pressured to ‘act white’ and even forced to become whiter generation by generation via marriage restrictions or even rape. Mixed identity was thrust upon them; rejecting the imposed identity (white) regardless of its presence in strict genetic lineage forms part of a movement to upheave the inequalities of the past.

Language is invoked in this strong delineation of identity in a couple of ways. First, Wangkatha language is often considered important partly because it helps differentiate Aboriginal people of the area from white Australians. This differentiation is of key importance because so many Aboriginal people could by their physical

15 The effects of marginalization discussed earlier should not be forgotten here – in addition to whatever agentive roles Aboriginal people play in combatting practices of inequality, it remains true that people of mixed Aboriginal descent are much more likely to be accepted as Aboriginal than they are to be accepted as white. To some degree, then, they have little choice but to reject the (white) identity that rejects them.
appearance pass for white if they wanted to, and might even be mistaken for white even if they don’t want to be. Without language and other overt markers of Aboriginal identity, these people would simply blend in with the non-Aboriginal crowd. By a similar token, it is said that even Aboriginal people who are too dark to be mistaken as white could be mistaken as a member of a non-Aboriginal dark-skinned ethnicity. One consultant in particular notes that Australia hosts dark-skinned immigrants from all over the globe, so language is necessary for all Aboriginal people to distinguish themselves. The language becomes an indexical link to a very politicized identity.

Second, the ideological links between language and identity that emerge in the sociolinguistic landscape mean that language use and, more to the point, language mixing are recursively (Gal & Irvine 2000) reproduced at the level of social groups. Judgments and prejudices about mixing identity are applied to mixing languages, with a focus on distinctions between different degrees of adherence to traditional lifestyle versus integration with non-Aboriginal Australians. Negative evaluations abound for language mixing in general – people are accused of ‘pinching’ Aboriginal words from one language to another, and there is a general fear that mixing among Aboriginal languages will blur salient boundaries between groups. Judgments about mixing English, however, are often the most severe. In language and other practice, ‘traditional Aboriginal’ people are differentiated from ‘urban’ Aboriginal people regardless of their finer group distinctions, and in many ways these boundaries are now the more important kind. Language varieties associated with these groups likewise vary, with traditional Aboriginal people being associated with fluent, unmixed language while urban Aboriginal people are associated with mixed forms of language – especially those forms that mix English with Aboriginal language, or with English alone. Because attitudes about the populations associated with a language variety are applied to attitudes about the language itself, traditional language is valorized as a stronghold of purer, more
traditional life. Aboriginal English may be seen to mark Aboriginal identity, but it only marks modern Aboriginal identity and is reportedly best viewed as a stepping stone to gaining fluency in the full Wangkatha language\textsuperscript{16}. Language mixing full-stop is associated with urban Aboriginal identity and therefore is taken to reflect some necessary evils of modern Aboriginal life or past oppression. However, despite these strong inclinations against mixing identity and even worlds, the importance of getting on in non-Aboriginal settings seems to be universally recognized. All consultants who discuss the importance of English are in effect demonstrating the importance of being able to operate in the English-speaking world. Even those who don’t overtly discuss this importance may implicitly recognize it simply by taking it for granted. Given that most Aboriginal people value English only for its utility in communication, they don’t see its use alone as a demonstration of conflicted identity or an act of biculturalism. English is not a marker of culture or identity; Wangkatha (or whatever variant of Aboriginal English consultants may juxtapose against Standard Australian English) is. Rather, they appear to see its use as a means of getting by in a world where living a completely Aboriginal life has been made impossible. It is language mixing that is seen as problematic.

Strong dichotomization between these two identities and the languages associated with them has also resulted in a strong domain divide between the use of English and Aboriginal language, creating a new basis for code distribution. As has been discussed regarding accommodation, code choice was traditionally determined primarily according to the social context of a community associated with a particular

\textsuperscript{16} A number of consultants argue that Aboriginal English is valuable for exactly this purpose, believing that people can add more and more Aboriginal language to their Aboriginal English until it becomes Wangkatha, bit by bit. It is in this way thought of, by some, as a transitional language on the path to Wangkatha proficiency, not as a language in its own right.
area and was practiced as a matter of respect. Currently, code choice is determined more according to the proficiency of interlocutors (as the assumption that everybody can understand Aboriginal language becomes increasingly problematic) and by the topic under discussion. Choosing a code based on proficiency is endemic to language shift because proficiency can no longer be assumed in such scenarios. Evans (2001) devotes significant discussion to the varying definitions of ‘speaking’ that can occur under language shift circumstances, whereby individuals formerly thought of as non-speakers can over time become speakers not because their proficiency improves but because all speakers more fluent than they have died. The changing nature of the definition for ‘speaking’ shows the importance of having at least some people who are considered to ‘speak’ the language, even in the face of language shift. For its part, code choice based on domain under discussion, while extremely common within endangered language communities, is not at all inevitable, but rather indicates an ideology of juxtaposition that seems to be almost universal in situations like those discussed here. It is overwhelmingly common for tradition and modernity to be thought of as mutually exclusive, and this ideology is often applied to languages as well. As is reported for other communities, Wangkatha consultants affirm that it can be difficult to talk about traditional concepts in the majority language (English), while it is often impossible to discuss modern innovations in their traditional language (Wangkatha). For example, when discussing whether she could talk about modern concepts in Wangkatha, one consultant says that she’d have to point to communicate the ideas she’s talking about because there is no Wangkatha word for them. Others say that they wouldn’t have to discuss those concepts in Wangkatha because everybody who lives in the modern world speaks English now. To them, it seems, the only reasonable scenario in which they would even attempt to discuss modern concepts in Wangkatha is if they’re speaking to people who completely lack command of English. The possibility that Aboriginal
language could innovate terms for non-Aboriginal technologies seems so incredibly unacceptable or unlikely that code-switching, pointing and circumlocution are preferable to coining new words. Creating words for those concepts in Wangkatha would make Wangkatha more like English, resulting in the two languages being used to discuss the same domains and possibly in them sharing (borrowed) terms for concepts. Such hesitation may also be due to waning fluency – possibly, people do not believe that they have the level of language proficiency necessary to successfully coin new terms, or they do not have the authority to do so. Furthermore, coinages are unnecessary when it is almost always possible to simply code-switch in order to discuss foreign concepts anyway – a practice that would have been used traditionally. As in traditional Western Desert, various codes are commanded by all and are used for specific purposes; however, those specific purposes are defined differently in order to maintain as strong a distinction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal as possible. As an interesting result of this domain divide, the limited Wangkatha proficiency exhibited by most non-elders proves adequate for expressing the cultural content that is thought to be appropriate in the language. Overall, where specific Aboriginal languages were once used to help index specific Aboriginal groups, Aboriginal language in general has become the focal point for distinguishing Aboriginal people and their traditional lifestyles from the non-Aboriginal. While some traditional sociolinguistic practices do endure (for example, extreme willingness and ability to code-switch), they are used in new ways and with apparently new motivations. Language, identity, and the habits and beliefs that languages are capable of expressing are strongly dichotomized in a way that conflicts with some of the work that language workers attempt.

Ideologies about the value of language have also been altered through sociolinguistic history and even current efforts at revitalization. While language is reported to have many different kinds of value under any circumstances, utilitarianism -
that is, the idea that language is valuable only as a communicational tool – is a matter of some scrutiny in language revitalization literature (see, for example, Loether 2009). It is often reported (most specifically by Dorian 1998) that outsider focus on the denotational value of language causes ideological shift among populations, who come to see their language as having strictly communicative value. It is also argued that the rhetoric surrounding language revitalization work assumes that language is necessary for culture, sometimes convincing community members of this argument, when focus traditionally fell more on the communicative value of language. Among Wangkatha consultants, it seems that both ideological transformations have taken place.

Languages in general are probably always valued at least in part because they enable communication, and traditional practices of accommodation in the Western Desert always recognized the need for differing groups to work together. This communicative value endures as long as some people lack proficiency in English. In fact, some consultants argue that language must be taught not so that the language can survive, but so that people from ‘the lands’ who don’t speak English can find translators and so that children in remote schools, whose English may be lacking, can be given instructions in a language they understand. Limited English speakers, it is said, even benefit greatly by the inclusion of some Aboriginal words in Aboriginal English. Once again, then, the maintenance of even limited Wangkatha serves a communicative purpose. In all of these cases, the focus on communication does not seem to be imposed; it is seen as a matter of practical necessity. While this could be the result of internalization of external perspectives, it is not necessary to invoke such a mechanism to explain what is going on.

Other kinds of focus on the communicational value of language comprise the majority of discussion in this thesis. In many ways, it is not past oppressive practices
that have put emphasis on the denotational value of language, but rather more recent language work. A language is endangered, common rhetoric says, because the number of ‘fluent’ speakers is declining – because conversational (i.e. communicational) ability is waning. As is argued throughout this thesis, overwhelming focus on this aspect of language and neglect of the social value of language is the target of most complaints community members have about outsiders’ treatment of their language and culture.

While it seems that Aboriginal people have always prized language as a communicational tool, the decontextualization of it is a new imposition. Language workers’ focus on the denotational is especially ironic given that the rhetoric surrounding language work can also have the exact opposite effect – it can claim political, spiritual and historical value for languages that are more often regarded by speakers as valuable for their communicational purpose above all else. These speaker attitudes are often assumed to be the result of contact with colonizers who hold this view, but cogent argument to this effect is rarely supplied.

Thus the nature of communicational value of language is complex – some communicational value seems to be traditionally oriented, while other communicational value seems introduced. The crucial difference is whether Aboriginal language (as opposed to English) can be decontextualized. This issue is of such great importance because Aboriginal languages always had value beyond just communication – as is demonstrated by the fact that no lingua franca emerged before contact despite frequent and extensive intergroup relationships between speakers of different languages. Some consultants find it difficult to discuss this value simply because it is taken for granted. Older consultants, when asked what would happen if language weren’t spoken anymore, respond with utter confusion at the question. To them, Aboriginal language is so iconized with Aboriginal life that the idea of no Aboriginal person speaking the
language is nonsensical\textsuperscript{17}. From this perspective, language is not valuable because of its link to identity; language simply \textit{is}. The value of language is discussed in terms of communication because communication is alienable from a specific language – one could communicate in English, Wangkatha, Italian or any other shared tongue. Aboriginal language, however, is inalienable from Aboriginal people; it makes no sense to discuss a connection between entities that are intrinsically linked. Furthermore, because they don’t see language or culture as under threat, these elder consultants do not invoke language or culture as identity-laden constructs. However, many younger Aboriginal Kalgoorlians voice their opinions that Aboriginal language is important for these sorts of reasons. In fact, one consultant interrupts his elderly mother as she answers a question about the value of language, and while she expresses the view that language is important to help talk to people, he corrects her by telling her that she needs to talk about how language connects people to their heritage. His perspective is by far the most commonly expressed.

Whether the value of language is viewed in terms of communication or identity, use of language seems to be more centered on performance and command of limited lexemes and phrases than on conversational ability. Especially because Wangkatha language use is dichotomized against English language use, for most communicational purposes, command of traditional language need only facilitate the discussion of traditional life which, given the strong lexical bias among consultants, may mean that only select terms for traditional practices and artifacts must survive to maintain the language’s communicative function into the future. For translation purposes, Wangkatha need only be spoken well enough to help non-speakers of English

\textsuperscript{17} They may find such difficulty articulating this view because they have not yet undergone processes of ideological clarification as described in Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998).
accomplish relatively limited tasks in towns. Command of English must likewise only facilitate interactions with the modern world, ranging from the occasional hospital visits of older people to full integration into schools and the workforce among urban youths. While full fluency in language would be almost universally preferred, limited linguistic ability would suffice for most purposes. Likely for this reason, definitions of ‘speaking’ that come up in interviews tend not to require full fluency in the language. Children are said to speak the language if they can sing songs in it; expression of a few basic phrases is taken to indicate linguistic ability; sharing words for traditional concepts is thought to be language teaching – this is ‘language as emblem’ (Simpson, 2013). Overall, determinations of speaking are based on performance of language rather than conversational use of it. This tendency brings with it some very practical advantages. Crucially, if the language’s vitality status is taken as evidence of cultural transmission and continuity, then vitality as evaluated by this definition demonstrates that language, culture and continuity are secure. Moreover, Wangkatha identity can be indexed through minimal use of the language, opening access to that identity to a significant population that is ethnically Wangkatha but doesn’t speak the language with conversational fluency. While this ability carries with it some risks, it means that victims of the Stolen Generation aren’t punished if the oppressive policies of their childhoods prevented them from acquiring their Aboriginal language.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the sociolinguistic history of Kalgoorlie, beginning with traditional practices that saw multilingualism, mutual accommodation and extensive social knowledge of other groups as paramount to appropriate sociolinguistic behavior. Early contact and Mt Margaret life, it was argued, posed drastic sociolinguistic changes that were nonetheless mediated through Aboriginal agency.
Possibly the most salient change was the formation, or at least crystallization, of modern Wangkatha identity itself. It was argued that, throughout contact, some sociolinguistic practices were changed while others endured, and that modern calls for language work often aim to restore the lost sociolinguistic practices without sacrificing those that remain. More than anything, focus falls on distinguishing Aboriginal identity from non-Aboriginal identity in all ways feasible – a complex goal that can be taken to demand the maintenance of language itself, sociolinguistic practice, and even specific lines of discourse.

The remainder of this thesis discusses in depth the ideologies that need to be accommodated in ethical language work. At their very essence, the ideologies stress that, because the primary value of Aboriginal language has emerged to be its link to authentic Aboriginal identity in contrast to white identity, the language must not be maintained in a way that perverts its authenticity. Preserving the language through anglicizing practices does not ameliorate the effects of past inequalities or improve the position of the language; rather, it promulgates inequality and, in one consultant’s words, threatens to paint the language white. Furthermore, the appropriate target of language work isn’t necessarily re-establishing fluency in the language, but may instead be on restoring sociolinguistic practices that have been changed.
Chapter 3. Language graphization

Many language revitalization projects focus heavily on language graphization. Language graphization is taken here to encompass the system for rendering oral language in writing, the contexts for and interpretations of literacy, and the creation of written language materials. It also comprises a central ideology within the context of endangered languages: an ideology of archival transmission, which sees written language materials (usually archived) as the potential sole transmitters of language into an uncertain future. The vast majority of consultant complaints about language work relate directly to its written products because these are the most concrete, persistent and privileged results of language maintenance efforts and thus become the focus of social consequences inside and outside of the language community. While language revitalization workers tend to assume that developing a written tradition will help salvage the spoken language, community members often fear that the written tradition has been created to replace oral tradition, or that it might accidentally do so. It is often assumed that writing is a prerequisite to successful language revitalization work (Lüpke, 2011: 312; Neely and Palmer, 2009: 273). However, the tools of graphization, including orthographies, texts and so on, are all social constructs with embedded historical, cultural and political symbolism (Woolard, 1998: 435). When literacy is adopted by a society, it is adopted only through ideologies; therefore, language graphization brings with it many controversies and ideological change and, as Neely and Palmer (2009: 273) note, cannot be developed or implemented under the unquestioned ideologies of the dominant or expert population. Debenport (2010) devotes extended discussion to the potential hazards of writing language down and, more specifically, circulating the texts

18 As more audio-visual sources are developed, different issues not discussed in this thesis are likely to arise.
produced. To the community she works with, writing language down has the potential to ‘[diminish] the efficacy of ritual language […] and [destroy] the clan structure’ (208). For the Wangkatha too, graphization brings with it serious risks that cannot be fully neutralized. Careful orthography creation can minimize negative impacts, but is really a process of constant compromise and negotiation between various levels of sacrifice.

