The Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages has produced this series of factsheets to support communities working to revive their languages. These factsheets reflect what we learned from the Meeting Point Project, which was run between 2008 and 2014. In that project, we focussed on the ways revival languages are being brought back into communities by Elders, language workers and language activists. All the factsheets are about these newly living languages, brought from the past into the present and future. We are very grateful to the people who have agreed to share examples of their languages with you in this way. We especially thank our case study language programs: Wiradjuri (Parkes program), Butchulla (Hervey Bay), Keerray Woorroong (Warrnambool), Wathaurong (Geelong program), Gumbaynggirr (Nambucca Heads) and Gunai/Kúurnai (Gippsland).

There are four different types of factsheets. Each one focuses on just one topic for language revival.

**METHODS**

These factsheets describe some of the tasks associated with language revival: using words in English, writing translations, compiling dictionaries, and exploring meaning. Discovering different ways for learning about the cultural knowledge attached to many words is a rewarding part of this work. Our focus here is on showing that there are all sorts of different ways to go about these tasks and no right or wrong places to start. Each sheet provides examples and an idea or two for workshops to support language revival work.

**PRACTICE**

How do you get the language out there? Living languages need to be used. These factsheets explore some widely used strategies for re-introducing language into the community: incorporating language in everyday writing such as community notices, making signs, writing songs and giving Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country speeches.

**PRINCIPLES**

Language revival is something new. People are learning how to do it and what is important as they go along. For these reasons, there are a lot of questions for communities to explore. Language revival is a powerful source for healing. Communities often experience a revival of cultural practices, brought into the present, as part of the language revival journey. Ensuring that these old and new ways of doing things are done properly is a major concern for many people. What of the nuts and bolts of language? There are factsheets in this section on exploring the grammar patterns of your language, and the role of linguists and linguistics in language work.

**PATHWAYS**

The choices people make in their language revival journey are reflected in the types of language that develop at different stages. These factsheets talk about how language revival starts and the different ways it can go. Each set of choices leads to different results – but all language pathways that strengthen the spirit and reconnect communities to each other and to Country are powerful ways of working towards a better future.
In the early stages of language reclamation, people usually like to start from English, and substitute words of their own language. This approach has some advantages:

- You can produce early resources quite quickly, without a lot of time needed for language research and checking. One way is to start with words that are already known in your community.
- You can focus on some of the cultural knowledge, traditional stories and so on that give the language its life and meaning.
- You can introduce words without translating them, using the English context, pictures, and knowledge of the story to help people work out what the words mean.
- You can focus on words around a theme to support a school program, such as ‘families’ or ‘weather’.

**IDEAS**

For writing stories, or translating traditional stories, people usually like to use the Language name for all their animal or Ancestor characters. Other people add sets of words, like colours, or a range of important basic words for Country or parts of Country, sun and moon, girl/boy and man/woman, and so on. If these are well known, or if you have good clear pictures, there is no need to give the English name as well. Sometimes people use the English word just once, and after that only the Language word. This helps readers to gradually stop relying on English.

Some people like to replace every English word with a Language word. This approach still uses English language patterns, so it’s just a matter of finding all the words! Sometimes you might have to be a bit creative about how to look up words. For example, if you can’t find ‘tall’, try ‘big’ or ‘high’. Also, remember that an Aboriginal language does not need the little ‘grammar words’ that English has, like ‘the’ and ‘an’.

**Walalbai nalwar – Small crab – Butchulla – J. Bonner**

They swam in Dungula, the Murray River, with Danela the fish. (Bartja and Mayila - Yorta Yorta - S. Atkinson, illustration by A. Sax)
For this workshop, choose a story that is already known in your community. Alternatively, you could use the story below. This story is shared by several different language groups.

A long, long time ago, a giant frog drank up all the water in the rivers, creeks and billabongs, until there was none left. The other animals, afraid of not having any water, discussed what they should do. They agreed that they should try to make him laugh. If they could make the giant frog laugh, then all the water would spill out of his mouth, back into the land. They tried many ways to make him laugh, but they all failed. Eventually, a tiny eel appeared, spinning and twisting on the hot ground. The more the eel wriggled, the more the frog’s face spread into a big grin, until finally he could hold out no longer. The giant frog roared laughing, and all the water poured out of his mouth, into the rivers, creeks and billabongs.

THE TASK
Using your own wordlists and dictionaries, choose some of the words in your story to put back into Language. There are a few ways to go about this:

- You might select a few key words to look up.
- Sometimes you will be able to find the exact English word you are looking for.
- If you can’t, think about what the word means. You may be able to find a word that is translated slightly differently. For example, what other words have a similar meaning to ‘tiny’?
- Think also about cultural meanings. For example, for an apparently simple word like ‘water’, you may have several words – one for salt water, one for fresh water, and so on. Your language might not have a word as general as ‘animals’. Because Indigenous languages grew up with the land, words for anything belonging to that land usually express very detailed knowledge – such as exactly which animal, whether it is male or female, and so on. So how will you translate ‘animals’ in your language?
- If your dictionary has a categories section, it is sometimes easier to browse through a category, such as ‘land/geographical features’, to see what kinds of words you have available.
- Keep in mind that it is not the English words which are important, it is the meaning behind the story. If you have the meaning you want to express, it doesn’t matter if it’s not quite the same as the English.
- Work up some illustrations to complete your story.
- Next, think about whether you need English as well as the Language word. Some questions to help with this:
  - Can the reader understand the word from the pictures?
  - Can the reader understand the word from the story context?
  - Would a Language – English wordlist at the back be enough?
  - What about a wordlist at the bottom of the page for any words on just that page?

When you are happy with your story, read it aloud to each other or into your phone or computer.
There are all sorts of ways to write in Language. You can start with English or you can start from an idea or a picture without writing in English first.

Some strategies include:

- Replacing every word from an English text with a Language word
- Starting from an idea and finding the Language words you need
- Using known formulas (such as greetings) to build up conversations
- Using known grammar patterns to build up stories
- Combining any of the above strategies to get the job done!

IDEAS

When working from English there are a couple of things you can do to make the process more manageable. For one thing, it’s worth looking at the English original to see if you can make it simpler. The simpler the English is, the easier it’ll be to find strategies to translate into Language. Sometimes this might even involve changing some Language words into English.

Original - If there is fresh grass found near Tarn Weerreeng without a funeral having taken place, someone was killed. No one is allowed to go there. (Deen Marr – Keerray Woorroong)

Rewritten - When you see fresh grass near Tarn Weerreeng (Road of Spirits), when [there was] no funeral, you know someone was killed. No one will go near.

Deen Maar

Photo: Joel Wright

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Original - Deen Maar

Rewritten - When you see fresh grass near Tarn Weerreeng (Road of Spirits), when [there was] no funeral, you know someone was killed. No one will go near.

By using sentence patterns you already know, you can write simple stories. In this story by Myranda Tournier, she recycles one sentence pattern in four ways: Where will I … eat/dance/brush my teeth/sleep … tonight. Then her closing sentence answers each question. (Wathaurong – Geelong)

Wiya wurr-ik morggalu dyeela-tyaree-ik?
Where will I play tonight?

... Larroong yeek-a.
At my house.
For this workshop, choose a story that is already known in your community. Alternatively, you could use the following story fragment. This story is shared by several different language groups.

