First Nations' Language Ecology and Language Education Policy in the State of Queensland, Australia

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要約

　本稿では，オーストラリアのクイーンズランド州における現在の言語生態について，特に先住民族が話す先住民族の言語について概観する。18 世紀にイギリスが植民地化して以来，多くの先住民言語が絶滅したり，英語や他の先住民言語との接触によって変化したりと，影響を受けてきた。本稿ではまず，クイーンズランド州の現在の言語生態について説明し，先住民が話す言語や方言の多様性を強調する。続いて，コミュニティや学校における先住民の言語を活性化し，維持するための国や州レベルでの取り組みについて述べる。最後に，クイーンズランド州の公立学校で先住民の言語教育が行われているいくつかの事例を紹介し，本稿を締めくくる。この論文では，地域社会の献身的な関与によって，特定の先住民言語の存続が可能であるという証拠を提示している。

Key Words : language (linguistic) ecology 言語生態, endangered language 危機に瀕する言語, indigenous language 先住民語, language revitalization 言語活性化, creole クリオール

Introduction

The precipitous decline in global linguistic diversity is an issue that has been addressed more and more frequently in recent years, and as a matter of some urgency. Although estimates vary, it is generally accepted that around 5000 - 6000 languages are in use globally today. However, predictions as to the percentage of these languages which will become either severely endangered or extinct by the end of this century vary from a low of 50% to a high of 95% (United Nations, 2022). Each language is an invaluable entity which expresses a unique worldview, underpins a culture, and represents a record of the human experience. The demise of a language is therefore not just the loss of a means of communication; it signifies the death of something much broader and deeper. To arrest this decline in the health of the global linguistic ecosystem, deliberate and sustained efforts over a long period of time at both national and local levels will be necessary.

　Australia is a country that is home to a large number of endangered languages. Indeed, a vast swath across the northern regions of Australia has been designated an endangered language

'hotspot'; that is, an area that contains a high proportion of endangered languages, high linguistic diversity, and low levels of documentation. Nationwide, prior to the arrival of British colonizers from the late eighteenth century, there are estimated to have been at least 250 languages in use across the Australian landmass and Torres Strait Islands. If we were to factor in dialects as well, then this number would at least double in size (Langton, 2019). In the words of R.M.W. Dixon, Professor of Linguistics at James Cook University, each of these languages "has a sophisticated system of grammar and vocabulary" and "absolutely comparable in complexity to the languages of Europe or Asia" (Dixon, 2019, pp. 4-5). Although around half of these Traditional Indigenous Languages (henceforth, TILs) are still extant, according to recent data, only a handful could be said to be in a viable state; indeed, "many languages could easily be lost in the next few decades" (*Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Policy*, n.d.). Tragically, such languages that have existed for millennia have been rendered extinct or severely endangered in a little over 200 years since British colonization. The growing influence of the English language over the past two centuries, in education, media, law, and everyday usage has put enormous pressures on TILs and led inexorably to the current situation.

In Australia, language loss has inevitably been to the detriment of the richness of the cultures of the First Nations peoples, the Indigenous peoples that have inhabited the Australian landmass as well as the Torres Strait Islands perhaps for the past 65,000 years. As McConvell and Thieberger (2001) state: "the Indigenous languages of Australia represent a great storehouse of knowledge and tradition" (p.106), and Langton (2019) adds, "Aboriginal languages strengthen the connections people have with their land, their culture and identity" (p. 30). In recent years, greater awareness of this situation has brought about efforts to halt the decline in TILs. Efforts are being made by national and state governments, language centres, Indigenous Knowledge Centres, communities, and schools to preserve and revive what they can from the steep decline in the use of such languages over the past 200 years.

This paper provides a broad overview of this situation by first, describing the language ecology amongst the First Nations peoples of Queensland. TILs in Queensland have been greatly influenced by language contact over the past two centuries: both contact among TILs, and with other languages, chiefly the English language. A knowledge of the current language ecology in Queensland should help in better understanding the situation regarding TILs, and the need to preserve them. The paper will then examine recent policies that aim to reform the education system, both nationally, and at the state level, to promote the effective teaching and learning of TILs in public schools. Finally, the paper will conclude with brief examples of case studies, describing how these policies are being implemented at the local level with the express aim of reviving and maintaining TILs for future generations.