It is important to also take note of the benefits of language graphization. Creating local language literacy can actually create new domains (Grenoble and Whaley, 2005: 107) and genres (Hinton, 2001: 240) for the local language, thereby encouraging expanded use of it. For Wangkatha especially, it is possible that some basic writing conventions will inspire people to text message each other in the language, thereby extending an existing domain of Wangkatha language use (informal communication). Written materials can also aid language revitalization efforts if they are designed and used thoughtfully, although audio recordings might prove more beneficial for these purposes (Lüpke, 2011: 321). Even written materials that cannot be read by most due to poor literacy training can have immense symbolic impact (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer 1998: 89; Terrill 2002). Specifically, because literacy has historically (inaccurately) been associated with enhanced cognitive function and more logical language structure (Collins, 1995: 76-78), writing a language down can improve lay perspectives of that language and the people who speak it, even making it seem, for the first time, like a ‘real’ language (Woolard, 1998: 348). Depending on the uptake of literacy, important informative or legal documents such as health guidelines or land deeds can also be translated into local languages once it has been graphized (Cahill and Karan, 2008: 12). Language graphization can therefore enhance the prestige of the language and its speakers (Lüpke, 2011: 320; Grenoble and Whaley, 2005: 97) by eroding the stigma associated with them (108). Language graphization does not only impact the language, it also impacts the social circumstances of the people who are
associated with it – Grenoble and Whaley (2005: 102) in fact identify this as the true goal of many language graphization efforts.

However, the social impact of language graphization can also be negative, resulting in the erosion of important sociolinguistic boundaries and promoting sometimes unwelcome new uses of language. In the case of Wangkatha, people worry that oral language is represented in written materials as ‘flat’ and that the information given in writing may be inaccurate. This chapter focuses on these concerns. First, a brief history of Wangkatha graphization and the orthography currently in use is discussed. Then, concerns over the effects of this system of language acquisition and pronunciation are analyzed. Next, the impact of writing on more social aspects of language are discussed – the creation of new contexts for writing, and the impact of language materials development on traditional language authority and practices.

**Graphization of Wangkatha**

Wangkatha has been written down informally since Mt Margaret missionaries began recording words and phrases for their prayer letters and their own language learning. However, serious attempts to create and implement a system of graphization did not begin until Douglas’ influence on the mission. Most modern day Aboriginal Kalgoorlians are therefore familiar with Douglas’ system, and a system based on it is used for modern language work. Unfortunately, it was developed without community involvement. While it may seem fruitless to discuss a future writing system for a group of people that has no experience with any form of literacy, a system devised without proper study of the elements of the language that must be recorded is not likely to be successful among community members (Cahill and Karan, 2008: 12; Grenoble and Whaley, 2005: 118). Speaker consciousness of phonology must take precedence over linguistic analysis of it (Cahill and Karan, 2008: 5), and the system must be tested and
modified before it is implemented (Cahill and Karan, 2008: 11). None of these practices had been brought up in the literature at the time of Wangkatha orthography development, so it is hardly surprising that they were not followed. Instead of seeking community input, the most widely used orthography (based on Douglas’ system for the closely related Warburton language) follows the phonemic principle of orthography development that prevailed at the time of its inception. Essentially, the phonemic principle adheres to the idea of representing every phoneme with exactly one symbol. As Grenoble and Whaley (2005: 120-121) explain, such a system results in relatively stable phonemic and morphemic representation of words because the phonemic systems themselves are more stable than phonetic realizations. Additionally, such systems frequently lend themselves to simultaneous representation of various dialects, whose surface differences often result from different phonological rules rather than different phonemic representation.

Following the model phonemic table set by Dixon (2011), the graphemes of Douglas’ orthography can be presented as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Apical</th>
<th>Laminal</th>
<th>Peripheral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alveolar</td>
<td>Postalveolar (retroflex)</td>
<td>Velar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plosives</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>rt</td>
<td>tj</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nasals</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>ny</td>
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<td>Rhotics</td>
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<td>r</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laterals</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>rl</td>
<td>ly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other approximants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>y</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Douglas’ system elegantly accounts for many code-internal concerns. First, some sounds that are phonemes in English but allophones of a single phoneme in Wangkatha must be rendered with the same grapheme in order to adhere to the phonemic principle. For example, Douglas’ orthography represents all plosives as voiceless because voicing is not phonemic in most Australian languages – meaning that a [k] and [g] allophones of the /k/ phoneme are both represented as ‘k’ in Douglas’ system. The graphemes that, for English, represent voiceless plosives were chosen to represent both the voiced and voiceless phones in Wangkatha in order to avoid ambiguity with sequences of the graphemes ‘n’ and ‘g’. Were voiced graphemes used for plosives, ‘ng’ could either denote a velar nasal or an alveolar nasal followed by a dorsal plosive. Because voiceless graphemes are used, ‘ng’ always denotes a velar nasal, while ‘nk’ denotes a velar nasal followed by a velar plosive. This decision shows careful consideration along the lines proposed by Grenoble and Whaley (2005: 125), who advise developers to select an existing symbol for one of the sounds in the language of wider communication in order to render the single phoneme in the local language. Pressing code-internal factors (allophonic variation and sound-symbol transparency) have been well accounted for in this approach.

Douglas’ orthography must also represent sounds that do not exist in English – a common challenge in orthography development (Grenoble and Whaley 2005: 126). While it would have been possible to create a new symbol or reinterpret the meaning of an existing symbol, in written Wangkatha digraphs are used to encode these non-English sounds. The digraphs usually rely on the pronunciation of the individual component sounds in English to approximate the Wangkatha sound. The retroflex series
is represented by an ‘r’ followed by the symbol for the alveolar version of the sound. For example, the digraph for a retroflex plosive ‘rt’ is an ‘r’ followed by the symbol for an alveolar plosive, ‘t’. The laminal series primarily follows this same principle - most of those phones are represented by the symbol for the alveolar counterpart followed by a ‘y’. For example, the digraph for a palatal nasal is ‘ny’. Finally, the digraph for a velar nasal ‘ng’ exactly corresponds with the digraph for that phoneme in English. In other cases, the digraphs rely more heavily on the International Phonetic Alphabet (henceforth IPA). A palatal plosive, for example, is written as ‘tj’, combining the alveolar nasal ‘t’ symbol with the IPA symbol for a palatal approximant [j], although this is generally written as ‘y’ in the English orthography. In both cases, a code-internal problem (the existence of sounds for which no equivalent graphical representation is available in the dominant orthography) is solved in a way that is thought to promote correct pronunciation based on English symbol values; however, the English pronunciation of sequences like ‘ny’, which is [ni] as in ‘many’, not [n], is not accounted for.

Finally, because the representation of vowels in the English orthography is quite remote from phonemic representations, even orthographies that are heavily based on English tend to base the graphemes for vowels on the IPA or some other convention rather than on English. Representation of Wangkatha vowels for the most part follows this trend, relying on the IPA value of symbols. A high front unrounded vowel, for example, is written as ‘i’, even though that grapheme can have various pronunciations in English writing. The value of sound/symbol transparency is upheld (a code-internal concern), although the transferability of English literacy to Wangkatha literacy is hindered.

The orthographic system for Wangkatha reflects the structure-based focus in regards to language graphization often attributed to Pike (1947), and it overlooks many
social and cultural aspects of literacy. Under Pike’s interpretation of graphization, the
development of any orthography is a branch of descriptive linguistics, and community
community concerns about the conventions that arise from such a practice are dismissed as noise
(Sebba, 2007: 6). Even later evaluations of orthography design demonstrate this bias.
Linguists, Hinton (2003: 1-2) explains, come into orthography design with a strong
structural focus and a commitment to addressing any code-internal considerations that
may arise; they are, however, less adept at accounting for code-external considerations
such as community preferences and ideologies, especially when the practices that such
considerations would demand contradict the demands of code-internal ones. The social
and political issues related to orthography development are typically cast as obstacles
language workers must overcome rather than concerns that demand serious attention
and study (Sebba, 2007: 13).

**Encoding oral language**

The majority of complaints about Wangkatha graphization focus on the
information that is left out of written language – most notably, paralinguistic features
and the phonetic information for a completely accurate pronunciation. A fair amount of
focus also falls upon the features of language that cannot be encoded in writing, even
though they naturally (and necessarily) occur in casual Wangkatha speech. Prosodic
prominence, for example, is not written down, but is considered utterly characteristic to
Wangkatha speech and is thought to distinguish it from comparatively flat English.
 According to one consultant,

> You know, when you sit down and talk in language it seems, the expression in
language is far better than English. English seems to be flat. It’s flat, you
know? No expression in it. When you talk in language, you talk your
expression.
In this discussion, the consultant focusses most specifically on volume and pitch variation; intonation, while not phonemic, is also considered important to Wangkatha speech but is not encoded in writing. Perhaps most notably, however, the hand gestures and facial expressions used prominently in Aboriginal conversations also have no textual encoding. These features (volume, pitch, hand gestures) are among a handful that are often said to comprise the real core of Aboriginal language use, and they have nothing to do with the structural components typically documented and described in endangered language work. All of these features characteristically go unwritten in most of the world’s orthographies\(^\text{19}\). However, they are considered essential to Wangkatha, which is often considered to be a more expressive language than others because of those features; omitting those features in writing is seen to essentially erase crucial distinctions between Wangkatha and English and directly erode the relative value of Wangkatha. Written Wangkatha then becomes a ‘hollow shell’ (Hinton, 2001: 241) of spoken Wangkatha, and some fear that language transmitted through writing will be likewise hollow.

As important as concerns regarding paralinguistic content are, most complaints about writing Wangkatha have to do with pronunciation. The current system, it is unanimously said, causes mispronunciation, which is turn causes changes to the language. Consultants specifically remark on people mispronouncing words to the extent that they are actually using a completely different word that may be, at best, comically inaccurate or, at worst, mortally offensive to listeners. Even if a specific

\(^{19}\) Tone and stress are occasional exceptions when they are phonemic, and assorted meanings behind these suprasegmentals and paralinguistic features are exceptions if innovations such as emoticons are taken into consideration.
misprediction doesn’t lead to using the wrong word, it may threaten the language by changing the word itself. As one consultant put it:

_The danger for print is [that] the pronunciations then become, can become manipulated, so you don’t get proper pronunciation. That’s the only way, because to me that’s the danger. Then, then it changes the word, doesn’t it?_

These changes are seen to threaten the authenticity of the language, especially because the distinctions between some Western Desert languages were based on differences in pronunciation. These intergroup linguistic distinctions are crucial to ethnolinguistic identity and are well-known amongst elder consultants. One, for example, specifically lists contrasts such as ‘uwa’ versus ‘yuwa’ for ‘yes’ and, as previously discussed, even language and group names were often based on salient lexical distinctions.

Due to a lack of Wangkatha literacy infrastructure, the mispronunciations that arise also often make Wangkatha sound more like English, thereby violating the all-important distinction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Here Hinton’s (2003) distinction between Linguistic Practical Orthographies (LPOs) and English-based Practical Orthographies (EPOs) is useful. Essentially, LPOs are based on linguists’ conventions, are concerned with code-internal issues, and represent each phoneme with a single symbol. Symbols familiar to the community may be substituted for comparatively foreign IPA symbols, but the phonemic principle prevails. EPOs, on the other hand, aim to represent a local language using English spelling rules that will lead English literates to pronounce indigenous words more or less correctly. Hinton (2003: 18) argues that LPOs frequently lead to mispronunciation for exactly these reasons – they ‘evoke English pronunciation’. Hinton (2001: 249) provides quotations from other indigenous people that demonstrate similar concerns, one of whom says,
I notice the kids get confused when they try to pronounce written words in our language; they pronounce it like English spelling.

Wangkatha consultants have adopted English spelling as the most natural spelling, many even viewing its orthography as phonetically transparent, so they too pronounce Wangkatha words with English pronunciation. In one consultant’s words:

It’s harder to read the language than it is to say it. Because linguists then say ‘Oh, no, you gotta spell it this way’ and Aboriginal people are saying ‘but that’s not the way you pronounce it’. So there’s a debate. I don’t know. Me, I like to make it simple: spell it the way it sounds. Because the English is like that, you know? […] You can sound English words out by the way it’s spelt, you know? […] but Aboriginal language isn’t like that.

Another remarks

In terms of writing it, that’s where I get upset because it’s not linguistically... they write it with the emphasis more on the English phonetics and presume that’s correct. And I’ll argue that fact.

In the Wangkatha situation, Douglas’ orthography is an LPO, while folk orthographies produced to correct the problems posed by it are EPOs. The problems arise because Douglas’ orthography is interpreted as if it were an EPO – it looks like it is based on English writing, but a significant portion is actually based on IPA symbols. For example, the symbol ‘i’ can be pronounced variously in English, and speakers who have no experience with the IPA have no reason to surmise that it’s pronounced as a high tense front vowel in Wangkatha. The system therefore seems obvious and perfectly sensible to anybody with formal linguistic training, but is somewhat inscrutable to the people who are meant to use it. Folk orthographies, on the other hand, tend to draw upon familiar representations of sounds (that is, English-based representations) more than unfamiliar, IPA-based representations, especially in regards to vowels. While the
resulting system clearly falls short of the one-sound one-symbol correspondence most linguists aim for, it is seen as less confusing than the more technically elegant existing system because it draws on what people already know. The pronunciation is seen to fall out so naturally from EPO folk orthographies that Aboriginal consultants say that ‘any white person coming in, they’ll be able to pronounce it’. For example, in one Wangkatha folk orthography (Boyle and Boyle, 1992), a high front vowel is represented as ‘ee’, not ‘i’ (which, in English, can be pronounced any number of ways). ‘ee’ is less elegant an encoding, and may even cause confusion regarding vowel length to those who assume IPA conventions, but to the intended audience it is indeed ambiguous. The heterography which results from the simultaneous use of multiple systems, however, creates its own confusion to Aboriginal people trying to operate in the written language.

Another major problem with the application of the phonemic principle is that it assumes Wangkatha phonology among readers. Douglas (1964: 10) developed it specifically with this in mind, designing the system ‘to simplify the teaching of reading to the native speakers of the language’. While it is true that most Aboriginal students in Douglas’ time would have been familiar enough with their heritage language to automatically apply the relevant phonological rules to whichever symbol they are presented with, this is no longer the case. Most of the Wangkatha population, especially the youths at which language materials are aimed, speak Aboriginal English as their first language and have limited command of Wangkatha. This, in addition to the prevalence of English language literature, means it is relatively likely that they’ll apply (Aboriginal) English phonological rules and English spelling conventions to any writing they’re presented with, not the Wangkatha phonological rules that they may or may not
even have command of\textsuperscript{20}. While Aboriginal English has a phonology closer to Wangkatha’s than is Standard Australian English phonology, they are still not identical, and the effects of individual positions on this phonology spectrum may even be reflected in their idiosyncratic spelling systems. In fact, the basis in English writing often does not reflect Australian English, especially the absence of coda [r]. For example, the word spelled ‘marlu’ \textit{kangaroo} will likely be pronounced correctly as /ma\textsuperscript{lu}/ by American visitors, who will produce something similar to a retroflex lateral as the middle consonant. Australians, including most Aboriginal Australians, will however pronounce the word as roughly /malu/, completing failing to produce a retroflex sound.