One day the crows were disporting themselves by throwing fire-sticks at each other. The sport consisted of catching the firebrands before they fell to the ground…

THE TASK

Practice re-telling the story in ways that make it simpler. Try one or more of these strategies:

- Without looking at the original written version
- As if you were telling a group of children
- In pictures or gestures

Now try rewriting the story so that there are only TWO or at most THREE elements in each sentence. For example:

| 1. WHO/WHAT is doing something | 2. What's HAPPENING | 3. WHO or WHAT else is involved or WHERE (if you need it…)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The little koala</td>
<td>climbed</td>
<td>up the tree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone</td>
<td>was late</td>
<td>to the workshop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the animals</td>
<td>laughed and laughed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We all</td>
<td>had a great time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The emu</td>
<td>fed</td>
<td>all its babies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once you can do this, it will be a lot easier to find the patterns you need to tell your story, in historical or linguistic sources.

EXAMPLE OF SIMPLIFIED GRAMMAR FOR TRANSLATION

(A) Original

One day the crows were disporting themselves by throwing fire-sticks at each other. The sport consisted of catching the firebrands before they fell to the ground…

(B) Splitting it into a small number of elements per sentence

One day the crows were playing/ by throwing fire-sticks at each other. They tried to catch the fire-sticks/ before they fell to the ground…

(C) Ready for translation

Once there were some crows. They were playing together. They were catching fire sticks. The sticks should not touch the ground…
LANGUAGE REVIVAL METHODS
DICTIONARIES AND WORDLISTS

WHAT A DICTIONARY IS FOR – AND WHAT IT IS NOT FOR

The point of a dictionary in language revival is to have all the words you have found in one place, so that learners and teachers can find them and use them. A dictionary cannot possibly contain your language. It is only the words and an English translation. It does not hold all the wealth of meaning and knowledge of your language, nor does it show you how the words go together into fluent living language. You will need more resources than just a dictionary. But making all your words accessible is a key foundation for your language program, even if you don’t pass it out to everyone.

A dictionary makes it much easier to produce other resources – a body parts chart, a fieldbook of birds, an introduction to kin terms – as well as translations, songs, stories and so on. You might also want what is called an ‘encyclopaedic dictionary’, that includes a large amount of cultural notes along with the words.

YOUR DICTIONARY, EDITION ONE – AND TWO

Many communities produce a first dictionary as an important milestone in the language research – and then do a second one later. This is not a waste of effort. The first dictionary allows you to get your language out there to the community, and – just as importantly – will produce reactions, comments, and hopefully more participation, to feed into a second edition. This process allows your 2nd edition to have a higher level of community understanding and agreement. Commonly it will have an improved spelling system and translations, more words, and often additional sections such as everyday phrases or some grammar explanations. All this takes time – a 2nd edition may appear years later. Often, 1st editions are only informally published, leaving the bigger expense till the bugs are ironed out.

LINGUISTICS AND DICTIONARIES

A dictionary involves perhaps a surprising level of linguistic issues to consider. These include:

- A spelling system that accurately reflects the sounds of the words, and that is acceptable and useable for both learners and speakers.
- Words that have several different meanings. For example, many Aboriginal languages have the same word for wing and arm. That same word may also mean a particular kin relationship, or a bend in the river. English doesn’t make these connections. But all these meanings are correct for that word, for that language.
- Words that don’t translate well into English. For example, many stages of development into adulthood are important in Aboriginal language cultures, and they are of course different from those of English. So historical sources may translate several words as just ‘man’ or ‘young girl’. These words are not wrong! But some meaning was missed when they were recorded. All these words are important in reclaiming your culture and language.
- Words that sound the same but in fact are different. Think about English ‘bark’ (tree or dog?) Every language has some of these.
- Related words, with different endings on the same words. There may be dozens of these for a single word.

To make an advanced dictionary that will last you for the long term, you will need some linguistic training and/or assistance to make well-informed decisions on these and other issues. Of course, you will also need to keep key community members involved in the decision-making process – so they will need some training as well. A dedicated language worker can be an excellent liaison between the linguistics and community worlds.
When you have a first-stage dictionary, or at least a good-sized and well-organised collection of words ready for a dictionary, you can use that collection to produce resources for much broader use quite quickly and easily...

MAKING WORD BOOKS

This project has been popular in Victoria and some other areas. We have been making them small enough to fit in a back pocket. They can be produced very cheaply and quickly. As well as the current dictionary or wordlist, the workshop facilitator should bring some samples of local artwork and/or photos, and/or ask participants to bring some with them.

1. In the workshop, decide on a small number of themes for the words you want. Examples: body parts, animals, family. Remember that books come in sets of four pages, so a multiple of four works well.

2. Using your dictionary or wordlist, select a first set of words on each of these themes. 10-20 words on each theme is ideal.

3. Write up each set of words on a separate page under their headings.

4. Choose some local artwork or a photo that represents your Country or community for the cover.

5. You may like to also choose a ‘watermark’ to go on the pages inside. This might be a small part of the cover art or photo.

6. Decide what else you need for a quick-reference book. The one illustrated has a spelling guide, acknowledgements, a statement of protocols for use, and a map of Victorian languages. (This step may take a little longer than the workshop time, but you can make the decisions in the workshop and work out who is going to write any extra sections.)

7. After the workshop, print it out, fold and staple and you’re done!

“There’s a lot more knowledge to go into that dictionary. And when we are done with that dictionary, it will be for the next fifty generations, because it will have that knowledge in it. That stuff that young people are asking me. It won’t be just a word. It’ll have those things that they need. Because there mightn’t be people around to give them that. Or you could have a dictionary that has other dictionaries attached to it, with that cultural knowledge.” - Doris Paton

“To get a dictionary, we want it how we would pronounce it, that we can understand and we can read it.” - Uncle Ivan Couzens

“They can take the dictionary home, the first stage dictionary like everyone else has got, and really get involved on what this word means and what that word means.” - Lee Healy
One of the things that many people love about learning Language is the way that there are layers of meaning behind so many of the words. The more you learn, the deeper you go into Culture.

“Some of those animals are spirit beings. And so their name is not just reflective of what the animal does, it’s reflective because the animal is also part of the spirit world. Sometimes you can’t really get a handle on the name until you realise that it’s a spirit name for the animal. When you start seeing those things, it transforms your feeling of being in the bush. Because you realise you’re surrounded by the spirits. And it makes walking through the bush an entirely different experience. And I would like the language to be used in that way.” - Bruce Pascoe

Learning culture through language

There are many striking differences between the ways that Aboriginal languages describe the world and the ways this is done in English. For example, there’s a stronger focus on differences between male and female in many Aboriginal languages than there is in English. Some languages use the same word for a tool or object and for the material that it’s made from: a basket may have the same name as a type of grass. Words for family members are different too - reflecting different ways of understanding how people relate to each other in Aboriginal culture.