The First Nations' Language Ecologies of Queensland

The following paragraph will provide an overview of the patterns of language use amongst First Nations peoples in the state of Queensland. It should be recognized that language usage in Australia is extremely complex, and the following is merely a rudimentary explanation to help provide an idea of the linguistic dynamics at work. It is by no means definitive, and readers should further examine the academic literature to gain a more detailed understanding. To begin with, Angelo and Poetsch (2019) describe three broad ecologies in which TILs presently exist, an 'ecology' being defined as "the configuration of languages spoken, heard, and identified within a specific place" (Simpson, Disbray & O'Shannessy, 2019, p. 8). The first category, Ecology A, represents those who speak a TIL as their mother tongue as well as English as an additional language; Ecology B describes a New Language (i.e., a TIL-based creole) as a first language as well as English, and perhaps a TIL as an additional language; finally, Ecology C covers those who speak an English dialect as a first language, and a TIL as an additional language (Angelo & Poetsch, 2019).

According to the Australian Census in 2021, around 8% of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island Queensland residents spoke a TIL at home, but this figure depended very much on region and level of urbanization. Therefore, more remote areas, particularly in the far north of the state, registered the majority of speakers of TILs at home with their families. Furthermore, according to the census, 71 Australian Indigenous languages were recorded in use in Queensland in 2021, although only 18 of these had more than 100 speakers (*Australian Indigenous Languages, Queensland, Census 2021*, n.d.). With regard to Indigenous Regions (IREGs), which are "large geographic areas built from whole Indigenous Areas and are based on historical boundaries" (*Indigenous Regions / Australian Bureau of Statistics*, 2021) then those IREGS of Torres Strait and the northern peninsular of Cape York ranked highest in terms of the number of people speaking a TIL at home. Along with the IREG of Cairns-Atherton, more than 70% of TIL speakers lived in these three regions. In a positive light, five of the eight IREGs in Queensland recorded an increase in the number of TIL speakers, compared to the previous census in 2016 (*Australian Indigenous Languages, Queensland, Census 2021*, n.d.).

If we exclude the 'New Language' of Yumplatok (which will be described later) from the census information, then among the most spoken TILs were Wik Mungan (947), Kalaw Kawaw Ya (805), Guugu Yimidhirr (781), Kuku Yalanji (347), and Lardil (295) (*Australian Indigenous Languages, Queensland, Census 2021*, n.d.). According to the Wik Mungan Indigenous Knowledge Centre, the location of Aurukun in northern Cape York, is "the last Aboriginal community in Queensland who have a traditional language (Wik Mungan) as a thriving and strong first language" (*Wik Mungkan Indigenous Knowledge Centre*, 2022). Importantly, the same source states that the speakers range from children to elders which would indicate that the language is in a relatively favorable situation. Indeed, the key is for young people to learn TILs as a way of maintaining the

health of the language. As Karadkis and Kelly (2018) assert, "[m]aintenance of Indigenous languages requires a large proportion of the Indigenous population who are children or in young adulthood to learn an Indigenous language" (p. 106). On the other hand, the Kalaw Kawaw Ya language, spoken mainly on three Torres Strait Islands as well as in the northern area of the Cape York Peninsula, is undergoing a language shift to the New Language of Yumplatok as well as Standard Australian English (*Kalaw Kawaw Ya – Pama Language Centre*, n.d.). As a result, the outlook for the Kalaw Kawaw Ya language cannot be said to be as good.