In contrast, when Troy and Walsh (2009) suggest English-based respellings of Aboriginal placenames, they rely on Australian English to affect the correct changes that will result in near-accurate Aboriginal pronunciations. Their suggestion for the word previously spelled ‘Kaba Kaba’, phonemically /gabagaba/, was ‘gubber-gubber’ (2009: 66) – a spelling that would result in a very obvious mispronunciation by Americans but which would lead Australians to a near perfect pronunciation. This suggestion was actually rejected and the spelling ‘Gubbah Gubbah’ substituted instead, but both respellings show the necessity of relying on (Australian) English spelling conventions.

The shortcomings of a phonemic model are exacerbated by the fact that Wangkatha texts are primarily read by people who don’t just speak English first – they speak English monolingually, having little or no command of Wangkatha language.

Here, orthographic depth proves to be an important concept. Orthographic depth refers to the level of representation that the writing system provides (Seifart, 2006: 279). A

\textsuperscript{20} See Hinton, 2003: 16 for discussion of similar concerns regarding Yurok phonemic models.
deep orthography represents the deep structure – phonemes, morphemes and so on – to which phonological rules are applied. A shallow orthography represents the surface structure – the phones that are actually produced once all rules are applied. The qualities ‘deep’ and ‘shallow’ are scalar, not discrete, and so all systems fall somewhere on the orthographic depth spectrum. Fluent speakers can adjust well to a deep orthography because they can guess the intended word from minimal cues and context and can accurately apply the relevant phonological rules; however, non-fluent speakers rely heavily on the surface information provided by a shallow orthography. These non-fluent speakers, such as Wangkatha readers, may well be encountering the word for the first time in the text they’re reading it in – the writing itself is instructive (Grenoble and Whaley, 2005: 138). Given the potential for archival transmission of Wangkatha language in the future, most consultants stress that any textual rendering of it must accurately teach the pronunciation of words to an audience that might not ever hear them pronounced by a fluent speaker. It is in fact impossible to render all relevant features that are attached to a spoken message, even in technical linguistic transcription (Lüpke, 2011: 321). An orthography can only come close to meeting this demand if it is shallow (Lüpke, 2011: 331; Seifart, 2006: 283) rather than relying on the application of native-speaker intuitions that do not exist within the majority of its readership and assuming that reading comprehension will be aided by context clues that are lost on non-fluent speakers.

People’s discomfort with using a single symbol to record what are, in English, two separate phonemes demonstrates the effects of English phonemics on writing preferences. Since almost all Wangkatha people speak English to varying degrees and many are at least somewhat literate in it, they can perceive the voicing distinction among plosives and they expect it to be rendered in Wangkatha writing as it is in English, even though this is not contrastive in Wangkatha. Even if they gain access to
fluent pronunciation models, they are likely to perceive the (phonetically) unaspirated voiceless plosives as voiced because English speakers have that perceptual tendency. Their rendering as voiceless plosives is therefore seen as intensely misleading in multiple ways, and is often corrected in the idiosyncratic spelling systems that people create. Nick Reid (2010: 295-296) reports similar finding for readers of New South Wales Aboriginal orthographies, where the allophonic variation that once existed between voiced and voiceless plosives is being replaced with overriding voiced plosives in all environments. When Wangkatha people create their own spellings, they typically use the symbols for voiced plosives in all environments, reflecting a similar shift.

Overall, then, consultants are wary of language graphization in part because using the current system really does lead to mispronunciation, especially given the lack of literacy infrastructure and poor involvement of the community in orthography and literacy planning. This mispronunciation is threatening to the ethnolinguistic distinctions invoked by even slight language variation. The EPOs that emerge in response to the existing system demonstrate that, if writing is to be directed at people whose first language (of literacy, and even in general) is English, then English spelling conventions must be followed. This is what Nick Reid (2010: 298) calls a ‘substratum-friendly system’, and it echoes precisely the findings of Troy and Walsh (2009). The main point is that English writing conventions will be followed by Aboriginal readers whose first language is a variety of Australian English (whether they are from Sydney or Kalgoorlie); ignoring this fact and imposing a purely phonemic model only means that orthography developers fail to steer the application of English conventions towards reasonably accurate Wangkatha pronunciation. In Walsh’s (2010: 266) words,

[An EPO] is a practical approach in which the intention is to have the majority of readers getting the pronunciation about right rather than a slightly improved accuracy being limited to a tiny minority of academic specialists.
Judging from the nature of consultant complaints about writing, the overwhelming influence of English must be acknowledged and accounted for in order to create a system that is true to Wangkatha. While some finer points of pronunciation may be lost, the overall pronunciation remains much better than what can be achieved through an uncritically designed phonemic system without substantial infrastructure for literacy, and accurate pronunciation is of paramount importance to the community.

**Creating a context for writing**

Some risks regarding Wangkatha graphization are far more elemental and less obvious than misgivings about pronunciation and the encoding of linguistic differences that are used to index Aboriginal identity. Many consultants demonstrate some level of discomfort about the language being written down at all. Writing down a language demands two different sorts of context creation. First, in order for a writing system to be successfully adopted, it is often necessary to create contexts for its use. Second, writing itself comprises a new context for language use – one that is universally nontraditional when it is first introduced. Using the language in these new contexts is a sociolinguistic change – it alters language use and introduces new language-centered ideologies. Given the assumed advantages that writing and literary tradition can give to language revitalization efforts, the proper path seems obvious from an external perspective, and so the majority of writing on the subject of indigenous language literacy urges the creation and implementation of a writing system (most significantly, Hinton, 2003 and Lüpke, 2011). However, consultants disclose serious and well-founded concerns about the sociolinguistic changes that will result from context creation and ideological revision. In many ways, writing the language down makes it more similar to English – not just because it may change pronunciation or flatten language as previously
discussed, but also because it erodes some crucial distinctions in the use of the two languages and even the perceived value of them.

A common thread in the history of Wangkatha writing is the assumption that it should be written at all. However, many consultants see writing the language as superfluous. Most notably, Wangkatha is primarily used in informal exchanges that are conducted in speech, not in writing. Exographia, in which vernacular literacy does not exist because majority language literacy is perceived to fulfill all of the necessary functions of writing (Lüpke, 2011: 318), is therefore comfortably accepted by this group. In one consultant’s words,

*What, are we going to write each other letters in language? We have mobiles!*

Informal contexts, such as conversations, have never required writing, and so people reject the idea of introducing writing to them now - especially because mobile phones make informal letter writing more time consuming and burdensome than oral conversation. SMS texting in the language may create a logical context for Wangkatha writing in the future, but this does not seem to have happened yet – probably because the young population that would be most likely to use Wangkatha writing in this way has limited proficiency in the language. To people like the above consultant, writing the language down is seen as unnecessary work, not as a route to prestige or language maintenance. Sallabank (2002: 227) presents similar practices among her Guernesiais respondents, who may use the writing system for public and formal audiences, but do not use it for personal communications. In the situation Sallabank reports, vernacular literacy has found some uses, but not in the sorts of exchanges for which oral language is considered most appropriate. In the Wangkatha situation, where infrastructure, including signage and literary tradition, has been built in English and practice sees English dominate commerce and education, the most obvious niche for Wangkatha is in
precisely those informal, unwritten contexts, and there the ability to write Wangkatha down is irrelevant. Formal contexts demand written English, and informal ones do not demand writing at all. Conducting informal conversations via writing would change the way language is used, and some consultants criticize the assumption that writing, an English imposition, is somehow a superior use of language anyway.

In fact, some consultants worry that the mere act of writing down the language makes it more like English. The value of Wangkatha is, to some extent, the fact that it is not written (see Woolard, 1998: 348 for similar comments applied generally). In one consultant’s words:

_Aboriginal language is a living language, it’s not a written language. It’s a living language that’s passed down by living people. It’s not a language that, you know, write it like in ABCs. It was never meant to write in ABCs because it’s spoken._

From this perspective, the act of writing at all may blur the boundary between the language with a written tradition and the language with an oral one. That boundary can be seen as oppressive, subverting the value of the unwritten language, but it can also been seen as protective, assigning specific values to different languages. According to these assigned values, English may dominate in written contexts and command overt prestige, but Wangkatha maintains its monopoly on intimate conversations and meaningful interactions. By traditional standards, Wangkatha wins, and maintaining these standards helps assert a rejection of imposed value systems, a rejection of the idea that ‘white is right’ and a rejection of development efforts that aim to fix Aboriginal problems by reshaping Aboriginal people in a non-Aboriginal image, by painting them white. Taken to its logical end, this argument sees English as the dead language because it is written, flattened and frozen. According to consultant interpretations, creating a context for Wangkatha literacy forces sociolinguistic change and even erodes the
critical boundary between Wangkatha and English. Meek (2010: 89) writes about similar perspectives from her Kaska consultants, some of whom maintain that Kaska is an oral language and should only be transmitted orally. For them, conversational ability is prized, not writing ability. Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998: 88) report similar findings for the Tlingit, for whom illiteracy has become a badge of identity. Literacy is seen as a non-native phenomenon, so it is thought that true Tlingits are not literate. Creating a context for literacy, then, is not a simple language planning issue; simply by creating such contexts, Wangkatha is ideologically changed, and language use is likewise transformed.

Given these present but not prevalent attitudes regarding vernacular literacy, it is not obvious that new contexts should be created in order to support the success of such a newly introduced use of language. That being said, not all consultants are against the creation of Wangkatha literacy – some indeed see archival transmission as a safeguard for the future of the language and culture, observing, for example, that,

*It’s important to have books, CDs, videos and art so that it’s recorded and people can learn language, get a sense of belonging, and pass on their dreaming.*

While the focus in this quotation is overtly on language (likely due to the linguistic focus of the interview), the specific goals mentioned do not obviously require the continuation of language proficiency – unless that proficiency is seen as inalienable from cultural proficiency. Either way, transmission of cultural knowledge may comprise the most natural context, or niche, for Wangkatha writing. There is already a strong domain divide in spoken language that prefers Wangkatha language for discussion of traditional life and Aboriginal Law. Extending this domain divide to written language seems quite natural. Some Wangkatha storybooks have indeed been created with exactly
In both potential niches, the inextricability of language and its social context emerges. Those who want to record Dreamtime stories in Wangkatha also want English translations, to ensure that the content is passed on to an audience that may not have proficiency in Wangkatha. However, the Wangkatha text is still included, despite the rather safe assumption that all future readers of the materials will at least have access to English literacy education. Language is intrinsic enough to these sorts of stories that consultants want them written in Wangkatha - not as a reflection of communication need, but as a reflection of indexical links between language and heritage. Additional clarification, in the form of English translations, can be provided, but the Wangkatha language cannot be erased from these expressions of culture. The scant, but still present, comments about Wangkatha and mobile phones suggest a possible trajectory towards involving literacy in what already forms an acceptable domain of Wangkatha language use – casual conversations between familiar Aboriginal parties. Similarly to the use of vernacular literacy with traditional content, it is used in domains that not only reflect what has become culturally normal language use but also index the (traditionality of the) culture of the speakers themselves. This perspective closely reflects perspectives about language identity, whereby it is considered completely nonsensical to even speak of language and identity as separate, whether or not the language is actually spoken. Overall, English can be decontextualized and spoken of independently but, for many, Wangkatha cannot. The inherent connections between Wangkatha language and its people and culture serve as part of its perceived superiority to English exactly because it cannot be decontextualized. Efforts that decontextualize it therefore make Wangkatha more like English, conceptually, and diminish its superiority.
This depletion via decontextualization is a nearly invisible factor in language materials development. Some resources have been made to transmit Wangkatha language. The vast majority of writing in these resources is in English (as the language of instruction), not Wangkatha, because they must assume absolutely no Wangkatha competence in order to serve their intended purpose. The resources can therefore be seen as using Wangkatha writing, but they do not really form part of a Wangkatha literary tradition. Furthermore, grammatical descriptions and dictionaries may have some cultural content in the sentences used to illustrate concepts, but the majority of the content conveys English-speaker concepts. The language itself can be seen as cultural content, but the English framing is once again problematic, and the language’s decontextualization in these materials cannot be denied.

**Social agency of language materials**

In addition to the more technical concerns about the mutual intelligibility of written materials discussed previously\(^{21}\), some concerns about graphization also center around the sorts of sociolinguistic practices that written language materials cannot possibly follow. Most importantly, written language cannot accommodate its audience, and it rarely shows proper respect for Aboriginal authority. Especially as they are often seen as the potential carriers of linguistic and cultural traditions into an uncertain future, language materials become social agents themselves. They are not merely objects nor even pedagogical tools: they are (potentially) language teachers and culture rememberers. Therefore, their adherence to appropriate social practices is of the upmost

\(^{21}\) Recall that, in order to facilitate mutual intelligibility of written materials, a deep orthography is best because it allows for a single phonemic rendering of words for which phonetic realizations may vary across dialects. However, a shallow orthography facilitates accurate pronunciation for non-fluent speakers of the language.
importance, especially as they may be acting without the guidance of properly recognized Aboriginal elders.

Consultants worry that written materials will usurp the authority of traditional language owners. Consultants seem to have exaggerated concerns about the accuracy of anything that is written down\textsuperscript{22} and worry that such resources usurp the authority of traditional leaders whose own understandings may contradict those that have been written down. In essence, consultants share the fears of Sallabank’s (2002: 241) Guernesiais respondents that an ideology of standardization will be adopted – that linguistic prescriptivism and the domination of formalized rules will prevail over traditional processes of authority.

In the Wangkatha context, language owners traditionally have significant (but not all-encompassing) power over language. Traditional language ownership operates parallel to traditional land ownership. According to anthropological accounts (see especially Sutton 2003), traditional land owners are responsible for ensuring that the land is taken care of and for ensuring that the land’s secrets are kept. They also have authority over the land, reserving the right to be consulted about land-related matters. Traditional language owners are likewise responsible for protecting the language – whether that is interpreted to mean that they ensure its continued transmission or that they ensure that it is not transmitted in a way that violates its integrity\textsuperscript{23}. They have authority over the language, and must be consulted about language-related matters. With the advent of graphization and the development of materials, some consultants

\textsuperscript{22} Their concerns may also be due to notions of bibliographic authority – the belief that information provided in books naturally has superlative truth value. This possibility may be intensified by the fact that initial Wangkatha graphization was used for transcriptions of gospel, which is thought by believers to command ultimate and infallible truth value.