“It’s not just the words, it’s all the meanings and the knowledge, the cultural knowledge. So it’s a whole thing you’re reviving, not just words and sounds.” - Vicki Couzens

Language ways can be used in English also

It’s also good to celebrate all of the ways that Language is part of the way people use English. All of this knowledge is part of the resources that people bring to language revival. In his novel Earth, author Bruce Pascoe uses lots of Aboriginal English:

“Tell you babies liddle story ’bout long time before … oh plenny warm that time… long long walk all over that country that time, walk all way to Condah, all big mobs there, big boonea fishin’ goin’ on, an’ all us peoples in stone warrun…”

Dictionary of Keerraywoorroong and related dialects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GALK</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>budagit galk</td>
<td>knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>branggu galk</td>
<td>stick, bat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>galk ba darrang</td>
<td>tree/“sticks on”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>galk dening</td>
<td>rib, ribs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>galk galk</td>
<td>rub sticks/“probable”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>galk galk mirran brung</td>
<td>thin/thin as a stick just bones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>galk galk-ut</td>
<td>up in a tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>galk ga-wang</td>
<td>skull/“bone”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One word, many meanings
(extract from Taungurung dictionary)
For this workshop choose some place names such as the name of your town, or a mountain, river or lake etc in your Country.

- Study the word or phrase.
- Check each element in the resources you have for the language (for example a word list or dictionary. You may also want to check the VACL publication series Aboriginal Placenames of Victoria.) List any meanings you can find.
- There might be several meanings given.
  - Compare the meanings.
  - What do the meanings have in common?
- Think about the place in a cultural way.
  - What do you know about this place?
  - Are there stories connected to this place?
  - How do the stories and meanings make you see, feel, understand about this place?
- Do any of the ideas you have collected make ‘sense’?

Use this discussion to start a booklet of place names for use in your community. Ask Elders and community about the places. Once you have collected some names and their meanings, you can build on this and gather more. Add photos of the places to make an attractive but inexpensive booklet that is simple to produce.

From the Dictionary of Aboriginal Placenames of Victoria by Clark & Heydon
Communities reviving Language practise many small ways of keeping Language constantly in the environment. The most obvious starting place is to take up the habit of always greeting people in Language. It is important to balance the projects that take a lot of time, care and consultation with quick and easy ways for people to use Language, or hear or see it, in their own contexts every day. This factsheet focuses on how some communities are doing this in written contexts.

Community notices
Any notice you are sending out or putting up on a noticeboard can include Language. The knitting circle advertised in the illustration also featured language to talk about family in the actual event, in a very casual and informal way.

Email, text, facebook, twitter…
Language in social media can range from a simple ‘hi’ through to words and phrases sprinkled throughout a message. Often, no translation into English is needed. For example, everyone can understand that the word at the start of an email is the greeting – especially if it has their name straight after it! Other words may be possible to understand from context, such as laka in the last line of the email illustrated. Leaving things like this in just Language helps people begin to think in Language.

Small projects for everyday language
Small projects can combine art and language development to increase the amount of language in the daily environment. Many communities make calendars – which may involve designing words for days and months – or cards, from postcards to cards for sorry business. Anything that is part of people’s ordinary everyday environment can be a useful small project for Language.
LANGUAGE REVIVAL WORKSHOP IDEAS
EVERYDAY LANGUAGE (Written contexts)

Invite everyone to an afternoon or lunch to get everyday language happening. Try some or all of these ideas during the afternoon.

These ideas will work best if you prepare a selection of words and phrases to give people or stick up in the room. Depending on the group, an alternative could be to make a resource list for the day at the start of the session, by brainstorming and using dictionaries and word lists. This could develop further during the session as people practise using the words.

Practise basic greetings to each other in turn.
 Do you use the same greeting for everyone? Or are there different ones depending on how many people you are talking to, or for formal and informal situations? Do you have something for ‘goodbye’ as well as something for ‘hello’?
 Make sure people know at least the basic greetings and encourage them to use them – on emails and texts, when answering the phone, when they get to work or school, and whenever they see someone they know.

Provide art materials or use phones or other devices to take digital photos. Ask people to create a design or take a picture to use on a card. Decide in the group on words to print with the card. A basic greeting? Happy Birthday? Wishing someone well on a journey or for graduation?

Keep the project small so that you can complete it ready to print by the end of the session.

Discuss and select an upcoming community event that will need a flyer. In the group, choose some words for the flyer to be in Language. Will they need translating? Or will people be able to work it out from context or from pictures on the flyer?

Remind people to bring their phones. Text each other across the room using at least one Language word in every text. Send messages back using at least one different or additional word. Expect laughter!

Do you have names for seasons, months or days of the week in your language?
 If you have any of these, you could draft a calendar:
• a chart of seasons,
• a chart of days for weekly planning, or
• a fridge calendar with a single picture (artwork or community photos).

Do you have names for seasons, months or days of the week in your language?
Signs are a great way of making Language visible in the community. They are a way of asserting the importance of Language on Country and a chance for sharing with the wider community. Signs are also a way to teach lots more people about culture. Along with signs that welcome people to Country or acknowledge Country, signs in special places such as gardens or on walks can be a way to share information about culture and history. Signs around the home or office can integrate language into routine activity.

**LANGUAGE WORDS IN PUBLIC SPACE**

Using Language in community contexts gives people a chance to get used to seeing it around and feeling more comfortable with it. This is an important part of creating safe spaces where people can speak to each other in Language. Language can also create a stronger sense of belonging and being welcome.

**A CHALLENGE: WORDS FOR NEW CONCEPTS**

Signs can sometimes be challenging if they require words that haven’t been recorded or remembered. This is especially true for things that are new in the culture.

“Now we didn’t have a word for ‘office’. Where was black fellas living in an office?! Big gum over there – that’s my office there. But here we have a European concept, from an Aboriginal person, to put into Language... I look at the translation – I look at the English version of it, and then go, ‘Well, hang on, we don’t have that in our language. However, we do have this, which is a similar meaning.’ A good example now is, the playgroup has asked me to do some signage for them: ‘No children beyond this point’. We don’t have the word ‘point’, and we don’t have the word ‘beyond’, so I’ve got ngan-ngan which is ‘no’, and boorai or boorron, so ‘no children’. That’s it. So now I’m looking for something to put on the end to say ‘past here’, because we don’t have the word ‘past’, or ‘near’ or something like that. It makes you think of other words, rather than just the main concept that you’re trying to get through. Cos those other words can still get the story across, but in a different, roundabout way. And I find it’s a great way of doing stuff, like that, because you can really play with it.” - David Tournier
Although there can be some challenges in finding the words you need, making signs can be a quick way to get language out into the community. This activity will be different depending on the kinds of resources you have available.

For example, you could:

- Take a look around a shared space that is used by many people in your community. What kinds of signs are there already? What other kinds of signs could be useful?
- Work in partnership with another Aboriginal organisation (for example, a Health service) to develop signs for their building.
- Plan signs that explain some aspects of a special place for visitors (for example interpretive signs on a local nature walk). It’s probably a good idea to start small, with signs in a well-used building, and plan for bigger projects as you gain in confidence.

This workshop focuses on signs for a shared, frequently used space. Start by getting everyone together for a cuppa or some lunch to think about using language on signs:

1. Make a list of the different signs around the place.
2. Think about which of these signs are easy to translate into language.
3. Think about whether some of the signs could be translated in more creative ways (see quote from David Tournier above).
4. Maybe there’s room for a bit of fun too! (For example by using names for male and female animals to label the men’s and women’s toilets...)
5. Are there other signs you could make? Some organisations like to label ordinary things in Language – tea, sugar, hot water... 
6. Type up the signs you’ve made on the computer or use your textas and paints to create beautiful original signs.
7. Stick them up and enjoy!