As for New Languages, this is the term often applied to the use of creole languages that have arisen through means of language contact since colonization. In the words of Angelo and Poetsch (2019), "New Languages show influence from various source languages including English and Traditional Languages" (p. 12). A number of creoles have been identified in Australia, and at least two have been codified and recognized as separate languages in their own right. The New Language of 'Kriol' is now spoken across a large swath of northern Australia, from the top of Western Australia, through the Northern Territories, and into the Cape York Peninsula of northern Queensland. It should be noted that the term, 'Kriol' covers a number of contact varieties existing across northern Australia and should not be considered as one single variety (Karidakis & Kelly, 2018). Also in Queensland, we see the existence of Yumplatok, also known as Torres Strait Creole or Ailan Tok, which according to Sellwood and Angelo (2013) "developed and spread to different islands" in the Torres Strait from the early 20th century and gained widespread currency as a lingua franca (p. 253). According to Langton (2022), "each Island [in the Torres Strait] has [its] own version of creole" (p. 45). Another creole spoken in Queensland is termed Yarrie Lingo, which developed quite differently from Yumplatok in the Yarrabah region, near Cairns. Sellwood and Angelo (2013) describe how people originating from various parts of Queensland and representing over forty TIL groups, were brought together in the Yarrabah Mission from the late nineteenth century to the 1960s. The language contact among these TILs, as well as other creoles brought from the inhabitants' original homelands, led to the development of the creole, Yarrie Lingo.

The common thread running through all these creoles is that English is the lexifier language and, according to Simpson et al. (2019), their grammars reflect both English and the TILs that have undergone contact and contributed to their development. Furthermore, it should be noted that as for the English vocabulary, definitions may not be totally consistent with standard English dialects, but "influenced by the respective traditional languages so that they are pronounced differently from English and have different meanings" (p. 8). Hence, these New Languages are mutually incomprehensible, with regards to both speakers of the TIL and the English language from which they have emerged. They are, as previously described, languages in their own right with systematized grammars as complex as any.

As for English dialects among First Nations peoples, it should be appreciated that there exist a number of Aboriginal English (AE) dialects that are widely spoken throughout Australia. Although Standard Australian English (SAE) is the English variety used in mainstream education, the media,

judiciary and so on, it is only one of a number of English varieties spoken in Australia today. Dialects of AE can range from those very close to SAE (the acrolect, or 'light' varieties) to those very dissimilar and almost representing a creole (the basilect, or 'heavy' varieties) which are often spoken in less urban areas. Since the 1960s, more attention has been paid to these AE dialects and this has led to them being recognized as genuine varieties of English, with their own consistent, rule-based grammars. Eades (2013) considers this recognition as "one of the most valuable contributions that linguistics has made to Australian society" (p. 2). Indeed, this recognition has helped establish AE as bona fide dialects of English rather than 'broken' or 'inferior' varieties that they have historically been treated as. According to Eades, a great number of Aboriginal people are able to speak at least two languages or two dialects and may code-switch, that is, speak AE with non-Aboriginal people, but a TIL or a New Language with fellow Aboriginal people. She distinguishes AE varieties from SAE in terms of phonology, grammar, words and their meanings, and the sociocultural aspects of their use (pp. 81 – 82). Butcher (2008) provides an overview of the many differences between AE and SAE and the reader is directed to such papers for a more detailed description of these differences. For example, with regards the lexicon, it would be assumed that in the more basilectal varieties, AE words reflect the local TIL and therefore would differ from location to location. However, as Butcher points out, in the more acrolectal varieties, commonalities in the lexicon can be observed regionally or even nationally (Butcher, 2008). Interestingly, AE lexical items not only reflect TILs but also archaic English terms that have since ceased to be in regular use in the standard variety. With respect to the more pragmatic usages of AE, Ober and Bell (2012) mention such culturally sensitive areas as kinship and indirectness, and state that "to be truly communicatively competent in Aboriginal English, one must grow up learning the cultural and linguistic rules and protocols of the specific Aboriginal social group to which one is connected" (p. 73).

It should also be noted that as well as Aboriginal English which reflects the traditional languages of mainland Australia, we can also find evidence of Torres Strait English, which is distinct from Yumplatok (also known as Torres Strait Creole). Indeed, Shnukal (2001) claims that the two are "phonologically, grammatically, and semantically distinct" (p. 182-183) although admits that the boundary between the two is confusing. Compared to other non-standard varieties of Australian English, Torres Strait English shares features in common, but also comprise those that "appear to be transferred from the island languages" (p. 197). Although not as well researched as varieties of AE, Torres Strait English should be regarded in its own right as another addition to the constellation of languages and dialects that are spoken in the state of Queensland.

