

# **New Speakers' Perspectives on Reinstating the Intergenerational Transmission of Endangered Indigenous Languages in Western Australia**

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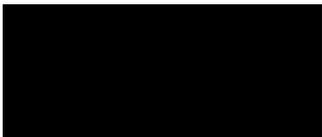
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## **Abstract**

It is estimated that of the more than 250 distinct languages spoken in Australia pre-colonisation, only 120 languages are still spoken; and of these, only 15 languages are still spoken by all generations (Marmion, Obata, & Troy, 2014b, p. xii). The remaining languages may still be spoken fully by a very few of the eldest generation, but they have not been passed down as first languages to the younger generations, who only know some words and phrases as a second language. These generations are now the 'new speakers' of the language, an emerging demographic of language learners who represent an opportunity for a community to revitalize their language (Bernadette O'Rourke et al., 2015). It has been proposed that any attempts at language revitalization that do not support families to transmit language to their children 'can amount to no little more than biding time' (Fishman, 1991, p. 399); if such intergenerational transmission is important and desired, then, the task of reinstating language transmission would seem to fall to these new speakers as a radically alternative population to first-speaker caregivers, creating a new model of intergenerational language transmission in a revival context.

This thesis interrogates the most aspirational ideals of reinstating intergenerational language transmission of Indigenous languages in Western Australia, from the perspective of new speakers of endangered languages. Qualitative interviews with 31 new speakers across four urban, rural, and remote communities in Western Australia show a range of perspectives regarding the prospect of non-fluent adults teaching children their traditional languages as first languages, from those who see it as a possibility, to those who think it is desirable but not possible, to those who no longer see the value in traditional languages. New speakers who want to see the next generation acquire their traditional languages are motivated both by the ideologies they have about the value of their languages, and their ideologies about the responsibilities of childrearing. Responsibility for such language transmission is divided between the learner, individual caregiver, family, schools, and the government, as new speakers grapple with feelings that they 'should' transmit language, but often don't feel confident to do so. Where new speakers do engage in intergenerational language transmission, they draw on a wide range of language transmission and teaching methods, as well as strategies for negotiating their own limited proficiency in language. Finally, the social, political, and educational influences on new speakers that have led to such a broad range of perspectives regarding the reinstatement of language transmission are examined, raising questions about informed choice and definitions of 'success' in language revitalization. This thesis contributes to the international scholarly knowledge about speaker/caregiver perspectives as concerns extremely endangered languages, and provides a strong basis for applied language revitalization efforts that are evidence-based, localised, and meaningful to the communities involved.

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For Steve.

# 1 Introduction

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It is customary to begin a description of the situation of Aboriginal languages in Australia with a survey of the number of languages spoken before colonization – at least 250, across the country – and the number of languages still spoken now – around 120, that are still spoken or remembered by at least some Elders, and 12 that are still learnt by children and spoken as first languages (Commonwealth of Australia, 2020). The deliberate suppression and subsequent loss of these languages signals to many a loss of culture, identity, wellbeing, and ways of seeing the world. However, the story of Indigenous languages in Australia should not only be told as a story of loss, reduced to numbers (numbers of languages, speakers, documents, words), but also as a story of revitalization – of generations of children and adults who are learning and reclaiming their languages anew.

The goal of language revitalization in general is to ‘breathe life’ back into the language (Baldwin, 2003). This can mean a variety of things, including increasing the community’s awareness of the language, increasing the visibility and status of the language, documenting the language, and so on. For many communities and linguists, the aspirational goal of language revitalization is the reversal of language shift (Fishman, 1991) by the creation of new speakers, whether they be adults who have learnt the language as a second/additional language, or children who have been taught the language as one of their first languages (Meek, 2012).

One approach to language revitalization in order to achieve the goal of increasing the number of new speakers, is to support families to reinstate the intergenerational transmission of language within the family to create a new generation of first, fluent, or ‘native’ language child speakers. However, with few or no remaining Elder speakers, in the majority of Aboriginal Australian language communities if language is to be acquired by the youngest generation, the task of transmitting the language would seem to fall to the generation of language learners and ‘new speakers’ (Bernadette O’Rourke et al., 2015) – those adults who have learnt, are still learning, or want to learn their heritage language as an additional language.<sup>1</sup> These new speakers represent an exciting opportunity for a community to revitalize their language (Bernadette O’Rourke et al., 2015). While the field of language revitalization studies, particularly as concerns European minority languages, has largely focused on the profiles and role of native speakers, O’Rourke et al (2015) argue that new speakers should be valued and recognised for their potential to increase the demographic strength of these languages and this is certainly the case for learners of Aboriginal Australian languages. Thus, in the absence of more fluent

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion of the term ‘new speakers’ see 1.3.1.