There are lots of different possibilities you could focus on. A project creating informal signage in Aboriginal controlled spaces is much easier to finish than a project for public signage or for a place administered by another institution.

Working notes for signs at the Wathaurong Coop, Geelong (David Tournier)
LANGUAGE REVIVAL IN PRACTICE

SONGS

Songs are a great way to learn and teach language. They are fun and easy to remember. Here are some different ways of developing songs in language...

TRANSLATE A WELL-KNOWN SONG

One advantage of translating a widely known English language song is that people already know the tune, as well as the meaning of the song. In the early days of a new Language program, Heads, shoulders, knees and toes is a popular choice because it teaches body parts. Many school programs, such Wiradjuri in Parkes, use a Good Morning song ("Yamandhu marang, yamandhu marang...").

The main challenge of translating English songs is that the rhythm of the music may not fit readily with the Language words. Some of the the words may also be difficult to translate.

ORIGINAL SONGS IN MODERN STYLES

One advantage of writing an original song in language is that you can fit the words and music together as you go. Even a small amount of language can be used to make great songs. These can be fun songs to sing in the car with kids, or more elaborate pieces for performing in public.

"Our languages have a unique harmonic structure that resonates with this Land, this Land from which they are born. This is why we must continue our work in language revival. Our Old People left us a legacy, a responsibility to care for Country, and to care for Country we have to know the right stories, words and songs. When we say ‘sing up the country,’ that is what we are doing, and our Country hears us. When we say ‘make the country strong,’ that is what we are doing, when we speak our language, when we sing those songs.” - Vicki Couzens
TRANSLATING WELL-KNOWN SONGS CAN BE CHALLENGING BECAUSE THE TRANSLATION MAY NOT FIT THE TUNE TOO WELL ON YOUR FIRST TRY. SOMETIMES YOU CAN DEAL WITH THIS BY CHANGING THE MEANING A BIT – YOU CAN ALSO EXPERIMENT WITH CHANGING THE RHYTHM OR THE TUNE. YOU CAN ALSO COMBINE ENGLISH AND LANGUAGE INTO ONE SONG DEPENDING ON HOW MUCH LANGUAGE YOU’VE BEEN ABLE TO RECLAIM.

1. Select a well known song.
2. Replace some of the English words with Language words to the level you have learnt so far.
3. Try singing the song to the tune.
4. How well do the words fit with the tune?
5. What changes could you make to either the tune or the words, to help them fit together better?

- It is fine to rewrite the English words so the Language words can fit the music. Look at Uncle Stan’s version of ‘Silent Night’.
- Does a different word order help?
- Try thinking about the meaning of the whole line or song, not just one word at a time.
- For example, ‘Under the shade of a coolibah tree’ could be translated as ‘Under a tree, cool’. If you know a word-ending for ‘under’, you can make the line even shorter.
- Does this idea help your song translation project?

SILENT NIGHT

Mugruwar ngurung, Yirimbang ngurung
Silent night Holy night
Mayinygalangbu balugenbu biyambul wirrinya
All people and animals are all sleeping
Maari-bu Dyuudyib-bu nganhala bimbala
Mary and Joseph also are there in the stable
Bali Yirimbang nganybula ngangaanha
Baby holy they two caring for
Bali yuwin Dyiidhu
Baby named Jesus
Biyaamidyu ngumambiyi
God did, sent

Uncle Stan Grant & John Rudder
Wiradjuri Songs Book 2
The Welcome ceremony in the present has both old and new meanings. The invitation to visitors to enter and enjoy the Country is still there, but now it is offered to people who are already on the Country. So a Welcome now emphasises the importance of Country and Traditional Owners in this event or place, and in this way practises respect for land, people and custodianship. In the 21st century, this is also an act of healing and reconciliation. A Welcome is not always in person – for example, some DVDs start with a Welcome.

Giving a Welcome in the Language of the Land is often an important early goal in Language revival. To do this increases the power of the ceremony, as the language is intrinsically bound to the land. Some say that the actual sounds of the language emerge from the land itself, and in many traditions it is necessary to greet the land and its Ancestors in their Language in order to be permitted entry.

Many people write a Welcome for general use and then vary it for each specific occasion. Other kinds of formal speeches, such as the launch of a book or event, can use a basic Welcome to start with, and expand it with a sentence or two about the event of the day.

The word ‘welcome’ is not often found in historical collections. People commonly use the best-known greeting in their language – ‘Galangoor djali’ (Butchulla), ‘Ngatanwarr’ (Gunditjmara) etc.

The Welcome speeches we have collected share some common elements:

1. Self-introduction. The speaker is often known to most of the audience, so the self-introduction is actually a way of establishing how they are connected to the Land and the Ancestors.
2. What Country it is, and acknowledgement of Elders and Ancestors. If the speech is translated into English, the Country or important features of the Country are usually still named in Language.
3. Responsibilities of the visitors to the Land and its people. Sometimes this includes a specific statement of laws about caring for the Land and ‘the children of Bunjil’, and sometimes also an invitation to guests to signal their acceptance of these responsibilities, such as by taking a gum leaf brought by the officiating Elder.
4. Introduction to the event of the day.
5. Statement of Welcome and thanks to the visitors.
To get started on your own Welcome to Country in Language, you only need a few simple ideas in your language. Resources for this workshop might include:

- a Language worker, teacher or Elder
- books about your language
- a visitor from a nearby Language Centre or university department of Linguistics or Indigenous Studies.

In the group, decide what you want to say in your basic Welcome. Consider the outline over the page. Find or develop key phrases in the workshop such as:

- Hello, welcome or good morning/evening
- My name is …
- I am a … [name of your country or clan] woman/man
- This is [name of your country]
- OR We are on [name of your country] (you could add the PLACE (Locative) ending onto the Country name)

You may like to say more than that in English, or develop more Language in your Welcome as an advanced project. Once you have a basic Welcome, you can add more complexity to it over time, or adapt it to different situations.

A Gunditjmara acknowledgement of Kulin Country

Ngatanwarr wooka ngootoowan ngathoongan.
greet give you (all) we (all)

Ngathook mayapa-wangan ngootyoong wanyoo
I make-understand good (to)

kulin alam meen, koorrookee, ngapoon ba ngarrakeetoong.
person Ancestor mother’s mother mother’s father and family

Mayapa-wangan ngoobyong wanyoo
make-understand good (to)

kulin meerreeng makatepa.
person Country today

“We greet you all, I pay respect to the Kulin Ancestors: the grandmothers, grandfathers and families. Pay respect to the Kulin people and Country today.” - Welcome by Vicki Couzens
PRINCIPLES OF LANGUAGE REVIVAL

LANGUAGE IS CULTURE, CULTURE IS LANGUAGE

Language is the vessel which carries the cultural knowledge of Country, relationship, connection, laws for living, stories, song and dance. ‘Language is Culture’ sums up the common belief across language communities that language and culture are inseparable. So ‘Language is Culture’ equals ‘Respect’ and therefore becomes the central guiding or foundational principle in Language Revival. It is the foundational cultural approach when an individual and/or community/s travel the pathways of Language Revival.