Education Policy for First Nations Languages

The following section provides an overview of recent developments in the education of First Nations languages at a national level, and following that, more specifically in the state of

Queensland. The provision of the teaching of TILs in the classroom poses unique problems in Australia where "the linguistic ecologies surrounding Indigenous children...presents considerable challenges for school systems that have SAE as the main target language" (Simpson & Wigglesworth, 2018, p.75). In a relatively small number of schools across the country, efforts have been made to teach local Indigenous languages for a number of years, particularly at the primary school level. However, the teaching of these languages has lacked systematicity and often given way to the more conventional curriculum-based languages such as French and Japanese in Years 5 and 6.

A landmark in the revival of First Nations languages was set down in 2015 with the provision of the *Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages* by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), an independent statutory body. The *Framework* has been devised through consultation with those already engaged in providing TIL classes in every state and territory of Australia. Of course, unlike the situation in countries such as New Zealand or Wales, Australia has a large number of Indigenous languages and rich language ecologies which make the development of curricula and materials a lot more challenging. This is acknowledged in the *Framework*, which endeavors to look to the future and the eventual development of Indigenous language education. To be specific, the *Framework* is intended to "result in curriculum development and school programs that are nationally commensurate in terms of teaching, learning and assessing" (*What Is the Framework?* n.d.).

As described previously, language ecologies in Australia are complex and First Nations students may come to school from a variety of linguistic backgrounds. Hence, the *Framework* has had to embrace this reality and provide for such complexity. According to the *Australian Curriculum (Pathways)* document, three pathways are recognized within the framework: First Language Learner Pathway (L1); Second Language Learner Pathway (L2); and Language Revival Learner Pathway (LR) (*Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages*, n.d.). Each pathway caters for students from different language backgrounds. Simply put, the L1 pathway is for students who use their Indigenous language as their first language, having learned it at home and using it in their daily communication. This pathway is designed to offer a way of reinforcing the validity of the language and helping students to expand their use of the language in terms of genre and register. It can also emphasize the orthography of the language by developing students' writing skills in the language. The L2 pathway is intended to cater for students learning a language 'off-country' (i.e., not used in the area of the school) that has a speech community elsewhere, embracing different generations using it on a daily basis. Thus, students are able to study a language and a culture with which they are unfamiliar, and most of these students will learn the TIL as an additional language. On the other hand, students who are 'in-country' but do not speak the local Indigenous language have an opportunity to learn the language of their community and bolster their First Nations identity. Finally, the LR pathway includes the majority of Indigenous languages in Australia and those that are "in various stages of revitalization, renewal and

reclamation" (*Structure*, n.d.). These categories cover First Nations languages in varying states of health: languages which are currently "being revived by their owners or custodians" (Disbray, 2019). Therefore, language revitalization targets languages that still have L1 speakers, but where intergenerational transmission has been interrupted. The L1 speakers would tend to be from the older generation. Language renewal is for those which are spoken by adults "to varying degrees in the community" (Disbray, 2019). Finally, language reclamation comprises those languages that are 'sleeping' and which rely "primarily on historical documentation...in the absence of community knowledge" (*Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages*, n.d.). If we look at these three distinct situations in Queensland for example, the Dyirbal language is categorized for language revitalization, Yugambeh for language renewal, and Yuwibara for language reclamation.