Elder speakers, the challenge put to endangered language communities is whether the caregivers who are new speakers and learners of the language can, or indeed want to, reinstate this process of intergenerational language transmission to create a new generation of speakers. In this, as a radically alternative population to native-speaker caregivers who pass on language to children, they have the opportunity co-create and participate in a new model of intergenerational language transmission in a revival or 'post-vernacular' context, one in which their own knowledge of the language is not complete.

Through a series of semi-structured interviews with such a group of new speakers, all of whom were either primary caregivers or in close contact with children in their family, across four broad Western Australian communities – South-West WA, Mid-West WA, the Goldfields, and Kununurra – this thesis observes and describes how new speakers perceive the task of reinstating intergenerational language transmission – whether it is currently being undertaken, how it could or should be done, or indeed whether it ought to be attempted as a method of language revitalization at all. The result of this is an alternative model of intergenerational language transmission that has emerged amongst new speakers of endangered Indigenous languages in Australia.

## 1.1 The research intention, question, and application

The primary intention of this thesis is to present the range of perspectives of new speakers of endangered Aboriginal languages, in their capacity as caregivers or members of family with young children, regarding the reinstatement of intergenerational language transmission; and in doing so, to provide a wealth of knowledge and a collection of experiences to other language communities and individuals who are interested in supporting this particular aspect of language revitalization, and to expand our notions of intergenerational language transmission in the context of revitalizing languages. Thus, this thesis intends to be a process of ideological clarification, looking 'below the surface' of community ideologies and rhetoric about language, to interrogate language transmission as a method of language revitalization from the starting point of individual new speakers' complex perspectives.<sup>2</sup> Ideally, while this thesis is not a handbook, it will nevertheless have a practical application; a language worker planning a series of language classes for parents, for example, could refer to parts of this thesis to support their understanding of what unspoken perspectives caregivers might bring to class and how

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this thesis I use a broad definition of 'ideology' as "values, practices and beliefs associated with language" (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2002, p. 123), and often use the even broader term 'perspectives' where appropriate. I use the term 'ideology' to align with and refer to the fundamental question of 'ideological clarification' as proposed by Fishman, which I understand to be a question of such perspectives on processes, values, etc.. I am not using the term 'ideology' to link to the study of language ideologies from an anthropological standpoint (e.g. Woolard and Schieffelin (1994)), which I consider to relate moreso to formal linguistic structures.

they could be addressed; or a caregiver seeking to undertake the difficult task of transmitting an endangered language could be supported by seeing their own struggles and perspectives reflected in this thesis.

In order to interrogate the reinstatement of intergenerational language transmission as a method of language revitalization, I ask:

What is the range of perspectives – the ideologies, attitudes, beliefs – that new speakers of Aboriginal Australian endangered languages have about re-instating intergenerational language transmission, across endangered language communities in Western Australia?

To answer this question I suggest the following subquestions:

1. Is the reinstatement of intergenerational language transmission a desired method of language revitalization for these communities?
2. If intergenerational language transmission is desired – or indeed currently in operation – how do new speakers view the processes involved? In particular,
  - a. Why reinstate intergenerational language transmission?
  - b. Who is responsible for intergenerational language transmission?
  - c. What language content should be, or is, transmitted to children?
  - d. How should languages be transmitted intergenerationally?
3. Given this potential variety and range of perspectives, how do new speakers perceive that their perspectives regarding language transmission have developed and change?

### 1.1.1 Significance

In the first instance this research contributes to the international scholarly knowledge about the nature of intergenerational language transmission, particularly in non-European-language contexts, which are understudied (Lomeu Gomes, 2018), and as concerns languages of revitalization (Stebbins et al., 2017). Whilst there are studies of speaker/caregiver perspectives and intergenerational language transmission amongst minority-but-still-spoken languages where language revitalization efforts may be assigned to new speaker caregivers (such as Welsh (Edwards & Newcombe, 2005; Jones & Morris, 2007), Māori (Chrisp, 2005; Muller, 2016), Basque (Ortega et al., 2015), and Manx (Mcnulty, 2019)), this study has a particular focus on perspectives regarding extremely endangered languages in an Australian context. Further, most research regarding the role of caregiver perspectives in contexts of family multilingualism are concerned with families where the caregivers are relatively fluent; this study gives a much needed opportunity to look at the perspectives and reported practices of ‘non-fluent’ caregivers and language learners, to focus on and profile new speakers who are engaging in a

new model of intergenerational language transmission. Finally, this research provides a strong basis for applied language revitalization efforts that are evidence-based, localised, and meaningful to the communities involved.