\textsuperscript{23} The latter possibility is, in general, completely overlooked by language workers, who tend to focus heavily on the need to ensure its transmission in any form in order to protect it.
fear that the language presented in written materials might eventually be interpreted to be more correct than language demonstrated by the language owners. This is especially the case if language owners do not actually have fluent command of the language. Meek (2010: 111) reports that something similar to this happens among the Kaska – materials produced by linguists are often given authority by proxy, becoming surrogate language experts for people who have moved away from the language locality. Among the Wangkatha, the fear is that, over a time during which many traditional processes are being lost, language owners might not be accorded their due authority because of these introduced factors. Their authority is important not only because of its crucial role in Aboriginal systems of authority in general, but because of the less obvious linguistic elements they command – for example, knowledge about appropriate use of language, whether or not they command fluent control over its grammar.

The risk of usurpation of traditional language authority is especially problematic simply because the language is written down. Language ownership has traditionally entailed restricting the acquisition of certain linguistic elements, such as ceremonial language24. This is more than a formal intellectual property right, although that aspect of the language is also a matter worth discussing. Rather, it is a matter of protecting important knowledge from falling into poorly trained or unqualified hands and tongues25. Furthermore, as discussed in chapter 2, traditional roaming meant that people had to learn which words from their daily use were restricted words among the groups they met so they could avoid using them there. Communication between different groups therefore necessitated extensive knowledge of lexical variation between groups

24 This language usage was also restricted by ceremonial authorities, whose linguistic authority is challenged by language work in the same was as language owners’ authority. Ceremonial authorities have the additional challenges posed by widespread adoption of Aboriginal Christianity.

25 See Debenport, 2010; Hinton, 2001; and Kroskrity 2009 for similar discussion among various Native American communities.
and ever-changing tabooed words in order to avoid using language that is deeply offensive to any of the groups involved. How are written materials to respect these sociolinguistic practices? Once the language is written down, that particular rendering of language cannot be changed according to sociolinguistic circumstances. It cannot ensure the qualifications of readers accessing restricted knowledge; it cannot code-switch to accommodate its audience; it cannot avoid terms that have since become tabooed. It is impossible to restrict the dissemination of written materials in a way that absolutely ensures that they do not violate these important sociolinguistic rules – a reading audience cannot be controlled in the same way a listening one can, and written materials that have already been disseminated cannot be modified. Debenport (2010: 207-209) does list possible solutions to similar concerns demonstrated by her San Antonio Pueblo consultants – for example, clearly identifying the intended audience for materials and laying out disciplinary actions (for example, termination of employment) that may result from misuse of them; or using previously published examples and grammatical types (not tokens) in academic works; or focusing on the sociolinguistics of language use. While no solution is perfect, it is possible that solutions appropriate to the Wangkatha situation can be determined through ideological study and community involvement.

The rendering of language in text itself presents the idea that there is a single ‘accurate’ version of the language. Grenoble and Whaley (2005: 134) find that standardization of any kind often creates an ideology of prescriptivism, wherein one form of language is considered to be correct. This contradicts the far more fluid nature of language practice and language authority that is traditional to the area. In

26 See Neely and Palmer, 2009 for similar discussion regarding Kiowa materials.
prescriptivism, language and literature themselves become the authority as the creators of language rules are ideologically erased. In fact, acceptance of an orthography by anybody can be seen as a product of cultural attrition. Neely and Palmer (2009: 275) observe that Kiowa higher education students tend to accept literacy education without the same reservations that older people do, revealing an interesting link between language authority and orthography acceptance. These students, Neely and Palmer say, have been conditioned to expect a standard orthography and so are less likely to question one that is presented to them. However, it may also be their lack of language authority that leads them to accept rather than challenge it. Lacking the authority to make language-based decisions, they simply take up literacy instruction as it is given. This simultaneously helps to explain varying efficacy of literacy development and to prove correct many of the worries that Wangkatha consultants have. Under this analysis, those who according to Wangkatha perspective are in the greatest need of careful, accurate instruction are the most likely to accept inauthentic authority. With all of the confusion over their creation, language materials made without language owners may gain their own form of authority, meaning that the language data of non-owners may overshadow the language of the owners. While this doesn’t seem to currently be the case, people are well aware that written materials are available across space and time and might gain authority by distant or future people who don’t know any better - for example, by the language workers who wrote them down in the first place.

In their stated concerns on this matter, consultants’ ideas about the appropriate role of language owners and language workers becomes clear – language owners must have ultimate authority, and non-owner language workers (if any are needed at all) should be their tools. For example, many consultants insist that the correct people must be consulted for language work - only those with authority and recognized fluency are thought to be able to transmit the correct language. In fact, there is a general
assumption that language workers themselves have this expectation of their consultants - people regularly encouraged me to talk to older and ‘bushier’ people, insisting that those were the ones I would really want to talk to even if I had explicitly told them that I was looking for the opinions and attitudes of young people as well as older people. Some think that the language workers themselves should be the language owners, and wonder why the language centre staff has to have language consultants in the first place. The view is that, if they don’t know it already, they shouldn’t be the ones working on it. General consensus is that, if the proper language authorities are not involved in language work, the products of such work will result in language mixing or incorrect teaching. For example, one consultant says of former language workers’ efforts:

I think it’s a thousand people try to write Wangkatha language or not only Wangkatha but any other language. They always never get it right. See, uh, Wilf Douglas was writing Wangkatha language, but it was a bit, bit out of Warburton, bit over there, bit over there.

Others criticize the dictionary for mixing up words from various languages, likewise because it was created by people who didn’t really know the language and the crucial distinctions between closely related codes. This, it is said, would not have happened if the language workers were from the correct group.

In all of these complaints, the role of personal autonomy comes into play. It is not simply that language materials potentially violate the power of traditional language owners – they also compromise the personal autonomy of people who would speak language differently than is recorded. Traditional language ownership allowed for some control over individual language use because the validity of authority was established on spiritual grounds – it was not an individual who was controlling another directly, but rather traditional practice as set forth in Aboriginal cosmology. This balance between autonomy and social order echoes those described by Myers (1986), who found that
ways of living among the Pintupi\textsuperscript{27} were interpreted as part of the Dreaming and therefore the proper way of life as mandated by cosmological forces, not by another individual impinging on the freedom of other individuals. Even newly introduced practices were thought of as new discoveries and increasing understanding of the Dreaming. In the Wangkatha context, literacy is not yet accepted as part of the Aboriginal way, and may never be, and so any linguistic usage put forth in literary resources may be interpreted as a threat to autonomy. In one consultant’s words,

\begin{quote}
What I can’t understand – it’s the white man telling us how to spell our language. I don’t believe in it. Neither does my other friends. I’ve got a language somewhere around the house. I wrote a lot of words and I’m gonna write it for my kids and spell it the way I spell it.
\end{quote}

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that, when discussing language graphization, many consultants worry that writing the language down will result in flawed transmission of the language itself, with pronunciations and the very contexts of language being anglicized. If this were to happen, consultants worry that language itself could be painted white and made strictly utilitarian as English is perceived to be\textsuperscript{28}. It was shown that the orthographic system that exists promotes the primacy of English and English literacy, framing Wangkatha literacy within its confines. Previous schooling in English literacy is assumed, and consultants often reveal an assumption that the letter is meant to be pronounced the English way. The ensuing confusion results in anglicized

\textsuperscript{27} Myers specifically warns against generalizing his findings outside of his area of study, which is adjacent to the Wangkatha area. However, his warning is based on a lack of information regarding these areas rather than on observations that social order operates differently in them, so it remains useful to reflectively extend his findings inasmuch as they appear to help explain Wangkatha phenomena.

\textsuperscript{28} See Sallabank (2002: 225) for similar concerns expressed regarding Guernésiais.
mispronunciation, especially as the phonologies of people learning from written materials anglicize.

The chapter also argued that writing the language down at all presents substantial risks, changing ideologies about language use and blurring the crucial line between the value of English and the value of Wangkatha. It was asserted that, if the context for Wangkatha language use is changed in order to encode it in writing and to make that writing system successful, this comprises an anglicized use of Aboriginal language. Furthermore, the creation of language materials themselves challenges traditional Aboriginal language authority, and the process of standardization challenges the personal autonomy of current language users. All in all, people worry that hurried efforts to create language materials will result in disastrously inaccurate records that ignore important distinctions, provoke language change, force Wangkatha language to fit into English contexts and practices, and paint the language white.
Chapter 4. Language in schools

While concerns about language graphization predominate, people also have strong opinions about the inclusion of language in schools. The potential value of classroom language instruction seems universally recognized, but the majority of consultants demand that the salient logistics be worked out before language is taught in schools, if it is taught in schools at all. First and foremost, their concerns call for focus on language as more than just structure, but as appropriate language use. Sociolinguistic rules for language learning itself must be followed, and sociolinguistic content must be passed on along with the language itself. It is important to note that these reservations are directed at the rather conservative approach to language pedagogy adopted in and around Kalgoorlie, not the more culturally and sociolinguistically inclusive pedagogies adopted elsewhere. However, treatment of language in this area is similar to that for many endangered languages, so discussion of these matters is still relevant on a broad scale. It demonstrates that something is not necessarily better than nothing – poor approaches to language pedagogy may actually do more harm than good, by sacrificing sociolinguistic elements of language and by souring a community against language in schools even if better approaches to the task are devised later.

Upon scrutiny, community members’ concerns reflect the same areas of focus as language graphization, including authenticity, authority and accommodation. Focus also falls on the role that specific Aboriginal languages play in marking traditional affiliations in a modernizing world. The topic of language in schools, then, reflects several points of contention between language workers and language communities: not only different foci for transmission (language form versus sociolinguistic practice), but also contradictory best practices. Language socialization – that is, the socialized use of language and cultural socialization through language – is easily overlooked when
language workers recommend specific pedagogies for language and culture transmission. However, traditional language socialization does not, for rather obvious reasons, naturally lend itself to classroom instruction of language. The entire point of learning language in the modern context is quite different – canonical language pedagogy, understandably, would see the goal as learning Wangkatha language. Community members see it as learning to be (more) Wangkatha through Wangkatha language. The goal is not so much linguistic proficiency as cultural proficiency.

Despite all of the reservations against including language in schools, the potential benefits of such inclusion cannot be denied. Lowe and Howard (2010: 195) argue that schools can become sites of ‘collaborative action’ towards language revitalization, and the Aboriginal Languages K-10 syllabus for New South Wales (2003: 9) argues that inclusion in schools is necessary for successful revitalization. According to the syllabus (2003: 9), the representation of Aboriginal languages in schools helps improve scholastic performance among Aboriginal students. However, successful programs for teaching language in schools often take place in spite of protests – Green (2010: 187) reports that some Dharug community members in Sydney argued that the language taught in schools was incorrect, or that the teachers could not rightly teach it. Lane (2010: 190) argues that Dhurga community members in coastal NSW had to be convinced that the language was valuable enough to merit inclusion in schools, and Julie Reid (2010: 243) was unable to hold workshops to get feedback from the entire Wergaia community because they were prohibited. These instances of non-engagement or opposition suggest that even successful school programs may have relatively invisible costs vis-à-vis the sociolinguistic practices and language ideologies of both vocal and silent protesters.
Consultant fears about the ‘empty’ transmission of Wangkatha, that Wangkatha words will be used in non-Aboriginal ways and thereby be ‘painted white’, are well-founded because the practices being built tend to gloss over their concerns. This chapter discusses four primary sociolinguistic facets of language that seem to be primary targets of transmission and the ways in which language in schools often hinders rather than helps their transmission. After providing a general overview of language education in and around Kalgoorlie, perspectives on language performance among children are discussed, most notably that the lack of proficiency among children is not commonly interpreted as a symptom of language loss. Next, views on authentic secondary language transmission are analysed, specifically the application of techniques for learning Western Desert languages to learning Wangkatha as a second language to English. Then two separate sociolinguistic themes are discussed at some length: first, the risk that teaching language in schools poses to traditional systems of language authority, and second, the remarkable difficulty in choosing what, exactly, to teach in language classes in schools if they are permitted.

**Language education in and around Kalgoorlie**

Wangkatha has been taught in a classroom setting periodically over the past few decades, although support for such efforts has not been reliable. Wangkatha classes are, from time to time, offered at the local high school, but enrolment is reportedly typically low and so the success of these classes varies. At the time of this research, the high school had ceased offering Wangkatha language classes due to lack of participation. However, the Karlkurla Language and Culture Aboriginal Corporation regularly provided language materials to schools in the area, meaning that students at least had
access to pedagogical materials. Wangkatha language classes reportedly run without incident at Mt Margaret, which is now an Aboriginal-run community. Outside of this general region, however, language education is decidedly more conflict-ridden. In one community near Kalgoorlie, for example, language classes were being run at the elementary level, but other members of the community protested its inclusion there, reportedly because the wrong people were teaching it to the wrong people.

Children’s linguistic performance

The first point of contention regarding language in schools is whether concerted language instruction to children is even warranted. When discussing language learning with community members, even with those who see the language as under threat, one notices a general lack of urgency when discussing the linguistic proficiency of young children in their family. These young children are typically not seen as failing to learn their language when they fail to demonstrate proficiency; rather, they are seen as preparing to learn and demonstrate language. Many see linguistic knowledge as something one must be ‘ready for’ – one consultant, for example, observes that

*It would be good for language to be taught in schools, but it must be respected. You can’t teach words that aren’t meant to be taught, and if [students] aren’t ready to learn it’s a waste of time.*

Perspectives like his echo that asserted by Bunte (2009) regarding the Paiute, who expect language to be learned throughout childhood but only ‘enacted’ when a child is ready. Bunte’s consultants have participated in some language work, but not because they see it as really necessary. Rather, in Bunte’s (2009: 189) words,

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29 That being said, if students failed to enroll in Wangkatha classes, it seems unlikely that they would make use of bibliographic resources.
[...] they are just pragmatically hedging their bets and planning programs that will get their young people speaking Paiute now rather than leaving everything to the very real possibility of later words arriving on the wind [that is, that children will begin speaking it naturally when they are ready].

More specifically regarding Aboriginal language socialization, Evans (2001) notes that Aboriginal children are expected to reach the appropriate age-level for learning language, as with other cultural knowledge. This, among other factors he systematically discusses, contributes to a lack of urgency regarding language transmission and an extremely fluid system for identifying speakers of an endangered Aboriginal language. It was also common in the past for Aboriginal Australians to learn new languages on through adulthood, so little urgency is expressed for language acquisition or fluency among young children. In the Wangkatha situation, assumptions about later development of language abilities often blind people to the lack of fluency among their own kin. The linguistic behaviors of young adults and even older adults who lack proficiency are alarming to consultants, but small children are said to be developing language fluency even if they’re only producing limited phrases and singing songs in language. For example, one consultant reported on the efficacy of the language teaching methods with her grandchildren saying that,

*Take them out in the bush and show them things, culture and that. Let them talk, let them sing. [...] We took my little grandkid, that little one I showed you, she knows singing. She can sing.*

Notably, these same children are expected to demonstrate full proficiency in (Aboriginal) English to the extent that their English language abilities are completely taken for granted. It is exactly this assumption of English language proficiency that

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30 In fact, singing is considered to be a key pedagogical device in many informal Aboriginal language programs (see contributions to Hobson, Lowe, Poetsch and Walsh 2010).
reveals a significant disjuncture between traditional language socialization and modern language socialization. One’s heritage language is typically considered key – it is the language necessary for speaking to one’s land and, especially according to revitalizationist discourse, for maintaining one’s heritage. Traditionally, given that children were typically raised among people who spoke their heritage language, learning that language was a given in all but extreme circumstances. There was rarely any need to make special arrangements or undertake specific efforts to ensure its transmission. There is no such guarantee in modern times, and there hasn’t been since the Stolen Generation. English is a given; all other languages, including one’s heritage language, are not. In traditional contexts, children would gradually develop proficiency in their own languages while possibly showing delayed proficiency in additional languages. In modern contexts, children gradually develop English proficiency while showing delayed proficiency in their own.