In 2009, the Queensland Government added a preamble to the Queensland Constitution that recognizes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and paid tribute to "their unique values, and their ancient and enduring cultures, which deepen and enrich the life of our community" (Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland, 2017, p. 56). *Many Voices: Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language Policy*, aims to recognize the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages for "maintaining cultural identities" and "promoting Queensland as a thriving, vibrant cultural state that values, and embraces" such communities and languages (*Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Policy*, n.d.). In 2019, the *Queensland Human Rights Act* was signed which acknowledged the right of First Nations peoples to "enjoy, maintain, control, protect, develop and use their language, including traditional cultural expressions" (Queensland Government, 2019). Also in 2019, the Queensland Government released the 'Statement of Commitment – to reframe the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the Queensland Government', which included reference to a number of ongoing commitments, including the Human Rights Act 2019, which aim for better outcomes for First Nations peoples in Queensland. The Statement envisages future actions to be "underpinned by the principle of self-determination actioned through truth telling, empowerment, agreement making and high expectations relationships" (Services (61121), n.d.).

The Queensland Government's *Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Policy: Action Plan 2023 - 2025*, set four priorities with the aim of promoting the vision "[t]hat Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in Queensland are strong, acknowledged, maintained and accessible to all Queenslanders" (*Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Policy Action Plan 2023-2025 Background and Context*, n.d, p.2). These priorities are as follows: Pathways; Action and Activation; Restoration and Transmission; and Recognition and Promotion. It is beyond the scope of this paper to record the fine detail of these priorities, but where they directly impact the education of TILs, a few details will be provided. The first priority, Pathways, endeavors to build physical, cultural and social infrastructure as a way of supporting language growth. For example, by helping to create training packages to support the professional

development of Indigenous language educators, and to work with local community groups. The second priority is Action and Activation which "focuses on sharing and encouraging the development of language expertise and resources" (p. 4). Although this covers many walks of life such as Magistrate Court interpreters and increasing TILs in the area of cultural tourism, for the purposes of this paper, it focuses on the implementation of the Australian Curriculum *Framework* previously mentioned. The third priority, Restoration and Transmission, aims to increase the number of people who speak TILs on a regular basis, as well as the storage of traditional languages. This includes encouraging the documentation of languages through public libraries and Indigenous Knowledge Centres as well as improving access to recording facilities at the Bulmba-ja Arts Centre in Cairns. With respect to schools, this priority encourages state schools and communities to work together to increase language growth "through use in the classroom" (p. 6). Finally, the fourth priority, Recognition and Promotion, "Seeks to increase awareness and understanding of Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages at wider community level" (p. 8). This priority comprises the most 'actions' and encompasses, among others, recognizing traditional languages through original place names and signage, supporting non-Indigenous organizations and operators to promote traditional languages, and encouraging the revitalization of languages. In terms of education, the fourth priority aims to provide "professional development opportunities" for those teachers whose students' mother tongue is "a language or dialect other than English", provide information for early childhood education and care services on how to include First Nations Languages in their programs, and investigate strategies to "support all schools to recognize and acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander Country and languages of their school location on signage and school websites" (pp. 7-8).

The Current Reality of First Nations Language Education in Queensland

Although the teaching of TILs in schools has a relatively short history, prior to the inclusion of the *Framework* in the Australian Curriculum (version 8.4), "six of the eight jurisdictions [in Australia] already had syllabuses for F-10 and/or senior secondary years, developed between 1998 and 2011" (Angelo & Poetsch, 2019). Such programs are seen to be effective, not only in promoting the language itself, but also in giving First Nations children a feeling of pride in their cultural identity and this can have sweeping effects across the board in school contexts. Indeed, according to Walsh et. al (2014), "there is increasing evidence that Indigenous students who have studied their heritage language show a marked improvement in their academic achievement across all learning areas" (p. 107).

Therefore, the teaching of these ancient languages provides so much more than mere linguistic knowledge. According to O'Brien & Bobongie-Harris (2023), such programs need to be carefully and sensitively developed in order to be successfully implemented. They describe a three-pronged approach to such development: co-design, authentic delivery, and cultural inclusivity. To