ASPECTS OF ‘LANGUAGE IS CULTURE’

There are several key aspects that are integral within the overarching ‘Language is Culture’ principle. Every aspect of Language Revival is measured against this overarching principle. It is the ‘given’ in any one aspect of language revival.

Elders, knowledge and authority - Many communities still have some language in everyday use. This may vary from a few words or phrases to fluent language speakers. Whether your community has a little, or a lot of language in use available or whether you have to search historical records to find your language, the Elders and senior people will play a key role in your language revival journey. The Elders and senior knowledge holders provide cultural knowledge and authority in decisions about language. These decisions might be about the spelling of your language, or a creation story of place in Country, or how to pronounce sounds properly and so on.

“I think by having Elders guide us, were put on the right track in the first place, and reminded of what we could and couldn’t do ... The people who use language and know language and know how it relates to culture and language, they are the experts ... It’s the Old People, they grew up with it around them, or they grew up in an environment where language was related to culture and related to how they related to each other.” - Doris Paton

“Your culture, your language ... It’s all rolled into one. You can’t separate one from the other.” - Maxine Jarrett

“In Aboriginal culture you have to be doing everything at the same time on all levels. Because otherwise you learn nothing; the culture is interrelated. The language is interrelated. The objects are interrelated. Their purpose is interrelated. And the family history is interrelated. It says something about the possum skin cloak, which says something about the possum itself. If you’re not accommodating all of those things, then you’re not being true to the culture.” - Bruce Pascoe

“The language is very much tied up to the culture as it is to the Country. And so language revival must equal those things. Because that’s what our Old People have taught us.” - Doris Paton

LAYERS OF KNOWLEDGE AND MEANING

Language revival is not just about the words and the mechanics of your language such as ‘how do you say this word? What are the sounds? How would we spell the words?’ Rather it is about the meaning and context of the word or sound as the vessel to deeper cultural meaning and knowledge.
Each phrase, word or part of a word carries layers of meaning and knowledge. A placename for example, may describe the physical characteristics of the surrounding environment or a specific geological feature such as a mountain, river or lake. Then there may be a Creation story of how the Ancestors created that place; it may also relate knowledge of habitat for creatures and how those creatures live in the Land.

The story or song of that place may teach Laws for living – such as the seasons for harvesting and gathering food and medicine plants, and the gathering of fibres for manufacture of baskets, string etc. The place may be a gathering place for ceremony and hold significance in the song cycles of that Country.

There are different ways in which language practitioners can bring that knowledge through. You can begin with talking to Elders and community. You can research and study the words of your language and learn the connections between groups of words, developing your understanding of language structure through linguistics.

Sitting on Country and ‘listening’, communicating with the Ancestors ...

Deeper teachings are learned on deeper levels of perception such as dreams and visions from Ancestral beings/spirits who are our teachers and guides. When language is spoken on Country our Country hears us. And lastly, but not least – by practising your language, every day.

“I might go out bush and yell it out in Dhudhuroa...they can hear you yelling out in their Country, in their language. I say, ‘Look, listen, Ancestors, you can hear that? Can you hear that? Am I on the right track?’ You know. Haven’t had a complaint yet!” - Tom Kinchela

“That was something that was guided by our Ancestors, that everything is not seen straight away. You have to search for it. You have to take it, reclaim it, and build on it. And that’s what I see is the importance now of the reconstruction of the words of our Ancestors’ language.” - Carolyn Briggs

“As soon as you start teaching them a few words, they feel the language. Because it belongs to them ... It comes up through the ground into them.” - Geoff Anderson.
Health, wellbeing and healing in Aboriginal communities is comprehensive and holistic. It is viewed and practiced considering all aspects of a person/s, family/s, community/s environment, culture and circumstance. Health and healing is not separate from the ‘all’ of life. In thinking about healing, from the ‘Language is Culture’ principle, communities identify culture as the key to healing: to healing the spirit of individuals, families, communities and Country.

IDENTITY AND HEALING
Learning your language is vital in strengthening identity ... ... and reclaiming identity and cultural knowledge.

“Getting your Holden cars and your pencillin injections won’t revive your language. But language can ensure the health of the community.” - Bruce Pascoe

ABORIGINAL IDENTITY IS WHO YOU ARE AND YOUR PLACE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

“It was what my son learned that brought me back to reclaiming. ‘You have to reclaim who you are Mum!’ That was his bit of wisdom ... he told me the power of our knowledge.” - Carolyn Briggs

“My daughters, they felt that once they’d done the language, that really gave them their birthright more than anything else.” - Richard Kennedy

“We sent them home with a whole branch, a whole family tree with each of their kinship order names and their grandfathers and mothers on their mother’s side and their grandfathers and mothers on their father’s side. And we would name them all in the kinship order system.” - Prof. Lester-Irabinna Rigney

“The sooner Aboriginal people across Australia understand the powerfullness of their own language, they’ll understand that their life will become better. It will be because they’ll have their own language and say – this is my language, this is me, this is who I am ... I can now speak my language ...” - David Tournier

Tyrendarra - Reviving Language is caring for Country (Gunditjmara)
WAYS OF KNOWING AND BEING

Our primary learning way is ‘listening, looking and imitation’. Within this learning we also receive spiritual learning – our ways of learning and knowing are not all tangible and explainable.

Our connection to Country, family and community is our spirituality: these ways of knowing, being and sensing are fundamental elements of our learnings. Feeling our spirituality, connecting and understanding our spirituality is healing. Our stories and language can deepen our connection to Country and culture.

“Our spirituality is so strong, but it’s not talked about in many ways. We do have spiritual healers. We have spiritual connection here that, if we walk onto a ground that we are not supposed to be on, we know, automatically that that is the wrong place to be. We will walk away. A lot of people don’t understand that. And I’m raising this because it does come with Language, our Creation stories tell us of where our Ancestors have been. But the most important thing, it tells us about our Country.” - Jenni Beer

Language, Healing and Country

People, Country and Language are interconnected. Language, our language from our own Country, strengthens our connections, healing people and land. Language can not only promote healing within Aboriginal communities, but also in the wider community. For example, people have noticed how the number of racist incidents in schools drops when Language is taught, with respect and understanding.

“Our languages have an unique harmonic structure that resonates with this Land, this Land from which they (languages) are born. This is why we must continue our work in language revival. Our Old People left us a legacy, a responsibility to care for Country, and to care for Country we have to know the right stories, words and songs. When we say ‘sing up Country’, that is what we are doing and our Country hears us. When we say ‘make the Country strong’, that is what we are doing, when we speak our language, when we sing those songs.” - Vicki Couzens

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

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

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

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

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

Language contexts

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“It was the idea of creating some dances and the whole dance just popped into my head like this little vision and then I needed a song. Because they didn’t tell me the song. So I had to create, thinking about how to go and collect the grass, and then we split it, and then we weave it, then we gather things, food, in it, or use it. So part of the dance is about that gathering. And so it’s talking about women and what women do and women’s knowledge of Country and plants, and our place, our roles, as the nurturers and family and things like that. So it’s all the stuff about cultural reclamation and that reconnecting and strengthening and bringing that knowledge out into the light.” - Vicki Couzens
Aboriginal culture is founded in a mandate of Respect. This cultural value of Respect is about ‘getting it right’. Respect asks us to listen to and be guided by our Old People, Country and Elders. We approach our language revival journey with deep Respect. But what does it mean when we say we have to ‘get it right’?!