People also do not demonstrate a sense of urgency about the potential loss of their language, at least among the very young, because they often believe that Aboriginal children are genetically predisposed to learning their language. Aboriginal children ‘twist their tongues’ around the language naturally, it is said, and they will pick it up with ease once they decide it is time. This perspective on language socialization – that it depends more on genetic makeup than on linguistic input – puts parents at relative ease when allowing their children to develop full proficiency in English before trying to add additional languages, like heritage Aboriginal languages, to the mix. English is commonly seen as necessary for success in school, beginning at a very young age, so its acquisition must be sorted out first. Heritage language, while of central importance, can always be learned later. In the words of one consultant, who had just identified English as the more important language for children to learn:
Oh, they’ll never forget their Wongai language.

The idea stems from a perceived inherent link between language and culture. Revitalizationist discourse is rife with this sort of essentialism – that language and culture exist and perish together – and criticism of such discourse often focuses on exactly this assumption. Henderson (1994: 7) writes that many Aboriginal people share exactly this essentialist sentiment when discussing the role of language in schools, noting that many cannot speak of language separately from culture, and others assume that language development follows naturally from cultural development. On one hand, the connection might be taken to indicate that the culture will perish if the language is not passed on. On the other hand, in a perspective often put forth by elderly consultants, the language couldn’t possibly perish as long as children are still being born and raised Aboriginal. According to Henderson, educational approaches that follow this perspective to its logical conclusion – by opting for cultural instruction without overt emphasis on language instruction – do not seem to work for language. The naturalness of Aboriginal language, the assumption that it can be learned later by Aboriginal people who first focus on English, therefore prevents people from taking action until, for some strange reason, English monolingual children do not grow up to be Wangkatha speaking young adults.

**Authentic secondary language transmission**

It can be confidently asserted that Aboriginal English is the first language for most of young Aboriginal Kalgoorlie, and any Aboriginal languages must therefore be learned as secondary languages. The problem lies in determining the precise method by

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31 See, for example, the contributions to Duchêne and Heller 2008
32 For the present discussion, Aboriginal English is considered a variety of English rather than an Aboriginal language. The precise role of Aboriginal English in determinations of vernacular language speaker numbers, however, merits further study.
which these secondary languages should be learned. Secondary language transmission
as it has been practiced over millennia has, quite obviously, not taken place in a
classroom. In traditional Western Desert, the vast majority of language learning
conducted throughout a person’s life would have been inspired more as a matter of
sociolinguistic savvy than of direct necessity because proximal languages were mutually
intelligible. Moreover, the most frequent types of language variation that one would
have encountered were primarily lexical, grammatical (primarily variation in verb
inflections and pronominal systems) and social – in order to exhibit appropriate
linguistic behavior within a neighboring group, one essentially had to know which
words were associated with which group and which words had been tabooed. Secondary
language learning therefore demanded two fundamental tasks – learning the social,
historical and political factors that may affect appropriate language use, and learning the
structural components. Transmission itself would have taken place in the bush, where
all of Aboriginal life took place.

Not surprisingly, focus continues to fall on the transmission of lexemes and
social knowledge when people discuss modern language learning, and Aboriginal
contexts and Aboriginal teachers are often considered necessary for successful language
transmission. The idea that language must be taught in schools, or even that it could be,
is frequently refuted. Schools are generally considered to be artificial venues for
language learning, so the environment itself can be seen as a violation of sociolinguistic
conventions of language acquisition. In some consultants’ view, placing language
transmission in the hands of the schools, and the usually non-Aboriginal parties who run
them, insults Aboriginal practice and Aboriginal authority. The action implies that
Aboriginal people don’t know what to do with their own languages – that processes that
have worked for millennia are now found lacking. Henderson (1994: 15) argues that
support must be offered in a way that does not insult the ability of Aboriginal people to
control their own language for exactly this reason. Even worse, the inclusion of language in schools assumes that languages can be separated from sociolinguistic processes in the first place, demonstrating to many consultants the comparative inability of outsider ‘experts’ to transmit anything Aboriginal in an authentic way. Henderson (1994: 10) notes that Pitjantjatjara was not being taught in schools during the 90s for exactly these reasons—some community members in positions of authority decided that schools should give priority to English and language should be passed on at home where it seems more natural and where Aboriginal authority will be respected by design. Some Wangkatha consultants hope that Wangkatha language will be treated in exactly the same way.

The preferred venues for modern language transmission are at home or in the bush, with Aboriginal parents or elders as teachers. In this way, it is thought, language can be passed on more naturally and will not be decontextualized. Somewhat paradoxically, consultants tend to see this contextualized language learning as transitional from English—children inevitably start with English and then, they hope, gradually mix more and more Wangkatha words in until they’re speaking Wangkatha. The assumption that English will be children’s first language is not challenged. This approach also sees Wangkatha language as a collection of words and phrases to be adopted into the matrix language—while the meanings of those words and phrases will be passed on in correct cultural context, the syntactic context is apparently of little importance. Such a technique may have worked quite well to learn neighboring dialects of Western Desert because the syntaxes, morphologies and phonologies of proximal language varieties are typically quite similar. Learning a neighboring language really was to a large degree a matter of learning lexical variants and sociolinguistic constraints. However, for teaching Wangkatha to speakers of English, the strategy seems to result in the acquisition of lexemes and limited expressions only. Therefore,
the actual practices reported to take place in more authentic language transmission contexts do not even approximate the immersion in a fluent-speaking atmosphere normally associated with natural language acquisition. The community focus is therefore clearly on authentic linguistic practices, including authentic transmission, more than on transmission of full proficiency in an idealized language.

While a strong lexical focus, even in an authentic environment, really cannot be considered a path to full competence and quite rightly draws considerable criticism by linguist scholars, the technique is considered by some (for example, Meakins (2010)) to be a good starting point for language learning. Amery (2009: 93-94) argues for a similar method, called the formulaic method of language learning. In this technique, specific phrases or texts are learned in the Aboriginal language (for example, a welcome to country), and this linguistic command can be gradually expanded. According to Meakins (2010), such a method builds on the language maintenance that is already taking place through code mixing. Meakins’ Gurundji consultants, for example, are preserving snippets of their linguistic heritage by adding Gurundji words to English sentences – Gurundji becomes the lexifier language arranged according to English grammar. While the linguistic changes that result from this method of language maintenance are obvious, the people maintain traditional practices of secondary language acquisition. Meakins argues that language taught in schools can contribute to this approach, adding more and more words and even full phrases of language to help transfer Aboriginal grammar as well. This method will not result in full monolingual control of the conservative version of the target language, but a significant portion of the language has been maintained and the maintenance strategies already in place have been respected. Efforts that impose radically different maintenance strategies, such as language nests or language apprenticeships, may either be rejected by the community.
because they lack grassroots involvement or may successfully revive the language while subverting sociolinguistic practice.

The formulaic method accomplishes most of the goals that seem to underlie consultants’ desires to transmit Wangkatha language, but would be seen as a failure in transmission in linguists’ terms because full fluency of the language is not likely to be acquired. Meakins (2010) advises that this common result of the formulaic method can be augmented by the gradual inclusion of grammar into lessons – a practice that can naturally stem from the handful of phrases that are frequently taught to Aboriginal youths. However, there is certainly a struggle between re-lexifying English and learning full Wangkatha, which is unlikely to happen via the formulaic approach. Consultants struggle with this apparent dichotomy because, even with their strong caveats about authentic transmission and sociolinguistic processes, they do hope that full fluency in their languages will endure. One consultant in particular struggles with the disjuncture between her belief that the home and bush methods are the best ways to transmit language and her observations about their actual success. She begins by saying that she spoke Wangkatha with her children while they were growing up, but when asked whether they speak it says they only know a few words. Later, when asked whether she thinks language should be taught in school because many children are only picking up a few words, she says yes after having spent the majority of the interview asserting that language should not be taught in schools. It seems that her beliefs about how language should be taught (at home, in families) contradict her own observations about how language is actually being passed down (or, more to the point, that it typically isn’t).

Immersion would be a more viable goal if most parents spoke Wangkatha, but virtually none do. The mixing that currently occurs among Wangkatha speakers is part of a natural effort to maintain language that, according to Meakins (2010) emerges
when full immersion in the traditional language is no longer possible. Non-Wangkatha speaking parents may, however, be able to pass on Wangkatha sociolinguistic conventions (in primarily English language), probably better than can be achieved in schools. Furthermore, semi-speaking parents are able to pass on the language that some call Wangkatha because some people attribute that label to a linguistic variety that mixes Wangkatha words into English sentences. Permissive definitions of the language, then, open up speakerhood to a wider population and enable ‘natural’ transmission of it.

In comments about language learning, environment emerges as a central component of authentic transmission – among consultants and across Australia. For this reason, the Aboriginal Languages K-10 syllabus produced for New South Wales (2003) focuses heavily on providing ‘authentic situations’ (64) for language use. Similarly, Evans (2001: 268, 274) identifies location as crucial for language use, and Green (2010: 186) urges language workers to teach Aboriginal language ‘on the land which it describes’. Most consultants for this research believe that trips to the bush are necessary for providing scenarios for authentic language use. Bush trips, it is said, must be organized so that students learn the language in context and so that elders have the opportunity to really explain the words they are teaching. Many older consultants were taught language in this sort of scenario, so it seems quite natural. For example, many mission children were able to spend occasional weekends and holidays out bush with their parents, and they believe that they picked up much of their heritage language and culture on these excursions. Some maintain this practice with their own children or grandchildren, making up for limited access to traditional lifestyle in Kalgoorlie with weekend cultural trips. Providing further support for Amery’s (2009) formulaic method, the actual practices reported for the ‘bush method’ do not engender full language transmission because there doesn’t seem to be much focus on carrying on fully Wangkatha conversations. Instead, trips to the bush are seen to facilitate language
transmission because they put children into the environment where salient cultural items and processes exist and can be named – that is, they engender fully contextualized language transmission. The primacy of bush trips relies somewhat upon the conceptions of a strict domain divide between Wangkatha and English. Home language teaching could be just as contextualized if Wangkatha words were innovated for modern concepts. However, because Wangkatha exclusively is accorded to traditional domains (and traditional domains only), a trip to the bush is often deemed necessary to create a context where its use is truly required. Language in a classroom, in contrast, is quite unable to follow these mandates – cultural items can be included in the environment, but not to the same extent that they exist in the bush. Schools in which languages are to be included might be best off offering fieldtrips for students33, following the practices already followed by concerned parents and grandparents.

Authority

In sharing their reservations about language being taught in schools, some consultants focus on the traditional authority of language owners, who they believe should be in charge of teaching. When language is taught in schools, consultants argue it must be supervised, approved by, and/or even instructed by the correct Aboriginal elders or, in some cases, their acceptable proxies. While it can be said that including language in schools actually offers positions of authority to the Aboriginal people hired to teach it, that authority does not follow traditional structures of authority in the way that traditional language transmission does. Henderson (1994: 3) observes that very few Aboriginal people have the technical qualifications required to teach in public schools. Institutions have arisen to provide such qualifications (for example, the well-known

33 Indeed, exactly this approach is taken elsewhere in Australia.
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education) and the need to make advancement opportunities available to Aboriginal people is a major area of focus in the 2012 report on ‘Language Learning in Indigenous Communities’, but the fact stands that most ‘good speakers’ of Aboriginal languages lack qualifications for teaching them. In fact, Rhydwen (2010: 258) reports that many Aboriginal people who have recognized authority over the language are not inclined to do teacher training, and some Wangkatha consultants perceive the pursuit of non-Aboriginal qualifications to disqualify individuals from true Aboriginal authority. Authority, it is often said, can only be obtained through traditional channels, and some perceive attempts to gain authority through non-traditional channels to signify an individual’s disregard, disrespect or even ignorance of Aboriginal authority structure. For example, one person in particular was often criticized for capitalizing on his culture for personal gain; this person had been through Aboriginal Law, which is relatively rare in modern times for Wangkatha people, but had also received very advanced academic training. The vitriol with which some consultants regarded his linguistic and cultural work possibly reflected their opinion that he prioritized Western preparations too highly. That being said, many consultants had themselves received some level of formal training, whether it was teacher training or rudimentary linguistics courses. However, none had come close to receiving the academic credentials, including academic publications, that he had. Neely and Palmer (2009) provide similar discussion regarding the writing of Kiowa: one script - developed by a Kiowa man - is often cast aside precisely because he undertook university study in his attempt to devise successful methods for language work. To consultants who hold similar reservations, Aboriginal authority and non-Aboriginal authority are mutually exclusive – one must abandon the traditional mindset required for the former in order to appease non-traditional institutions as required for the latter. Poetsch and Lowe (2010: 157) specifically advise that the community mistrust that is
ubiquitous in Aboriginal groups often stems from usurpation of authority in general. In
their words,

[The institution has a] seemingly innate tendency to take ownership and control
in a range of ways – including restrictive timeframes and lesson locations, set
pedagogical approaches, differing notions of the role of a teacher and
unreliable sources of funding.

They further note that, since language, culture and identity are so ideologically
entwined, loss of control over so many aspects of cultural and linguistic transmission is
extremely threatening. By usurping traditional authority, the classroom environment
threatens not only to err in its transmission of language, but also to steal away
Aboriginal agency that has survived throughout contact so far.

Classroom language instruction is also often thought to be inadequate because it
often does not benefit from the expertise of proper language authorities. Many
consultants worry that the wrong language teachers will fail to transmit paralinguistic
and sociolinguistic content. Partly for this reason, almost all language programs at the
very least place an Aboriginal person from the area in the language classroom and
sometimes require that a local Aboriginal person be the teacher (Henderson 1994: 19;
contributions to Hobson, Lowe, Poetsch and Walsh eds 2010). In the Wangkatha
context, all consultants argued that the Aboriginal community must be included in
decision-making, meaning, at the very least, that recognized elders are involved in
determining what is taught and, to some extent, who teaches it and who learns it.
Without such Aboriginal representation, it is feared that language might not be
transmitted correctly. Emphasis is placed, for example, on correct pronunciation, with
the frequent assumption that only an Aboriginal person could pronounce the language
correctly34. Even if language is transmitted correctly, linguistic proficiency, without adequate cultural understanding, is considered to be an illegitimate use of Aboriginal cultural property. Through traditional language transmission, the transfer of cultural content along with linguistic content could be taken for granted. In an environment where artificial language learning may be required, it is considered absolutely crucial that the cultural component of language be included, and it is often believed that only an Aboriginal teacher (preferably an Aboriginal elder) can ensure that this is done. Selecting Aboriginal teachers also helps avoid the social disconnect involved in having a non-Aboriginal person teach a language that is ideologically iconicized with Aboriginal culture and people – a disconnect that arouses concern and even suspicion (and in practical terms, fails to provide an adequate role model).