be brief, any program that introduces a First Nations language into a school should be co-designed with traditional owners and elders of the language. Giving agency to the Indigenous speakers is essential "to ensure that community voices, ideas, and practices are acknowledged throughout the entire process" (O'Brien & Bobongie-Harris, 2023). Secondly, it has been deemed essential to encourage the authentic delivery of such First Nations languages by developing the cultural-capacity of teachers who will be working with a variety of learners. Finally, it is important for educators to "consider language models that are specific to the local area, if possible, that will enhance culturally inclusive learning opportunities for all students" (O'Brien & Bobongie-Harris, 2023). Thus, the introduction of a First Nations language into a school isn't simply a matter of adopting a textbook and syllabus and delivering standard language classes. It has to be a collaboration, involving consultations with the speaking community, Elders, educators, and linguists alike to provide a program that respects the language and the cultural sensitivities of those who speak it. According to *First Languages Australia*, the number of traditional languages being taught in Queensland schools as of the second semester 2018, was 24, and 55 schools in the state were either actively teaching or investigating the possible teaching of a TIL. This meant that approximately 4200 students in Queensland were enrolled in a school teaching a TIL at that time (*Nintiringanyi: Teaching and Employment Strategy*, n.d.).

The following section will deal with the practical and tangible ways in which TILs are being revived in schools in the state of Queensland. In particular, it will focus on efforts being made in schools and language centers in the state with the purpose of raising awareness of and maintaining TILs. The Queensland Department of Education has issued a Statement of Purpose which seeks to "assist Queensland Educators and school communities to support the languages and cultures of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within the school context" (*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Statement*, 2018). With respect to the teaching of languages in schools, the department has adopted a "three-way strong' approach which they hope will enable Indigenous children to deepen understanding of their own culture as well as that of the Indigenous community. The three ways comprise: 1) recognizing and affirming the child's home language, which could well be different from SAE; 2) improving children's proficiency in SAE by teaching it "explicitly, actively, and meaningfully"; 3) supporting the study and research of a TIL which can "develop cultural knowledge, pride, and identity for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students and non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students" (*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Statement*, 2018). This approach can also help to avoid the phenomenon, highlighted by Verdon & McLeod (2015), of 'subtractive multilingualism' where "the home language is lost as a result of a language shift towards the dominant language of an educational environment or social context" (p.156). The 3 way strong approach endeavors to respect and affirm the home language of the students while building their confidence and proficiency in SAE. In Queensland, there are some notable examples of the implementation of a First Nations language program in the public education system, and examples of three of them will be provided.

First, in the Eidsvold State School, near Bundaberg, consultations over several years between the school and the local community have resulted in the teaching of the local Wakka Wakka language. Doris Beezley, who works in the school administration, is also a member of the Eidsvold Wakka Wakka group and has been crucial in providing a bridge between the school and the local community in order to develop a program that respects the cultural protocols of the local community. Both Aunty Doris ('Aunty' being a term of respect toward seniors among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders) and a language teacher who used to work at the school, Lachlan Mackenzie, appreciate that the support of Elders, staff and community was crucial in raising awareness of such protocols (*How Teaching an Aboriginal Language Has Connected School and Community*, 2021). Furthermore, the language program is in the process of being expanded to include other schools in the region ("Ancient Language Revived at Rural Queensland School, Building Resilience and Improving Attendance Rates," 2020).

In Mossman, a small community in the north of Queensland famous for 'Mossman Gorge', a part of the Daintree National Park, the local public school (Mossman State School) has introduced the teaching of Kuku Yalanji, the language of country in that area. The language program is aimed at students from prep to year four (*"My Heart Feels Lighter": School Language Program Fosters Reconciliation*, n.d.). According to Sharon Case, Head of Curriculum at the school, there is a rich diversity of languages, cultures and lifestyles within the school community, and around 50% of the students identify as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. According to Dominique Russell (2020) who interviewed Case, the consultation period with the local Indigenous community, the custodians of the Kuku Yalanji language, took around 18 months and the language program (in line with the Australian curriculum) was jointly developed by the school and the local Indigenous community. The local community also formed the Kuku Yalanji Language Advisory Group (KYLAG) to give advice on how teaching units can be developed, which topics to choose, and which cultural and linguistic elements to include. According to Case, the program has had a positive effect on the Indigenous students by strengthening their identity, wellbeing and connections. All students, whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous also experience a "deeper cultural understanding of our Indigenous people" and this has led to an improvement in student behavior (Russell, 2020).

