UNFINISHED BUSINESS: Some issues in need of attention in Australian language revival.

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Unfinished business

- What am I doing here?
- Is revival the goal?
- Is revival possible?
- Is school the answer?
- Is technology the answer?
- Is documentation the answer?
- Are protocols helping?
- Are linguists helping?
- Parting thoughts
What am I doing here?

- 30+ years in Australian languages
  - Community controlled/ responsive contexts
  - Last 10 supporting revival by training teachers
  - Current reclamation focus

- Observed issues (NSW emphasis)
  - Goals, planning, theory, research…
  - Lots of conversations with students/ activists

- Advocate of self-determination
  - Including the right to learn from mistakes

- But informed consent and ethics apply.
  - Watch out for that tree!
Is revival the goal?

- Has anyone asked the community?
  - What was that about ‘ideological clarification’?
  - It’s not too late…

- Is everyone talking about the same thing?
  - ‘Wellbeing’ versus linguistic outcomes
    - status, cultural revival, reconciliation, self-esteem…
    - first language, transmission, native speaker, domains…
  - Bringing language ‘back’/ keeping language ‘strong’
  - Does anyone agree on the ‘re-’ words?
  - Remember the AILF!
### Remember the AILF!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australia’s Indigenous Languages Framework (AILF) Categories</th>
<th>Defining Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language Maintenance</strong> (First language maintenance)</td>
<td>All generations are full speakers of the language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language Revival</strong> (learning the language of their heritage)</td>
<td><strong>Language Revitalisation</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Language Renewal</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Language Reclamation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Language Awareness</strong></td>
<td>Non-speakers learn about a language no longer spoken, and for which there are only traces of the spoken language and poor documentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language Learning</strong> (learning the language of someone else’s heritage)</td>
<td>Non-speakers learning a new language.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Is revival the goal?

- Dangers of assumption/ unconditional support
  - Cost/ benefit issues
  - Potential to achieve goals
  - Consequences of ‘failure’
- Revernacularisation needs specific action.
  - “When will we have our first native speaker?”
- Awareness is much easier,
  - but is it revival?
Is revival possible?

- What, do linguists think?
  
  *If successful language revival is taken to mean the full restoration of the language to a state of strong vitality (by re-establishing the broken language transmission link; regaining full conversational language knowledge and fluency; and active use of the language by all generations in wide range of social contexts), the chances of success for threatened Aboriginal languages are, in all probability, fairly remote.*
  
  (Schmidt, 1990 p. 106)

- Is there enough language to start with?
- Are people able to put in the effort?
  - Do they know how much is needed?
- Is success conditional on external resourcing?
Is revival possible?

- Reclaimed language is ‘new’ language.
  - Can the language be changed?
  - How much change will the community accept?
  - What price functionality?

- There is a great need for language planning:
  - that distinguishes goals from strategies,
  - sets outs times and responsibilities,
  - and takes account of theory and best practice.

- Yes, we can!
  - The Baldwins and Baird have shown us the way.
Is school the answer?

- Fishman’s ‘camouflaged failure’
- Most NSW revival is now located in schools.
  - Other states are following this trend.
  - Prestige & employment
  - Resources communities can use
- NSW Aboriginal languages syllabus K-10 (2005)
  - Your language, government standards
- Communities servicing school programs
- Recent establishment of ‘language nests’
  - Coordinating centres, *not* immersion preschools
  - Government service delivery
Is technology the answer?

- Self-contained, demonstrable outcomes
- Prestige and apparent modernity
- Naturalness versus simulation
- Skills transfer
- Cost & longevity
- Technical issues
- Useful if it facilitates meaningful communication,
  - otherwise often questionable.
- Talk language to me!
Is documentation the answer?

- It can be very useful,
  - but, doesn’t cause learning or speaking.
- Easier and more satisfying
- Tangible output
- Literature and archives give substance.
- It’s not revival,
  - but should be integrated into any program.
Are protocols helping?

- What are the protocols?
  - On and off country
  - Who can speak/learn/teach
  - Bureaucracy of borrowing

- Where do they come from?
  - Many can’t be historical, so recently created

- Whose interests do they serve?
  - ‘Language keepers’ or gatekeepers?

- Do they help or hinder?
Are linguists helping?

- Who committed the offences, where and when?
- How useful is stereotyping?
- Who is (was) a linguist?
- How much damage can linguists do,
  - apart from being annoying?
- How much help can linguists be,
  - given most aren’t trained in revival or education?
- Are people shooting the messenger?
- Haven’t see many around lately…
Parting thoughts

- It’s not too late for ideological clarification.
- It’s never too late to make plans.
- A good understanding of theory and best practice could save you lots of everything.
- Don’t trust schools to revive your language.
- Don’t trust technology to revive your language.
- Documentation isn’t revival.
- Only accept useful protocols.
- Don’t trust linguists, but use them anyway…