‘Getting it right’, like the words and sounds of our language, has many layers of meaning, aspects and ways of doing and being, of ‘getting it right’. At every step in our language revival journey we must make decisions:

“… it’s not my decision to make … all aspects of Aboriginal ways of doing things – not only language – education, health, employment, housing – there’s all those protocols, the cultural protocols that still exist today … I need direction from a reference group, to say, ‘Hang on – you’re doing that right, you’re doing that okay – but you’re doing that wrong.’ You know?” - David Tournier

Decisions about language resources – do we use historical sources? Do we just use language that is known in our community? Sounds and spelling – what are the sounds of our language? How do we know they are the right sounds?

Cultural authenticity – is this our word? is this word right for this place? Is that the right meaning for that word?

Authority – who says it’s ‘right’? Who is allowed to learn language?

Do we teach non-Aboriginal people? Do we teach it in schools?

Grammar – how do we make sentences? How do we talk, converse in our language? Do we relexify (swap some of our language words into English)? How do we teach grammar to our mob? And so on.

Authenticity – People feel strongly about their language and as the journey progresses people’s opinions around issues can change. Some begin feeling that they must use only the words that are from their language: that is, not using borrowed words or words that are not identified by Elders or written sources as from their language and so in this way keeping their language ‘authentic’ or ‘pure’. However, often as people move along their journey and learn more, opinions and attitudes can change. Many groups work from community and Elders’ language knowledge and are guided by this in keeping the language authentic.
“If my Ancestors told these stories to the first settlers, there was a reason for that. It set the pattern. It wasn’t a closed shop. It was a door left open, for me to be able to see that and look for the bigger picture. To say, well if they told them, we are still influenced strongly by English language structure or grammar. So part of ‘getting it right’ is also about grammar, about our language structure.

“When I was first doing language, I wasn’t using endings. I was just putting words together. And so basically it was language done in an English way. Now that I’m starting to learn the endings, and putting endings in the right place, it’s becoming more Wathaurong than English. And it’s quite interesting, because once you start using the endings, it makes it sound right, and puts it in its right flow.” - David Tournier

“We’ve got the language, his [Threlkeld’s] publications, you know. It’s like reading Shakespeare stuff. And that’s where all the evidence of our language is. Inside amongst that. So, to unlock the secrets of the language, we’ve had to unlock him … that’s just what we have concentrated on. We could’ve dove in and grabbed his word list and so forth, which appear in these old books – just used those and started pronouncing the words and started talking again. But we couldn’t. We needed to understand how he used every single one of those characters, to pronounce that unique sound.” - Daryn McKenny

“Getting it right’ can mean learning how to say the words ‘properly’: what are the proper sounds; learning the sounds. Some people feel that the words must be spoken like it was in pre-European times. Some people feel it is more important to get people using and speaking language. Others feel that getting the sounds right requires consideration of different factors including pre-European speech, in-depth research into historical resources, even in-depth research into the historical person who recorded their language.

“‘If you accept the premise that language is constantly evolving and changing – when there’s been a period of static, of over 50 to 100 years between when a language was spoken and now being revived - How can you then say to people, ‘You can only say it this way’?” - Jeanie Bell

Again, the issue of authenticity raises its head. If you are using historical records - whether it’s grammar in the form of sentences, or more if you are lucky, has been recorded - then the decision about the ‘rightness’ of these records is a question. In terms of historical records, there are differing opinions on whether these resources should be used - are they authentic? Is our language authentic if we use what white people have written down? Language revival is a journey, of that there is no doubt …

“All the argy bargy that’s going on, behind it all is a very positive cultural thing. Because ten years ago we wouldn’t have been arguing the toss about language. We wouldn’t have been arguing about the language boundaries … It’s inevitable that there’s going to be some push and shove about whose Country is whose, what language is what… you’ve just got to accept that that’s gonna be part and parcel of the rise of culture and language.” - Bruce Pascoe
PRINCIPLES OF LANGUAGE REVIVAL
GRAMMAR PATHWAYS

Grammar is just another word for the patterns of your language when you join words together. If you are using your Language words without learning its grammar, you will naturally use the patterns of English for your language.

PATHWAYS IN LANGUAGE REVIVAL PROGRAMS

Different language programs have different approaches to reviving grammar, and different levels of emphasis on how important it is. The pathway you choose is up to you.

**One step at a time** - Some people add elements of grammar gradually into their translation work. They may do this over several versions of the same translation, or they may focus on one aspect, such as pronouns, for some time before adding in the next level.

Some people teach Language with its traditional grammar right from the start, but only introduce one new pattern at a time. This means a learner can only say one or two types of things at a given stage (such as where someone is or where they are going), but it has the advantage of always keeping Language in its own patterns. One way of doing this is to teach people to copy a formula – set ways of saying things – and then adapting this to different situations by changing just one word.

For other people, it is more important to focus on words and meanings, Language in cultural reclamation, and the confidence of their community to have a go. Naming animals, colours, body parts and so on, can be very important to inspire people, and get them started using Language. It can also be vital within your cultural learning program, as the language provides windows into layers of meaning that the English words for plants etc. do not connect with. You can also use many single words, in stories or songs etc., with English as the base. This lets people use Language in more extended contexts, while still staying within what feels familiar and easy.

**Grammar-Translation** - Other people prefer to aim for the whole of the traditional grammar right from the start, by carefully looking up grammar resources or consulting a linguist for each part of each translation they do. This method can be very slow at first, and relies on knowing what you’re looking for to some extent. However, it could perhaps be used for some special projects, while encouraging a have-a-go approach to language for more everyday use. Traditional grammar is not the only priority.

How do we learn the grammar?

Find out which of these you have available to you:

1. Community grammar book or section in your dictionary. You may also like to get help interpreting these.
2. Language learning books or CDs
3. Regional Language Centres will have resources and trained people, and may be able to run workshops.
4. Assistance from a university that runs linguistics courses. Staff need ‘community service’ opportunities and PhD students need ‘fieldwork experience’. This can be a good way to get training and resources for your community.
5. Targeted training for your language workers. There may be a TAFE course, or training through a Language Centre, AIATSIS and so on. Ask through your networks.
People when they first start, they're very tentative, aren't they? And they start it off just trying to do small things, and keep it at a very basic level. But then at some point, they realise that they've got to do more than that. And that's been a bit of an issue. I think people get a little stuck on the grammar stuff. And you've gotta really find creative ways of doing it, if people are finding it hard to move to that stage of putting words together.” - Jeanie Bell

“I don’t really do grammar. I just teach em, and it might be based along English way. So we might say, ‘Thindu jirrah’, which translates, ‘This is a kangaroo’. Because that’s how they’re trying to fit it in, into their English structure. If I try to do it in the proper Aboriginal grammatical way, then they’re just all mixed up. So we just wanna get em talkin’. And all of that will come eventually. Like, this is the proper way that you actually put those things. And this is the marker that you add to it. But even when I tell em that you put this marker on it for this reason, I show em the same in English. So I say, ‘So, you’ve got the word jump, and I want you to tell me it has already happened. So that is called past tense. What do you add to it?’ But we never go there until they’re really comfortable.” - Lynnette Solomon-Dent