Despite the many misgivings that Wangkatha people may have about language being taught in schools, concern about the survival of the language can be seen to trump concerns about ultra-authentic transmission – adherence to the strictest rules of language use is, by many, considered to be less important than transmission of at least some language. While demanding that the correct people are in charge of language follows traditional rules of language ownership and can be seen to show continuity with past sociolinguistic rules, it is not evident that command of mundane, daily language would ever have been restricted in this way. Even if it was, overly rigid enforcement of these rules is not considered acceptable by all. For example, some consultants think community members who fought against language being taught in their schools in a nearby town acted in draconian ways. These consultants appear to consider strict adherence to these (reflections of) traditional rules about language teaching is

34 Ideologies having to do with pronunciation are discussed in greater detail in chapter 3.
antiquated. The actions of those language owners are seen as an unnecessary impediment to language learning, probably because they demanded the complete cessation of language teaching rather than modifications to it. For those who fear the imminent demise of the language, their potential negative impact on the future of the language is seen as too costly.

**Accommodation and heritage**

Consultants also worry about which language will be taught in schools. If only one Aboriginal language is selected, this would assert that the language has more value than other languages in the area, contradicting traditional egalitarian practices of accommodation. This practice is seen as utterly unacceptable – it contradicts traditional practice and follows what is seen as the very worst of western (linguistic) practices. In the erudite words of one consultant,

*Don’t ever ever think that any language is better than another language. All languages should be equal and should be preserved.*

Even with the demand for equal treatment of all languages, local languages maintain their traditional importance. In general, consultants strongly argue that the local language, not a transplanted Aboriginal language, should be taught in schools if any Aboriginal language is. This reflects the traditional practice of learning whichever language is local to the area to which one travels, and echoes Henderson’s (1994: 45-6) finding that Aboriginal people in general place great emphasis on recognizing the linguistic practices of others and on keeping distinctive languages distinctive. However, among the Wangkatha there is not yet consensus about which language is the most appropriate language – the Kalgoorlie area is traditional home to a handful of languages, as evidenced in the Native Title claim (Harrington-Smith on behalf of Wongatha people v Western Australia, 2007) lodged for the area. Most consultants agree that Wangkatha
is Kalgoorlie language, but many also see Wangkatha as either a mix of the real local
languages or a collective of them. Furthermore, even if a single language is agreed
upon, the precise lexical and grammatical content of that language is still up for debate,
especially as lexical content changes due to traditional practices of tabooing and
borrowing. The precise words that should be transmitted in schools are therefore
unclear. In fact, some worries about teaching language in schools center very firmly
upon the vocabulary that will be taught there.

These concerns seem to be manifested in a dictionary developed by previous
language workers. The dictionary, which seems to reflect language as it is used across
Kalgoorlie, is unanimously accused of mixing languages – most likely, consultants say,
because the dictionary authors consulted the wrong people. According to consultants, it
does not demonstrate clear boundaries between languages, and therefore does not
accurately teach any particular language, much less the appropriate language of
Kalgoorlie. In fact, the dictionary is sometimes blamed for the linguistic ‘muddle’ that
one currently finds in Kalgoorlie, as if people have been learning the wrong words to
use since the development of the barely used resource. Criticism of the dictionary
reveals two obstacles that any language materials must overcome: people expect any
materials to clearly define linguistic boundaries that were probably never all that vivid
historically; and materials must, somehow, keep up with the linguistic changes that
result from ‘authentic’ practices such as tabooing. Language materials, and even the
typical, pedagogically sound language classroom, must simultaneously reify the
language, but in an authentic way, and allow for traditional language change. This is
literally impossible. Some resource creators have included disclaimers explaining the
nature of language variation on their resources, but those disclaimers are rarely read.
Others have clearly identified which language each term is said to come from, but these
identifications may be contested or may change over time. Furthermore, including
certain words may be considered offensive by some for whom the word is tabooed, while failure to include those same words may be considered negligent by others. Recently, a mobile phone application has been created to facilitate community contribution to a digital dictionary for the Iwaidja language of Croker Island (Canton, 2012), but the results of this effort have yet to be studied and there is no such application for Wangkatha. Such a promising development may allow for the constant modification of language resources that would overcome many community concerns, but only with adequate ongoing input. For the time being, the inability of any Wangkatha resources so far to adequately overcome the two obstacles serves, for some, as a solid argument that language should not be taught in schools.

In addition to issues concerning the selection and representation of local languages, the preference for local language in schools can become a problem because consultants also generally agree that children should learn their own heritage language first. This is a problem because school classes typically include children from different backgrounds. Consultants often see language as iconically linked to heritage, so the correct language must be learned in order to link to the correct heritage. Heritage language learning is also seen as a basic right that must be respected. If language forms part of identity, then children deserve to learn it in order to access their full identity. Being forced to learn another language can be seen as an attempt to force a foreign identity onto them – an especially salient risk because many agents of the Stolen Generation attempted just that. The primacy of English in the missions, for example, is seen by some as an overt attempt to eradicate Aboriginal culture. Forcing all Aboriginal children to learn the same Aboriginal language in school can be seen to echo this hegemony, comprising an attempt to paint all Aboriginal people with one homogenizing brush. Resistance against language in schools, then, comprises part of a continued indignation at linguistic hegemony in all of its forms. The value of heritage language is
exactly why home language learning is often preferred to language in schools – it means that nobody will be forced to learn the local Aboriginal language before learning their heritage language.

Similarly, some consultants find a compromise between the value of heritage language to individuals and the primacy of local language within a place, believing that people should travel to their traditional locales in order to learn their heritage languages appropriately. The strongest view here sees moving to the region where the language is spoken as the only acceptable method for learning the language. People wanting to learn Warnmala, for example, should go north to learn it, not try to include it in Kalgoorlie schools. Likewise, people wanting to learn Indonesian should move to Indonesia, not learn it in Kalgoorlie’s High School. Those with more permissive views are happy for people to learn their heritage language at home no matter where they are, but think that moving to that language’s country will be more effective. In fact, other than heritage language learning, it only makes sense to learn any language in its locale because the language is only useful upon visiting the area where it is spoken. Many consultants express their utter disbelief that Indonesian is taught in Kalgoorlie schools but Aboriginal languages are not – everybody who lives in Kalgoorlie spends time in the locale of Aboriginal languages, but, they challenge, how many ever travel to Indonesia? In this view, English becomes the most practical language because it must be used by everybody in Kalgoorlie, followed by Wangkatha, and very very distantly followed by so-called ‘global’ languages like Indonesian.

With the extreme difficulty in selecting the ‘correct’ language, some consultants would prefer to wait until the matter is officially decided. Consultants suggest two deciding factors: community consensus and the Native Title court. Overall, Aboriginal people show remarkable willingness to go along with whatever consensus may be
found. Some identify specific languages that absolutely should not be taught (usually a language group that they think unfairly contested or joined in with their own group’s Native Title claim), but even in those cases they typically say that it would be okay if general consensus decided that language were best. One in particular argues first that any language should be taught, but then admits,

\[...\] I’d be a bit precious about, you know, if Gapun gets taught. I’ve they’ve got a language. You know? But, at the end of the day a language is being taught.

People also note that there’s so much dysfunction about language that such a consensus will never be reached. In some ways, the Native Title court is seen as a determination of consensus – one that facilitates the gathering of many Aboriginal groups and which requires substantial evidence. It is hoped that, with the immensity of evidence required for such proceedings, and the voluntary participation among Aboriginal groups, everybody will abide by the decision the courts come to. Whichever group is found, in court, to be the true holder of Native Title will have their language taught in schools. Given the extreme backlash of the most recent Wangkatha Native Title claim, including accusations that many claimant groups were inauthentic and did not have rightful claim to the area, this hope seems unlikely.

Not all consultants share the lack of urgency that dominates the discussion in this thesis. Some very clearly indicate that they would rather have language instruction, in any form, now than risk losing more of the language. In fact, the consultant who most explicitly suggests Native Title determinations as ‘the answer’ also bucks the general trend of taking great care in selecting a language for inclusion in schools. In her words,

\textit{Just blasted teach them something. Sort out the semantics after.}
She goes on to point out that children can ‘fix’ whatever misunderstandings classroom language learning might present at home. If they’re learning the wrong language in schools, their parents can correct them. If their pronunciations are off, their grandparents can help. If they fail to learn their heritage language, their families can teach them where they’re from. To her, home learning can supplement and correct classroom learning, but classroom learning is necessary to ensure that the language survives. Notably, she is one of only a handful of consultants who has young children, and her father had taken part in significant language elicitation work with a highly trained academic linguist. Another consultant with young children corroborates her perspective to some degree – he asserts that languages must be taught in schools if they are to survive because children won’t sit down to learn language at home; they would rather play games during their free time. Most other consultants demonstrate significantly less sense of urgency and are much more comfortable hearing out the litany of complaints regarding language in schools and waiting for some sort of consensus to be reached.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that, if nothing else, it is obvious that consultants have diverse, sometimes contradictory, views about the inclusion of language in schools, beginning with the assumption that schools are, indeed, appropriate venues for Aboriginal language learning. Taken together, consultants reveal a desire to balance maintenance of fluent language and maintenance of authentic linguistic practices, but there is little agreement about where the fulcrum should be. This thesis asserts that concerns about which language to teach in schools largely reflect a desire to maintain or reconstruct authentic processes, respect for Aboriginal authority, and idealized affiliations, sometimes through relatively recently innovated means. Analysis of the
situation reveals that the inclusion of language in schools poses a significant threat to all of these goals – it challenges traditional language socialization patterns and refutes the adequacy of traditional secondary language transmission practices. Schools can also, just like written materials, usurp the authority of proper language owners, simultaneously violating traditional authority structures and endangering the authenticity of the language and culture that is transmitted. In fact, Henderson (1994: 9) points out that some Aboriginal-run language programs are said to be more political than educational because their aim isn’t (just) to improve language ability but to improve the social realities facing Aboriginal people. In the Wangkatha context, his insights suggest that language education that is run according to Aboriginal goals may treat language ability as a secondary focus – one intended to achieve political ends, and one for which social and political sacrifices perhaps should not be made. Sacrificing Aboriginal control over language in order to ensure transmission of denotational code, for example, would sacrifice the ultimate political goals for the secondary linguistic ends.

That being said, many solutions to the problems encountered while trying to include Aboriginal language in schools have been proposed, including teaching language to adults first through a democratic process (Meakins 2010: 243), encouraging community members to participate in the classroom with children (Cipollone 2010: 175; Lowe & Howard 2010: 203) and structuring language content under core cultural values (McNaboe & Poetsch 2010: 221-2). Most notably, the Aboriginal Languages K-10 syllabus for New South Wales (2003) takes great strides in addressing concerns for NSW languages that have also been raised for Wangkatha. The prescribed progression teaches about appropriate language use and the links between language, culture and identity from the beginning levels of language instruction, and heavily stresses accurate pronunciation and paralinguistic features that many consultants fear will be lost in a
classroom environment. At the highest levels of instruction, students are expected to actually demonstrate appropriate language use - although this is after they are expected to demonstrate at least some command of grammar - and emphasis is given to authentic contexts for language use. However, implementation of this syllabus requires massive infrastructure that is far beyond the current reach of Wangkatha language learning, and the syllabus itself does not guarantee that these crucial aspects are properly addressed in actual practice. The mere existence of such a document might help allay consultant concerns in Kalgoorlie, but cannot fully address them.

Overall, it would be ridiculous to claim that the community wouldn’t prefer transmission of fluent contextualized language over contextualized language with limited proficiency – to make an opposition in these terms. Some modifications to traditional language socialization and secondary language acquisition may indeed be necessary in order to secure transmission of more fluent language, even if it is simply the gradual inclusion of grammar in addition to sentences, as described by Amery (2009) and Meakins (2010). However, decisions about what sorts of changes should be made do not fall under the authority of language workers. Language workers are in a good position to inform community members about the nature of the sociolinguistic changes that have taken place and their options for responding to them, and to help implement the plan that they make. Enforcing ‘pedagogically sound’ language teaching regardless of its effect on sociolinguistic practices not only limits the likelihood that the community will ‘be on board’; it imposes some kinds of change in the name of reversing other kinds of change, ever under the assumption that the outsider expert knows best.
Chapter 5. Language mobilization in Native Title Claims

The previous chapters have reported on the concerning effects of language work that is taking place in the name of linguistic and cultural revitalization and, ultimately, Aboriginal empowerment. It has been argued that many efforts to salvage and maintain language per se demand changes to sociolinguistic practice, while many community members desire language work precisely in order to restore or maintain sociolinguistic practice, and want it to occur in ways that will have this effect. Language ideologies and sociolinguistic practice, however, are subject to influence not only when language is the focus of action, but also when language is mobilized – that is, invoked as a necessary component of action – as a political tool for an indirectly related political struggle, as often occurs in indigenous rights movements. Along these lines, this chapter investigates the nature of language ideologies among Wangkatha language consultants as they have been highlighted in the recognition of Indigenous land rights through Native Title legislation. It is argued that the ideologies that underpin empowerment efforts of this sort can reshape the way language is conceptualised, especially through the intersection of access to tangible benefits and language-based processes of authentication. Just as efforts to maintain language can impose cultural change, efforts to maintain language for non-linguistic goals can result in ideological transformation.

Before discussing its role in shaping language ideologies, it is first necessary to understand the basic premises of Native Title. Basically, successful claimant groups are recognized by Australian law as the Native Title holders of their claimed land, and - to a certain degree - their traditional rights to their land are officially seen as never having been legally extinguished. Claimants must meet certain requirements to demonstrate that they qualify as Native Title holders – an imperative that meets with sharp criticism from many Aboriginal people because those requirements do not necessarily align with
Aboriginal values and tradition. The benefits that result from successful Native Title claims vary greatly depending upon the diplomatic prowess of group representatives and the value of the land to outsiders such as the mining industry, but many Australians perceive that there are significant automatic benefits that incentivize specific behaviors, such as speaking a certain language. Language can be used in Native Title to help identify the relevant group, and many (especially Aboriginal) people believe that language is instrumental in validating that group’s authenticity and validating an individual’s membership to that group. Language, therefore, is invoked, often in non-traditional ways, in discussions about Native Title and in court proceedings.