## 1.2 Reinstating Intergenerational Language Transmission: an aspirational ideal?

Across Aboriginal language communities in Australia the desire for children to learn their endangered languages is strong, with 74% of respondents to the Second National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS2) saying that they wanted “traditional languages to be strong, widely spoken, used or known in communities *and passed on to younger generations*” (Marmion et al., 2014; emphasis added). But why attempt to reinstate intergenerational language transmission? Not ‘why revitalize languages in general’, but why attempt as a new speaker of a language, that isn’t the everyday vernacular of the community, to pass that language on to children in the family? Indeed, Hinton (2010, p. 38) notes that

While it is the dream of many people involved in language revitalization to see a new generation of native speakers, the parent generation, who sincerely desire the language for their children, usually do not speak their heritage language themselves, and cannot take on the task of passing the language on to the children at home. Thus second-language learning becomes the center of language revitalization.

Nevertheless this dream is the aspirational ideal of some language activists, as I discuss in this section, and is also fuelled by theoretical frameworks of language vitality on the one hand. As such, it becomes both a potential imposition placed upon communities that are revitalizing their languages, as well as a genuine desire of those same communities, and the complexity that new speakers bring to the possibility of reinstating intergenerational transmission is worth interrogating further (Bernadette O’Rourke & Nandi, 2019).

The theoretical thrust that I explore in this thesis for pursuing intergenerational language transmission as a method of language revitalization is based on a couple of different frameworks of language shift, namely, Joshua Fishman’s (1991) Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS), and the UNESCO (2003) language vitality assessment. The GIDS is an eight-point scale that characterises the degree to which a language is endangered, with the intention of guiding language activists as to what to work on next to be most effective (see Table 1). It includes as a measure – step 6 – the degree to which the

Stage 8: most vestigial users of the language are socially isolated old folks
Stage 7: most users of the language are [...] beyond child-bearing age
Stage 6: the attainment of intergenerational informal oralcy
Stage 5: language literacy in home, school and community
Stage 4: language in lower education that meets requirements if compulsory education laws
Stage 3: use of language at work
Stage 2: language in government and mass media
Stage 1: some use of language un higher level educational, occupational, governmental and media efforts

*Table 1. Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale, adapted from Fishman (1991)*

language is transmitted between generations.<sup>3</sup> Within this scale, the family is the ‘unexpendable bulwark’ of reversing language shift, valued as a site of language use and transmission because, in theory, “its association with intimacy and privacy gives it both a psychological and a sociological strength that makes it peculiarly resistant to outside competition and substitution” (Fishman, 1991, p. 94). Fishman goes on to acknowledge that in ‘modern’ environments, the family unit may not have the socialization power that it once had, and that the family may not be enough in itself to reverse language shift – but that without the family, any attempts at language revitalization that do not support language transmission in the home ‘can amount to little more than biding time’ (Fishman, 1991, p. 399). Pauwels also argues that the home domain is the ‘stronghold’ of language maintenance because of the likelihood that most or all members of the family are of the same ethnolinguistic group, and because the family is “the least subjected to scrutiny and regulatory frameworks or institutional policies operating in any society” (Pauwels, 2016, p. 91). Similarly, with reference to Fishman and other theorists, Berardi-Wiltshire (2017, p. 333) concludes that:

[...] especially in the absence of mother-tongue education, the duty and the efforts of ensuring language maintenance falls onto the families, whose role in such cases is all the

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<sup>3</sup> Hinton notes that ‘for minority indigenous non-literate societies [...] the GIDS scale is less applicable’ (Hinton, 2011, p. 294), where steps 1-3 pertain to use of language in the government, media and the like, steps 4 and 5 pertain to the use of language for written communication which is a point of modernisation rather than language revitalization, and no mention is made in the GIDS of revitalization from documentation. Nevertheless we can extract from this scale the importance and indeed the idealisation of intergenerational language transmission, step 6.

more important, as without a safe place for the heritage language in the home domain, not even institutional heritage language education can warrant its future.

Such is the case in countries like Australia, where Eisenclas and Schalley (2017, p. 565) suggest that speakers of community languages cannot rely on efforts outside the family to support their child's language acquisition because "in the prevailing politico-economic context a shift towards appreciating the value of community languages is unlikely".