“All we need is that grammar and dictionary to be published, and we can sit down and we can create. It’s a stepping stone for more things to happen.” - Jenni Beer

“I think sometimes we put the cart before the horse. I know that having a grammar is not an Aboriginal concept as such, but nor are all the other things which are being produced. Having a dictionary is not an Aboriginal concept of the language. I see it all the time, Language programs around the country, stuff happening, and it’s like – okay, where’s your grammar behind the scenes? How do you build a house? You gotta have your plans. You’ve gotta have your guidelines, your standards in place, to how the frame gets together. To build a motor car. Ford, Holden, Toyota, they all have, behind the scenes, the manual. How it’s to be built. We had to have that in place before we could start.” - Daryn McKenny

“Once you’ve got that pattern in the grammar, you keep following that pattern. And so that goes back also looking at more study on neighbouring Countries, and what’s been recorded in their grammar and structure and patterns. Maybe through the similarities of both Language groups, or Language groups next door, neighbouring Countries. Then, if we need to extend the grammar even further, we could probably borrow from one to the other. Again, that’s more research.” - Tom Kinchela

“With Wathaurong, the grammatical structure is the same as Wemba Wemba. And so you say, ‘Righto, if they’re saying this is how you construct that sentence, then we probably should construct it the same way’. You make that guess.” - Bruce Pascoe
Linguistics is the study of languages and how they work. Sometimes learning about linguistics can seem daunting but it can provide some really useful tools for people to use as part of reclaiming their language. Sometimes communities choose to ask a linguist to do some of this work for them.

DEVELOPING LINGUISTICS KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Anyone who works in language revival is likely to hear about quite a lot of linguistics as time goes by. At one time or another, many language workers and language activists decide that they want to develop their linguistics skills and knowledge so that they can do as much as possible with their language. There are a range of ways to learn about linguistics – contacting a regional language centre can be a good place to start. When you have the linguistics tools in your own hands, you have more power to make strong and lasting decisions for your language.

GETTING THE RELATIONSHIPS RIGHT

It is important to find a good balance between linguistics perspectives and community ways of knowing. When there are strong, healthy relationships in place and a good balance in perspectives, linguists can make really positive contributions. When relationships between communities and linguists are less strong, community members might not trust materials produced by linguists, and linguists can get worried about things like historical accuracy of community-produced materials.

PUTTING LINGUISTICS TOOLS TO WORK

One of the key strengths of some linguistics knowledge is the confidence it gives people to get more active in how they do language revival. It allows them to have a go – try things out, reflect on what works and then try out some more new things. Linguistics knowledge is also important for understanding historical sources. Many tools that are useful in language revival, such as dictionary development software, also assume some knowledge of linguistics. These tools are a great way to simplify and organise work in some of the big tasks associated with language revival.

As partners or mentors, linguists can support the development of comprehensive and well-analysed dictionaries, descriptions of grammar, and carefully designed and graded learning materials. You might want to ‘outsource’ some of this work to a linguist, with regular consultations built in, or you may want to work alongside to share knowledge and perspectives as you go.
PRINCIPLES OF LANGUAGE REVIVAL
USING LINGUISTICS

“But I feel confident in myself. And I feel more confident now than I ever did. And that’s made me a lot stronger to teach it, because I know a lot more. By doing the phonological reconstruction myself. To do every word. It has really opened up my eyes. And I can see where a linguist is coming from, and I can see where the sources are coming from, to help us with our language.” - Lee Healy

“Well, when I ask a question, I just want to know how it works, linguistically. Or maybe they could make it a whole workshop thing, like how to make sentences, you know, the proper way. Also, show me grammatical way, give us those skills – but give us a choice. I might choose the other way. Whereas some linguists go, ‘Oh no, that’s not grammatically correct. You can’t print that book.’ And my philosophy is, so what if someone comes better than you – well, actually, I taught em. So, you know, that’s a plus for me too. People who are happy to pass on knowledge, and to grow other people, don’t care about passing it on.” - Lynette Solomon-Dent

“You gotta go down, you gotta keep talking to people all the time about it. If there’s issues that are out in the community, go out there and start tackling them. And say, ‘Well, hang on – come on board. This is an opportunity. Come on board. Don’t knock us down’, you know. In order for it to succeed. And the thing is, when we give it back to the community, they may not want to write it down. They may want to speak a few things. But then, it’s giving it back to the kids, too. How do you do that? I know that people say, ‘Well, hang on – no, I’m too old to do that. Teach the young ones. Teach the grandchildren’, blah blah. But the grandchildren are going to come back to the grandparents and say, ‘How do you say that word? Can you remember that, Grandma or Grandpa?’ They don’t remember it. What’s the sense of just teaching it to the grandchildren? You know, it has to be everybody on board talking it.” - Jenni Beer

“Cos I just thought – oh, there’s only select people that could create Language, and linguists went for degrees and Masters and PhDs, because they specialised in it. But to give opportunity for community members to go to the next stage. That was the opportunity that I took with open hands. It was about me taking control and taking ownership.” - Carolyn Briggs

“And I noticed when I went to university and did linguistics, I was taught that Aboriginal languages mostly had a VSO word order, and that was pretty general. When you’re out there, you realize there’s actually quite bit of flexibility in word order in our languages. There isn’t just a fixed thing, just one way, is there? It can be quite flexible in a lot of languages that I’ve come across. And I think that people tend to go with the English word order. They tend to want to put the adjectives before the nouns. They tend to want to say something in the way they’re used to saying it. But it doesn’t make or break the language if they do that, does it? I think the role of linguistics is like a window and a door or a key. It gives people a key to open up some of the mystery of Language. I get really overwhelmed by people’s responses when something suddenly clicks for them, you know. They sort of go, ‘Wow! I didn’t even notice that before. And now, look, I understand it.’” - Jeanie Bell
PATHWAYS OF LANGUAGE REVIVAL
STAGES AND PROCESSES

There is no one right pathway for reviving language.

Different communities may prioritise: cultural knowledge, traditional grammar, the knowledge or preferences of Elders, Language in schools, foundation resources such as a dictionary, songs and stories for children, language for public use, or other goals. Some groups have Elders who speak or remember language; some have access to a linguist they know and trust; some have rich Language records. You may be responding to interest from a school, or awareness that your Elders’ knowledge is precious and time limited, or you may be looking for a better understanding of who you are. All of these starting points and priorities help to motivate and shape your language revival pathways. For example:

If you have... your pathway might emphasise...

Elders who speak Language or cultural knowledge... ...listening to Elders, encouraging talking out on Country with them, recording their knowledge
Many different historical sources of Language... ...collating all the words from all the sources into one database
Good access to linguistic support... ...preparing an easily accessible dictionary and grammar to draw on for resources and teaching
A local school asking for Language in the classroom... ...making educational resources, developing songs and games
Many requests for welcomes, names for buildings etc... ...small projects to get Language into speeches and signage on country
Young people wanting to know about their language... ...quick-lookup apps for phones and ipads

Language revival is a process, not a destination.