**Wangkatha Native Title claims**

The most relevant Native Title claim during the time of this research was Harrington-Smith on behalf of Wongatha people v Western Australia (2007). Originally, claimants from several separate groups were preparing individual cases for Native Title holdings in and around Kalgoorlie. However, under early legal advice, many of these groups joined together under the same claim and additional groups were added throughout the evidence gathering period. This amalgamation was rife with political struggles that fall outside the scope of this thesis: for example, some consultants view many of the later ‘add-ons’ as inauthentic, asserting that those groups were just trying to cash in on what many community members predicted would be a lucrative land-use arrangement between local mining companies and any legally recognized Native Title holders. Others accuse the earlier claimants of being inauthentic, saying that later groups only joined in because they worried that the illegitimate groups making the claim might win Native Title over land that was never theirs. Whatever the reasons for the amalgamation, it became a substantial reason for the ruling against the claim – in his published reasons for judgement, Justice Lindgren
cited the failure to establish group cohesion under traditional Dreaming criteria as a significant factor. In his words:

*A major issue in the case has related to the nature of the claims as group claims. The issue raises the anthropological question of the nature and basis of rights and interests in land and waters under traditional (pre-sovereignty) laws and customs of the Western Desert. At that time, the Aboriginal people were semi-nomadic. The evidence shows that the subject matter of ownership was areas defined by Dreaming (Tjukurrpa) sites and tracks, and that it was the connection of the individual to an area so defined that made the individual an ‘owner’ of that area.*

*[…]*

*The individual’s claimed ‘country’, established by reference to the notion of multiple pathways of connection, was referred to in evidence as his or her ‘my country’ area.*

*[…]*

*The present Claim groups are associations of people who recognise each other’s claim to a ‘my country’ area, and the present Claim areas represent aggregations or poolings of their ‘my country’ areas.*

*[…]*

*[… it is not shown that all of the constituent ‘my country’ areas are themselves defined by reference to Dreaming sites or tracks. In substance and generally speaking, what appears to have occurred in this respect is that in the Claims as brought, the multiple pathways of connection concept has come to displace the requirements as to the definition of the subject matter of ownership.*

*It is conceivable that an individual or a small group of individuals may have native title in a smaller area representing a constellation of Dreaming sites or tracks, but there are not group rights and interests in the Claim areas as such.*
Since the disappointing ruling, several smaller claims have been lodged. Some claims surrounding the Kalgoorlie area have been successful so far, but no claim in the name of Wangkatha people has. The rejection of this major claim and the subsequent filing of smaller claims means that Native Title concerns factor significantly in many statements and even practices surrounding Aboriginal language and culture.

**Language in Native Title**

When invoked for Native Title purposes, language becomes a tool for meeting externally defined criteria. The roles that language plays are largely shaped in accordance with new methods of cultural evaluation, although Aboriginal people are often quite clear that they want language included because it is important in their group identity. Henderson (2002: 3) presents the following uses of language in a Native Title claim:

*Language is relevant to the extent that (i) it is involved in identifying the relevant group of people, (ii) evidence for the continuity of a language contributes to a claim for the continuity of tradition and (iii) terms in the language are used in describing the cultural system.*

The two that are most central here are the ability to identify the relevant group, discussed briefly below, and the role of language in demonstrating continuity, to which an entire section is devoted later.

Language can be used in court to identify the group that is relevant to a Native Title claim (Henderson 2002: 3). The process involves analyzing language naming (McConvell 2002: 279), establishing time-depths for the continuity of groups over time (Alpher 2002: 245; McConvell 2002: 259), and, most importantly here, identifying the continuing ideological nature of the language or dialect group. If a dialect group can be demonstrated to have diverged from related languages, the ideological distinctiveness of
the speech community can be convincingly argued to have been salient at the time of divergence (Bowe 2002: 126). The enduring salience of the group distinction can then be demonstrated by continued divergence. The relationship between language, group and land is recognized to be quite complex, and Henderson (2002: 4) notes that there is clearly no legal requirement that a language and group be demonstrated to be coextensive: a single group can speak more than one language, and a single language can be spoken by more than one group. However, the use of language to identify group boundaries drives many people, including the consultants for this study, to envision sharp divides, often on the model of distinctive dialect groups. This signifies a change from traditional concepts of language group-ness because, while linguistic distinctions were always salient, the boundaries were not traditionally crystallized in the way that Native Title proceedings are perceived to demand. As with choosing which language to represent in schools, Native Title creates dysfunction about line-drawing and certainty.

Linguistic identity can be used to authenticate a group as a whole. This type of authentication affects language practice because different authenticating bodies (Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal) interpret the relationship between linguistic identity and language use differently. Aboriginal linguistic identity has been argued time and again to be a matter of language ownership more than proficiency (Sutton 2002: 24), meaning that a person’s linguistic identity is not determined by the language(s) he or she speaks (as a first language, in specific domains, or necessarily at all), but rather by complex connections to tracts of land and families and the language(s) associated with them; however, the potential that outsiders will see proficiency as the true marker of linguistic identity makes language practice a crucial factor. Therefore, insecurities about Native Title drive some to emphasize their claim for the existence of a distinctive dialect/language spoken only by members of their group.
Language can also be taken to validate individuals’ claims and, by extension, their inclusion in Native Title claimant groups. One consultant described his experience in a Native Title court, in which he felt that he demonstrated the superior validity of his claim by speaking traditional language more fluently than other claimants. In his story, he did not focus on any statements made on the stand, but rather on language use in casual conversation during breaks – a distinction that suggests the importance of authenticity in the face of one’s competitors because the demonstration was made in a way that would not directly impact the official court proceedings. A couple of consultants also discussed the use of inappropriate place or group names by claimants: to them, using the wrong name to denote a group or name a modern location demonstrated a lack of familiarity with Wangkatha language and, by extension, a lack of authentic Wangkatha identity. In particular, a consultant identified the endonym used by one claimant group as incorrect in form – this consultant claimed that the endonym was actually the word for ‘vagina’. This group’s adoption of the endonym, then, was taken by the consultant to demonstrate their ignorance about language and culture. Even without the influence of Native Title, the use of language as an authenticator of indigenous identity often requires continuity of form. Authenticating discourse typically dictates that, in order for a language, or the use of a language, to assert one’s authentic place within a traditional culture, that language must closely resemble the language that was spoken during traditional times. The uses of language in Native Title hearings call these assumptions into question more so than any other context because continuity is a specific requirement that can potentially be demonstrated through language. However,

35 This also demonstrates the value of language in political positioning, which falls out of the scope of the present research project.
some language change is inevitable, and language loss demands a different perspective on the link between language and culture.

**Demonstrating continuity**

Continuity can be established through arguments about language, among other factors that are less relevant to this thesis. Henderson (2002: 5) identifies three facets to continuity of language: the current state of knowledge about the language and ability to speak it; a demonstrable relationship between the language and the land under question; and unbroken descent of the language from the imposition of sovereignty to current times. The current state of knowledge of and proficiency in the relevant language can be argued to demonstrate a continuous cultural system. Henderson (2002: 3) notes that court precedent shows that the ability to speak a language is not necessary for making a Native Title claim, and speaking ability alone is not sufficient. However, he poses the remaining question of whether at least some members of a claimant group must have command of the language, as court cases have left the answer to that question undetermined. Furthermore, while broad linguistic identity has often survived better than traditional estates as the focus for traditional grouping (Sutton 2002: 24), the interpretation of expert linguistic evidence is left to a judge, and anticipations of these interpretations weigh on the minds of actual and potential claimants in ways that are discussed in the remainder of this section. Walsh (2002: 240) argues that the judgment in at least one Native Title hearing demonstrates a misunderstanding about the distinction between ownership and use. Therefore, it is quite understandable, and even rather savvy, that community members often believe that good command of their traditional language is necessary for a Native Title claim, and many have misgivings about demonstrating what may be limited linguistic competence as a result.
In order for language to be invoked in a Native Title case, its relationship to the claimed land must be established. This kind of relationship can be established in the court through a history of documented association between the language and the location, etymologies of placenames (Evans 2002: 55), analyses of dreamtime stories (McIntyre & Doohan 2002: 187), and, most important here, analyses of ideological connections. The last paints a complicated picture, belying the dogma of a ‘static model of the relationship between language and land’ (McConvell 2002: 283). From a strictly linguistic point of view, language, people and place are not inherently linked: people must believe in a link in order for it to have sociolinguistic value and linguistic impact, and that belief may itself be a facet of cultural continuity. Silverstein (1998: 404) similarly notes that a language group can only exist if there are perceived contrastive markers of membership and if there is some consensus about methods by which someone can demonstrate participation in a language community, and Woolard (1998: 18) explains that any marker of identity and group membership is necessarily ideological – language use, for example, is not itself an indicator of any particular identity; interpretations of language use are. In her words:

\[...\]simply using language in particular ways is not what forms social groups, identities, or relations[...]; rather, ideological interpretations of such uses of language always mediate these effects.

Connections between language and land are similarly ideological. In Aboriginal Australia, land, people and language are connected at least in regards to ownership – people who are connected to the same land are also often connected to the same language because the ownerships are acquired according to the same criteria. Therefore, language as it is ideologically conceived connects to groups as they are ideologically conceived and both connect to territories as they are ideologically conceived. Simplistic arguments that connect a reified language to uncontested territory in a direct manner
almost always overlook the complex ideological underpinnings. Explaining the underlying complexities in a courtroom, however, is problematic.

Especially in cases where language attrition has taken place, the notion of unbroken descent can be problematic (Henderson 2002: 5). It is not clear in law exactly how much language heritage must be demonstrated, as the relevance of language continuation is interpreted on a case-by-case basis. The requirement of continuity is often perceived by consultants and officials alike to demand that some claimants or their recent forebears, at least, have some degree of fluency in or knowledge of a traditional language. Additionally, many consultants suggest that others believe they must demonstrate that the language has not changed at all since contact. Linguists (and anthropologists who focus on linguistics) testifying as expert witnesses have established ‘normal language change’ as a mitigating factor for continuity. However, unless judges understand the processes of language change, they may not interpret this convention accurately. Furthermore, (potential) claimant groups are not necessarily aware of this mitigation, so any change in language, however small and however natural, can be seen as a saboteur to an otherwise authentic claim to those on the ground.

In regards to Native Title, the threat perceived by consultants from language change lies precisely in the possibility that these changes will be taken to demonstrate a lack of continuity, and that lack of continuity will result in a denial of Native Title claims. This focus helps explain the sharp perceptual line exhibited by many consultants, which distinguishes between traditional causes of language change (such as borrowing due to tabooing) and modern causes of language change (such as borrowing due to introduced technologies). Any change to language is seen as threatening, but at least a traditional kind of change can be argued as a sign of continuity: borrowing due to tabooing, while it requires a slight change in language, demonstrates continuity with an
important and widely recognized Aboriginal tradition. Borrowing in order to name newly introduced technologies not only presents a change to language, but also exposes the adoption of a modern lifestyle and that lifestyle’s integration into the very parlance of the most traditional community – language speakers.

Lexical borrowing also poses the risk of confounding the basis of historically ephemeral group names that have become crystallized. Recall that, in traditional practice, group names were often based on salient lexical distinctions between groups. These group names in the Western Desert could be quite fluid, as were the groups they designated, but oftentimes group names that were provided to Westerners during early contact have become crystallized – including that for the Wangkatha. When incentives to prove the validity of social and geographical boundaries emerges, the lexical distinctions that are evoked by the very names of the groups in question regain importance. Lexical borrowing, then, might be perceived as a threat because it could potentially jeopardize the authenticating power of words and their social boundaries, as the process of borrowing introduces the theoretical possibility that the word used to denote the group will change. Of course, borrowing always did carry this possibility, but the crystallization of group boundaries and labelling adds salience to the threat. The pronunciation difficulties introduced by the orthography, as previously discussed, pose similar threats – when the lexical distinctions used in naming (historically or currently) were or are actually phonological in nature, mispronunciation could be as damaging to crystallized boundaries as lexical borrowing. For example, the current distinction between the Wangkatha and Wangkatja labels primarily rests on a distinction between dental and palatal realisations of the laminal stop.\textsuperscript{36} The risk that the two groups who

\textsuperscript{36} It has been claimed that Wangkatha has a phonological contrast between dental and palatal categories where other Western Desert dialects generally do not.
distinguish themselves in this way may be seen as one group is part of the reason that current pronunciation of these two words is far more different than the laminal distinction probably was in traditional use. Wangkatha is typically pronounced with an (voiced or unvoiced) interdental fricative, while Wangkatja is typically pronounced with a palatal affricate. Neither sound exists in the traditional language, but the perceptual difference between the words is enhanced with these pronunciations.

Overall, fears about language change can be attributed, at least in part, to fears about the effect of those changes on the success of group claims under Native Title law. Such fears are also common to any standardization efforts, but can also be attributed to the unique situation posed by the standardization of endangered languages: the variety that is recorded becomes the sole means of transmission and a standard when other varieties. Native Title highlights many concerns that would have existed otherwise because it brings them into the courtroom during arguments about group composition and continuity.

**Language shift**

Many Native Title claimant groups are undergoing some degree of language shift – a fact that is hardly surprising given the morbidity of Aboriginal languages across the continent. Continuity comes under question in cases of language shift because the Native Title legislation, like many tools of indigenous mobilization, valorizes the traditional in juxtaposition against the modern. This juxtaposition has been characterized in many ways: the noble savage vs. the obscene substance abuser (Muehlmann 2008: 42); frozen traditionalism vs. total assimilation (Ginsburg & Myers

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37 Of course, these different pronunciations also quite clearly reflect the application of English spelling conventions to Wangkatha writing. Most English speakers pronounce the digraph ‘th’ as some sort of interdental fricative, and ‘tj’, while confusing, is more logically pronounced as a palatal affricate than as any other English sound.
2006: 28); traditional past vs. dystopic present (Ginsburg & Myers 2006: 31). In all cases, valorization means that claimants must present their connection to tradition in an atmosphere that often sees that tradition as mutually exclusive with modernism. This dichotomy is already conceptually present within the community – for example, the use of English and the use of Wangkatha are quite mutually exclusive in spirit, with strict domain divides and strong opinions about differing values and strengths. Resistance against innovating Wangkatha terms for modern concepts serves as a cornerstone example of this dichotomy – the value of Wangkatha is partly expressed in its relatively exclusive association with traditional past. Similarly, in the context of Native Title, the cultural expressions that most benefit a Native Title case are those that show continuity with traditional culture. The resulting cultural expression has been characterised as museumification (Errington 2003: 729) or immobilism (McConvell 2002: 262-63).38 Simply put, this juxtaposition denies claimant groups the right to adapt to their changing social landscape and punishes those that did so in the past. These effects mirror exactly other criticisms often levied against the requirements for Native Title claims.

Establishing continuity with a shifting language therefore becomes problematic in the community, first because the traditional language and culture becomes valorized in a way that frowns upon the kind of modern innovations that vitalize languages and cultures, and second because continuity of form is frequently valued above continuity of the ideological link between language and culture. It is vital to note that continuity is not so problematic from the legal perspective in Native Title – one person with a reasonably extensive knowledge of language would probably make a reasonable basis for continuity, and innovations that reflect cultural changes can attest to the vitality of a

38 Immobilism is centred on ideas of an unchanging geographical location as well as an unchanging culture. It is ironic that, in this case, the immobilism is caused by mobilization.
language (Henderson, pers comm). Valorization often accompanies language shift, especially in cases where language is in any way mobilized. This section, therefore, describes processes that would probably be underway even without Native Title law, and that don’t actually align with legal requirements. However, it seems that Native Title does bring these processes into sharper focus.