The Pama Language Centre, based in Cairns, is actively helping in the survival of First Nations Languages in the Cape York Peninsula of far north Queensland. Its mission is stated on its website: "Pama Language Centre works with First Nations Language Champions of Cape York Peninsula to record, revive, revitalise and maintain our ancestral languages" (*Pama Language Centre – the Languages of Cape York Peninsula Are Treasures We Share*, n.d.). The languages in Cape York are of the Paman language family, and it is these which are focused on by the Centre for specific help. Of the approximately twenty languages that were targeted in 2023 by the Centre, one of these is Guugu Yimidhirr (*Guugu Yimidhirr – Pama Language Centre*, n.d.). The Guugu Yimidhirr language is spoken around the area north of Cooktown and was the Aboriginal language that

Captain James Cook and his crew encountered and recorded when they beached their stricken ship, The Endeavour, at the mouth of the Waalumbaal Birri (in English known as the Endeavour River) in 1770. Thus, it became the first Australian language to be recorded by European explorers. Amongst the 150 or so words of Guugu Yimidhirr that the crew recorded at that time, the most noteworthy is the word 'gangurru' which has entered the English language as 'kangaroo' to describe the particular species of marsupial pointed out by the crew members. Hope Vale, a town located 46 kilometers from Cooktown, is home to the most concentrated area of Guugu Yimidhirr speakers. Currently, the local primary school is working in conjunction with the Pama Language Centre to design and create materials to help schoolchildren to learn their ancestral language as part of the formal school curriculum. Local Guugu Yimidhirr language experts such as Lillian Bowen have been teaching the speaking and writing of the language in the classroom and developing materials along with the cooperation of the Pama Language Centre (*Guugu Yimithirr Current Language Activities – Pama Language Centre*, n.d.). Lillian Bowen has been particularly active in writing songs for the primary school children who can develop their proficiency of the language through this medium. In 2016, she also wrote a picture book for children in the Guugu Yimidhirr language to "support the intergenerational transmission of Guugu Yimidhirr". Also available as an e-book, students can read and hear the stories at the same which enables them to understand the correct pronunciation of the language (Admin, 2016). These efforts by the Hope Vale Primary School in conjunction with the Pama Language Centre are helping to rejuvenate the language and strengthen the identity of the Hope Vale First Nations community.

Conclusion

This paper has addressed issues connected to the education of Indigenous languages in Australia, with a particular focus on the state of Queensland. First, an overall description of the current situation regarding the language ecology of Queensland was provided. It can be recognized from this description, that the language ecology is complex, and embraces, among others, TILs, creole languages, varieties of Aboriginal English, as well as Standard Australian English. The paper then turned its focus on the current usage of TILs and the efforts currently being made at both the national and state levels to revive, revitalize, and maintain them. Through the provision of a flexible *Framework* for implementing the teaching of such TILs in the national curriculum, it is envisaged that more children in Australia will be given the opportunity to learn such languages. The situation in Queensland was further explained with reference to current language policy which seeks to expand the awareness and use of such languages and their various functions in the wider community. Finally, several case studies of TILs in the primary school classroom were provided as examples. It is clear that at the local level, the teaching of TILs often necessitates the active collaboration of schools, communities, Indigenous Knowledge Centres and language centres. The fruits of such collaboration have been seen in schools around Queensland, and the benefits to both

Indigenous and non-Indigenous children alike have been observed. The active preservation of TILs in Australia has a relatively short history and the longer-term results of such actions described in this paper are yet to be fully understood. However, the author feels that there is room for However the author feels there is room for optimism in some cases. Indeed, it is encouraging to know that with the support of national and state governments, many local communities are taking the initiative and endeavoring to promote a sense of pride in their TILs and ensure their survival and transmission to future generations. Such focused efforts, along with constant vigilance, should hopefully provide a future for a number of TILs and ensure that the rich culture of Australia's First Peoples is safely maintained.

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