It is easy to get held back at the start of reviving your language by worrying about whether the spelling, or the words, or the pronunciation, or the grammar – are correct. But all languages go through successive stages of understanding along the revival journey. If you wait till all the research is done, all the decisions are final, everything that can be known is known – you will never be able to start. Instead, it works better to use what you know right now as best you can, at each stage of your journey, and develop your knowledge and confidence as you go. This allows everyone to learn, and allows the language to emerge into the community again. People around you, such as school partners, will need to understand that the language is in process, and so aspects of it will undoubtably change over time. There may be more words, better understanding of word meanings, adjustments to the spelling, changes in policy and practice of the grammar.
PATHWAYS OF LANGUAGE REVIVAL
THOUGHTS ABOUT STAGES AND PROCESSES

“So you skill yourself up to those particular areas and it opens the doors for you, and you just look at things in a different light, and say, ‘Ooh yes, we can do that. We can do this. We can do that.’” - Jenni Beer

“Where Language is vulnerable, I think the list is an important starting point, so that people are not continually having to do that research all over again. Because it takes years. And the dictionary is a base point. You can add to it, you can revise it, you can forget about it, but you can always return to it if you need to. Whereas people with cultural Elders – if they can absorb all the knowledge that those people know, then they don’t need the list. But I would argue that virtually every Victorian language needs some kind of base point to protect the language.” - Bruce Pascoe

“It was the first stage dictionary because it came out in a hurry. And we’re learning from that first stage dictionary to go on to the second stage. There’s no bad thing about the first stage dictionary. The words have been put into books, other people have got em because they’ve gone to Language camps. And there’s a few words in it, so they had some words. And if I didn’t have that first stage dictionary, I wouldn’t be able to translate what I have been doing in the last two years.” - Lee Healy

“Proper Language revival process needs that cultural knowledge, the cultural context and the underpinning knowledge, to make it make sense. There’s no point in talking about that tree, unless you really understand what that tree means. So yes, we’re doing Language revival, but that underpinning knowledge is really important to that Language revival. So I think ours is very much on-Country focus. Language, right? not in isolation from that context – and I think that’s where it’s different to some of the others.” - Doris Paton

“We have to facilitate the building of relations between towns, between communities of the same Language Nation, and their relationships with schools. And often we get well into the end of the first year, before we actually sit down and do some hard Language or linguistic work. Because there is so much that needs to happen before people feel comfortable enough, and the community feel that they have ownership of what goes on.” - Kevin Lowe

“You have old evidence of how your Old People spoke words, through recordings, and then you would hear those words, and then you would learn how to spell those words, using a linguistic framework. And that’s part of the journey that I had to go on. And it still hasn’t stopped, because it’s created another cycle. The next cycle is to create the dictionary, the tape, and write more stories. So that I leave the next legacy from the old unseen legacies of our Ancestors. Start creating another picture, for our young to take control.” - Carolyn Briggs

“On my journey along the language reclamation and revitalisation track I am in awe and inspired by those I meet who are taking the same journey. This same journey has many pathways and many stories, but in the end we are striving for the same goal – to re-learn our Mother Tongue, to keep our culture strong and hand it on to the next generations.” - Vicki Couzens
The journey starts with inspiration...

WHAT’S THE INSPIRATION FOR YOUR JOURNEY?

There are all sorts of reasons why people begin the journey of language revival...

- I want my grandkids to know their country and their language
- Our local school wants to run Language and Culture classes
- My Mum was asked to do a Welcome to Country
- Our art group wants to be able to use Language in our work

When you look back over years on this journey there will be ups and downs, places where you went slowly and times when you seemed to fly. Each of the choices you make about making new words or spelling will have its time. Some of them will stick for the long term but sometimes it will be obvious pretty quickly that there are other choices that will work better. If you don’t try things, you can’t find out if they work!

THINGS TO PACK WHEN THERE IS NO MAP

You may not know exactly where you’re heading but there are a few things you can do to support yourself on the journey of language revival. It’s useful to be clear about the different resources you have – and the different people in the community who could be part of the journey.

- What language is remembered in the community?
- Are there words? Cultural knowledge? Stories? Place names?
- Are there historical records for your language?
- How do people feel about the records and the people who collected them?
- Is there any research work by linguists – perhaps a dictionary or grammar description?
- How do people feel about using that?

JOURNEYING TOGETHER

As Language work becomes more visible in the community, more people may want to get involved. Sometimes there can be conflict about different parts of the language revival journey.

Language revival work ripples out into issues to do with Culture and Country. Sharing language happens in families and communities, and different points of view are part of how relationships can be strengthened. There can be difficult times and conflict but if you are persistent there will also be connection and healing.
“If my Ancestors told these stories to the first settlers, there was a reason for that. It set the pattern. It wasn’t a closed shop. It was a door left open, for me to be able to see that and look for the bigger picture. To say, well if they told them, they must have known somehow that that was going to be recorded for the next generation. And it’s taken me that journey, because it is the journey of your status, too, within your community – to know knowledge, to share knowledge, to bring it to the next stage. So I had to reclaim it, look at it, understand it, and start to feel confident to write it.” - Carolyn Briggs

“We’ve got the language, [Threlkeld’s] publications, you know. It’s like reading old Shakespeare stuff. And that’s where all the evidence of our language is. Inside amongst that. So, to unlock the secrets of the language, we’ve had to unlock him. And that’s just what we’ve concentrated on. We could’ve dove in and grabbed his lexicons and his word list and so forth, which appear in these old books, just used those and started pronouncing the words and started talking again. But we couldn’t. We needed to understand how he used every single one of those characters, to pronounce that unique sound.” - Daryn McKenny

“I think only about a dozen or more people started. For a couple of weeks, and then it slowly dwindled away to about 2 people after the 8 weeks. I was very disappointed. I thought, ‘Why don’t they come and learn? Because it’s up to them as parents and older people to teach the kids.’ Then I started thinking, perhaps it’s the other way round. Learn the kids, and they’ll ask their parents, who’ll want to know what they’re talking about. And sometimes that works.” - Uncle Ivan Couzens

“‘The other thing that makes it slightly easier now, cos I’m starting to get the hang of it, is the endings. Cos when I was first doing the language, I wasn’t using endings. I was just putting words together. And so basically it was Language done in an English way. Now that I’m starting to learn the endings, and putting endings in the right place, it’s becoming more Wathaurung than English. And it’s quite interesting, because once you start using the endings, it makes a lot of sense’, you know. Makes it sound right, and puts it in its right flow.” - David Tournier

“‘But all the argy bargy that’s going on, behind it all is a very positive cultural thing. Because ten years ago we wouldn’t have been arguing the toss about Language. We wouldn’t have been arguing the toss about Language boundaries – because we didn’t have that knowledge. So it’s inevitable that there’s going to be some push and shove about whose Country’s whose and what language is what. But you’ve just got to accept that that’s gonna be part and parcel of the rise of the culture and the language.’” - Bruce Pascoe

“When we first started all we had to do was to remember to keep one word in front of the kids. And that was the way we sort of tried to keep it. You know, like, you went in the next day, you had a new subject. You knew that they didn’t know what father was and mother was, and all this, so you were ahead of ‘em.” - Geoff Anderson