Valorization of tradition also presents a pair of paradoxes: first, the future of a cultural representation gets its value solely from its association with the past (Dobrin & Berson 2011: 189); and second, the very traits that were attacked during assimilationist eras (such as the Stolen Generation era) become necessary for recognition of special indigenous status (Muehlmann 2008: 35). The role of language in this ideological stance pivots on its essentialization with culture. It has been recognized for some time that this essentialization is in many ways problematic. Walsh (2002: 236) discusses the phenomenon in regards to Native Title in particular:

*Something is being lost as fluency declines, but much of the culture is being retained and much of it is being transformed. Whether land ownership relies so heavily on the parts of culture being lost (or transformed) that the land ownership will be negated must be determined on a case by case basis.*

Because Native Title specifically requires cultural continuity, not linguistic continuity, language can be used to demonstrate continuity only as far as it can be linked to culture. One approach to linguistic continuity argues that a language’s form must be similar to the form recorded in early history, although the natural change that occurs with any living language must be tolerated. This approach in regards to Native Title is probably best discussed by Bowe (2002: 105) in reporting Sommer’s contributions to the Yorta Yorta Native Title hearing. According to Bowe (2002: 105), Sommer presented the current morbidity of the language as evidence that continuity had
not been maintained. The findings most central to this conclusion, as provided by Bowe (2002: 106), were that:

- In the social domain, the speakers of Yorta Yorta lack the language resources to engage in meaningful conversation even on culturally relevant topics.
- Yorta Yorta language revival programs may serve a valid purpose in supporting Yorta Yorta identity and cohesion, but the resulting use of Yorta Yorta can only be regarded as symbolic.
- If Yorta Yorta is not actually dead, it is at best permanently frozen at a point of imminent morbidity by the language revival program.

Bowe concedes that the language could be considered moribund or dead if one focusses on transmission of language structure (Bowe 2002: 127), but maintains that this exclusive focus on linguistic form misses important aspects of continuity – such as ideological continuity. Similar arguments about the flawed, structural focus that linguists tend to bring with them to the field abound. Dobrin & Berson (2011: 195), for example, note that such a focus ‘runs the risk of under-theorizing the important role of mobility, diffusion and mixing in shaping endangered vernaculars, and in some cases sustaining their speakers’, adding later that a form-focused approach to preservation may even violate indigenous ideologies about continuity and community (2011: 200).

More specifically regarding Native Title, McConvell (2002: 287) argues against the assumption that language change equates to ‘a break in continuity of tradition’, thereby refuting notions that language loss should be taken to automatically nullify Native Title claims. Despite the fruitful scholarly debate on the subject, however, consensus has yet to be reached, and scholarship is not always reflected in courtroom judgements. Focus often falls on the continuity of linguistic form, resulting in understandable tendencies towards purism among potential claimants.
A more sociolinguistically-aware approach to linguistic continuity argues that the use of salient linguistic elements, particularly lexemes, that can be identified as part of the traditional language demonstrates continuity of the relationship between a language and a culture. In fact, even discourse that bemoans the loss of language typically demonstrates an ideological link between language and culture. Bowe (2002) argues the importance of this link in refuting the arguments she presented from Sommer (above). She observes that the Yorta Yorta people may have lost fluency in their language, but that they have clearly demonstrated a continued link between the language and culture by using remnants of the language to mark their identity – even just a few words known by a handful a people could suffice in some cases. Likewise, Sutton (2003) argues that a loss of traditional language cannot be taken as evidence against the authenticity of claims to linguistic identity, noting that linguistic identity is about owning or belonging to a language rather than speaking it. Bell (2002: 44) makes a similar argument:

*Goori people believe strongly that our languages are still very much a part of who we are and language continues to be one of our main spiritual connections to country. The form and use of our language has changed dramatically over the past 50 to 100 years due to numerous factors, but the continuity of connection has remained.*

It must be recognized that the relationship between a language and a culture is an ideological construct that is the property of individuals within a society and is subject to change. Endurance of these ideological constructs, which can only be demonstrated by practices that can be traced to the ideologies, is therefore a form of continuity. Just like with the creation of language materials and the inclusion of language in schools, an overwhelming focus on linguistic form can easily overlook the importance of language ideologies.
Ideological transformations

In fact, the sociolinguistic practices and associations that survive aren’t simply overlooked in the wake of Native Title: some are directly threatened. In all cases, more than just Native Title comes into play – some ideological transformation has been taking place since contact. The point here is that, even though Native Title does not seem to inspire practices without precedent, it absolutely highlights activities that reflect an ongoing ideological transformation. The two most prominent transformations have to do with group boundaries and language guardianship.

Where traditional practice saw remarkably individual-based affiliations between people, land and language as well as ephemeral naming and composition for large groups, modern practice attempts to approximate miniature nation-states with clear-cut boundaries. Therefore, the Western Desert dialect mesh that is typically studied as an extreme example of borrowing and cross-linguistic synonymy is ideologically broken up. Group differences did exist in some sense before Native Title, and corporate groups have been emerging since contact, but now Native Title law inspires a focus on clear boundaries. The many associations between people and land that are currently posited in court, however authentic they may be regarding traditional grouping, must now be argued in terms that convince a judge rather than in terms that have meaning in a traditional context.

The tendency towards Western naming practices and the normatization of groups that were reified according to them had substantial consequences: it contributed to the increasing corporatization of language groups, in ideology and practice alike, because it created groupings that were expected to endure. In early contact, missionaries, law enforcement agents and government authorities typically played the strongest roles in group naming and attribution of memberships outside of Aboriginal
practice, although a handful of researchers also had their impact. For the Wangkatha, group composition was based primarily on Mt Margaret Mission residence. Many Goldfields children who were institutionalized during the Stolen Generation were residents of Mt Margaret and, as in most institutions associated with the Stolen Generation, were lumped together with little or no regard for their traditional affiliations or speech variety. Initial understanding that the local Aboriginal population was ‘Wangkatja’ resulted in application of this name to all future residents of the mission. Due to this crystallization of variable groupings into proper names, and their eventual adoption by the Aboriginal population themselves, these names endure to the present day – in some cases along with associations to their early contact constituencies and locations. The children of Mt Margaret lived together in dormitories, forming close relationships with fellow ‘inmates’ who became, more than classificatory kin, life-long friends and the closest thing many of them experienced to family. Older children helped care for younger children, forming parent-child-like bonds – a fairly traditional practice at any rate. Mission staff, although non-Aboriginal, also formed family-like bonds with their charges. Thus the ‘group’ in mission settlements became more corporate in character, in that there were longer-term broad associations and co-extension between the relatively discernible group and their stable territory. Australia-wide, sharp, corporate-like delineations such as this probably did not exist until after contact (Sutton 2003), so such corporatization can be seen as contact-induced ideological change.

The introduction of benefits that are tied to Aboriginal group membership has contributed to the corporatization of groups because corporate groups are the most easily defined on the ground. Aboriginal society traditionally saw strong links between people, land and language, and those links that are of continuing importance (Sutton 2002: 23). Group boundaries of some type have always existed; however, before Native Title those groups could more easily be defined and redefined in reaction to social
purposes, day in and day out, as any social groupings are. The Native Title era creates incentive to prove that group boundaries exist, not just operate according to them in daily life, and to prove that they existed before contact with unbroken descent to modern-day groups. Sometimes, this incentive is thought by consultants to cause people to create new distinctions, or try to manifest distinctions through language in cases where language was never the basis of differentiation. This repurposing of social distinctions is a common social trait; however, with Native Title in the background, the new distinctions may be made according to criteria that will best suit Native Title purposes and crystallize that way. Even if Native Title does not constrain an individual’s creation of group delineations, it conditions the way that others perceive that individual’s posited groups. One consultant notes that:

_Because of Native Title, some people reckon they speak different languages when they really don’t._

Therefore, Native Title comes into play when people evaluate others’ claims to linguistic and social distinctions, coloring the political underpinnings of social habit. The shift is that many associations that are currently posited, however authentic, must now be argued in terms that have limited meaning in a traditional context, or are interpreted to have this requirement underlying. The complex relationships that were forged before contact are often conceptually traded for much simpler bounded entities that can be more easily adopted by individuals on the ground, thus crystallizing through Native Title claim the results of a process that began during early contact. The maps presented by expert witnesses demonstrate the dialect mesh scenario, but people who take part in the claims often believe that this mesh must be ‘sorted out’ in court for language to play a clear part in a Native Title claim.
In addition to a drive to identify clear boundaries, Native Title also inspires some to restrict the use of their language in apparently new ways. When language is used to instantiate and authenticate group membership, language proficiency becomes a potentially necessary and exclusivizing practice in an area that traditionally boasted multilingualism. Language guardianship, an ideology through which individuals seek to control who is permitted to learn and speak a language, seems to pose substantial ideological changes in an area where multilingualism and lifelong language learning was taken for granted (see Evans 2001 and Brandl & Walsh 1982 for discussion on these matters). In the Native Title era, the practice of language proficiency becomes potentially dangerous in the eyes of consultants who then seek to protect it, first because a failure to demonstrate command of the language may jeopardize an otherwise well-founded claim to identity and, second, because an ability to demonstrate command of the language may strengthen an otherwise unsupported claim. Individuals who feel that they have an authentic claim to identity but who are linguistically insecure may refuse to speak the language among people who might expose their linguistic knowledge to those who would deny their claim. Individuals may also be wary of language instruction because it would give more people language proficiency, which could in turn strengthen an inauthentic claim to identity. Exactly this is reportedly the case in one community near Kalgoorlie: a family that is fabled to speak the language fluently both refuses to work with linguists and protests the teaching of their particular language in local schools. While this family refused to talk to me (a linguist), others in the area explained that their sentiments were probably due to fears about Native Title. Henderson (2002: 17) likewise notes that:

Claimants may be concerned that having researchers document their knowledge of language and other things may amount to surrendering it to other
groups. This is probably more likely in areas where few if any claimants have substantial knowledge of the local traditional languages.

Language consultants give similar perspectives in more general terms:

_Some people don’t let others learn the language. ...They’re depriving their kids that way. They see knowledge as a threat, and with Native Title they’re worried about down the track, thinking their family will miss out._

Whether or not Native Title is actually the motivator for the actions of language guardians, the perceptions shared by Aboriginal consultants demonstrate that such fears are anticipated, and Henderson’s concurring observation suggests that these trends extend beyond the Wangkatha group. It must be said that language guardianship can be partially explained independently of Native Title. Language attrition often causes formerly mundane domains of language to become sanctified as discussed in chapter three. However, Native Title adds additional rationale for a process that may have taken place anyway.

_Consideration_

The ideological shifts that result, at least in part, from language mobilization present a paradox: they are created, formalized, or at the very least highlighted, as a result of attempts to valorize traditional values and practices. Likewise, Native Title law, which ostensibly aims to empower Aboriginal groups and respect their traditions, requires that claimants make their case in non-Aboriginal settings according to non-Aboriginal processes and for non-Aboriginal judges. The irony of such a system is not lost on language consultants, nor is it unique to Aboriginal Australia. While many of the ideological shifts that seem to be taking place can also be attributed to other factors and have reflexes in pre-contact tradition, Native Title, like language work in general, often causes linguistic focus to fall on language form rather than linguistic practices and
ideologies - sometimes because these are the factors that linguists focus on\textsuperscript{39}, but also because these are the factors that Aboriginal people believe that they will focus on. In some cases this means that the survival of linguistic practices is overlooked while the deterioration of language structures is identified on the ground and in the courtroom. In others, it means that traditional practices are actually modified, at least ostensibly, in the name of proving – exclusivizing - cultural continuity. Just as with language graphization and language in schools, the importance of sociolinguistic practice and comparatively invisible language ideology is rarely taken seriously; the importance of much more easily identified linguistic form is, on the other hand, magnified.

\textsuperscript{39} Many of the contributions to Henderson and Nash’s (2002) edited volume on Language in Native Title demonstrate that linguists often do bring in discussion of sociolinguistic associations and ideologies – see especially Bowe.
Chapter 6. Conclusion

This thesis has argued that consultants demonstrate, through overt expressions or through ideologies that seem to underlie them, that conducting language work according to external (usually western) expectations is often inappropriate. It is argued that, on serious analysis of consultant concerns, the processes and ideologies behind language are important components of language maintenance as well. However, these important processes are often ignored in language work and when language is mobilized for non-linguistic ends, as in Native Title.

By undertaking language work, linguists and anthropologists often demand ideological shift, unknowingly or not. First, they often intentionally or unintentionally create needs among community members – a need for experts, a need for (often called ‘contexts for’) literacy, a need for their own language. While some communities do overtly express these sorts of needs, or the needs can at least genuinely be interpreted from community members’ stated goals, often they are simply assumed and then imposed. Much misunderstanding along these lines stems from a fundamental difference between linguists’ typical initial goals and those more typical to communities. Linguists aim to bolster speaker numbers; community members typically aim to transmit their culture. Linguists often focus on the needs of the language (for its survival, for its proper encoding and graphization) under the assumption that this will enable them to best serve the community. However, the needs and goals of the people are sometimes at odds with the needs of the language in actual practice.

The typical focus on linguistic form overshadows many of the goals of the community. Among Wangkatha consultants, virtually everybody agrees that the language should be saved, but they have other goals as well. In fact, many sociolinguistic and extra-linguistic goals seem to underlie the linguistic ones, and/or are
prioritized above them. Stated desires for language work stem partially from hopes that authentic practices will be maintained or revitalized: that traditional practices of accommodation can be taken up again once the languages that are meant to be accommodated are actually spoken again; that traditional respect can be better shown once lexical restrictions, such as tabooed words, once again become common knowledge; and that traditional language ownership can come to have renewed meaning when the owned languages are themselves renewed. Some also hope that rescuing languages can help clarify affiliations between land and language and among people, or that the languages can continue distinguishing Aboriginal people from other Australians long into the future. These are all very social goals for which language is just part of the superstructure, and not an end in itself. Overwhelmingly, community members aim to be Wangkatha through Wangkatha language, not necessarily to speak Wangkatha. If the definition of Wangkatha language has to change in order to best serve the goal of being Wangkatha, that is more acceptable to some than speaking narrowly-defined Wangkatha but not as Wangkatha people.

Language work can not only overshadow these goals; it can actually work against them. With a focus on optimal language transmission, linguists may reform traditional practices of language transmission and even insist on a potentially contradictory enterprise of language graphization. These practices can indeed help bolster speaker numbers, but at the cost of the very authentic practices that some community members wish to maintain. Just as missionaries painted Aboriginal words white by forcing English meanings onto them, linguists may paint Aboriginal language white by forcing it through academically approved processes. Even by mobilizing language for non-linguistic ends in a rather ironic process for proving cultural continuity, non-Aboriginal definitions of language boundaries and linguistic continuity predominate. Wangkatha people generally indicate that they would probably be willing
to sacrifice some levels of authenticity in order to preserve more of their language and have shown their willingness to work within non-Aboriginal systems to access the benefits of their identity. However, neither extreme (full language fluency at the cost of most authentic practices, or full authentic practices at the cost of most language ability) is attractive to consultants, and this thesis has argued that it is up to community members, not outsiders, to determine the appropriate balance. While it can be argued that linguists have a duty to inform consultants of the findings of linguistic research into, for example language acquisition, in order to help them determine how to best achieve their strictly linguistic targets, it is not the linguist’s place to revalue their language for them and insist upon specific goals related to its maintenance. It is certainly not an outsider’s place to determine whether their proficiency or linguistic identity is valid. Not only does such an approach further undermine Aboriginal authority, but it potentially results in the ruin of consultants’ primary goals in order to maintain their secondary ones.
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