Similarly, the UNESCO (2003) 'Language Vitality Assessment' includes intergenerational language transmission as one of its six factors to evaluate the vitality of a language. Concerning this particular factor, a language is 'stable yet threatened' when it is 'spoken in most contexts by all generations with unbroken intergenerational transmission' (UNESCO, 2003, p. 7), and shifts from being 'unsafe' to 'definitely endangered' when 'the language is no longer being learned as the mother tongue by children in the home' (UNESCO, 2003, p. 8) (see Table 2). Other factors of vitality include the proportion of speakers within the total population, and the language community's response to new domains and media; and the UNESCO assessment includes as a caveat that '**no single factor alone can be used to assess a language's vitality**' (UNESCO, 2003, p. 7- emphasis in original). Nevertheless, intergenerational language transmission and the creation of a new generation of language speakers seem to have emerged from scales such as the GIDS and the UNESCO assessment as the defining measure of language vitality, such that O'Grady and Hattori (2016, p. 45) in their analysis of how these scales have been utilised, describe intergenerational transmission as 'the ultimate goal of language revitalization efforts'. This focus on intergenerational language transmission has been felt by some language activists as an imposition of an outside goal on their language communities (Leonard, 2011), and as an 'ideological disjuncture' between expert rhetorics and community-internal rhetorics that "affect the ways in which the 'health' of the linguistic environment is diagnosed and ultimately, the health, or success, of language revitalization" (Meek, 2012, p. 153). Other language activists – for their own reasons, without reference to these theoretical scales – have embraced the goal of reinstating home language transmission, seeing it as a personal responsibility, even a moral imperative, even where they themselves are still language learners and new speakers.<sup>4</sup> For example, Margaret Noori, an Anishinaabemowin learner and teacher of the Ojibwe language of the Algonquian language family in North America, writes that in order to 'reverse the damage' of linguistic and cultural genocide, "the

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<sup>4</sup> My intention here as an outsider linguist is neither to endorse nor criticise the position of family language transmission as a moral imperative, but simply to describe this representation. See section 2.1 for further comment on my positioning and researcher background.

Degree of endangerment	Grade	Level of intergenerational language transmission
Safe	5	The language is spoken by all generations. There is no sign of linguistic threat from any other language, and the intergenerational transmission of the language seems uninterrupted.
Stable yet threatened	5-	The language is spoken in most contexts by all generations with unbroken intergenerational transmission, yet multilingualism in the native language and one or more dominant language(s) has usurped certain important communication contexts. Note that multilingualism alone is not necessarily a threat to languages.
Unsafe	4	Most but not all children or families of a particular community speak their language as their first language, but it may be restricted to specific social domains (such as at home where children interact with their parents and grandparents).
Definitively endangered	3	The language is no longer being learned as the mother tongue by children in the home. The youngest speakers are thus of the parental generation. At this stage, parents may still speak their language to their children, but their children do not typically respond in the language.
Severely endangered	2	The language is spoken only by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may still understand the language, they typically do not speak it to their children.
Critically endangered	1	The youngest speakers are in the great-grandparental generation, and the language is not used for everyday interactions. These older people often remember only part of the language but do not use it, since there may not be anyone to speak with.
Extinct	0	There is no one who can speak or remember the language

*Table 2 UNESCO Language Vitality Assessment, Factor 1: Intergenerational Language Transmission. Adapted from UNESCO (2003).*

language must be returned to the children and the home” (Noori, 2009, p. 13). Similarly, Kari Chew, a Chickasaw language activist, expresses that within the context of her own family, she and her husband felt a ‘linguistic responsibility’ to learn and pass on the Chickasaw language to their future children (Chew, 2015). And indeed, there have been a number of documented attempts by caregivers, who have learnt their heritage language as a second language, to raise their children as the first fluent or native speakers of the language. These include Daryl Baldwin, a Miyaamia speaker, jessie little doe baird<sup>5</sup>, a Wampanoag speaker, and in Australia, Jack Buckskin, a Kurna speaker. All three of these new speakers relied on historical documentation to learn their language in the absence of native speakers, requiring them to undertake further training in formal linguistics to fully access and apply the language data in the documents. As such, these new speakers are unique in their attempts to learn and pass on a no-longer-spoken language, raising questions about why they felt compelled to undertake such a task and how they approached it. I note that their stories are somewhat unique in that these three new speakers did not have remaining traditional speakers to refer to or compare themselves to, creating a situation in which any language the new speakers learnt could be seen as a step away from 'zero'. Conversely, the presence of even one or two remaining speakers in the communities represented in this study potentially brings a marked difference in some ways – for example, new speakers may feel inferior or lack confidence in comparison to the remaining speakers. Keeping these potential differences in context in mind, their stories nevertheless share common themes with the new speakers in this study, including the challenges of learning their languages, creativity in their approach to language learning, and feelings of responsibility to their language, culture, community, and children.

Daryl Baldwin, a new Myaamia (also referred to as myaamiaataweenki) language speaker, talks about language as being “something that came to me later in life” (Baldwin, 2013, p. 3). Myaamia was spoken in the American Midwest and by Baldwin’s family in north central Indiana, but forced relocations from 1846 led to the community becoming fragmented. Before his deliberate intention to learn Myaamia, Baldwin had only heard ancestral names, but after becoming aware of the status of the language he felt a responsibility to learn it. This impetus coincided with the birth of his first child although was not strictly motivated by it, as at that time he was also generally interested in furthering his education, and only started actively learning the language when his second child was born, starting with household items, birds, animals, and so on. He reports that the endeavor to reinstate intergenerational language transmission was an effort approached collectively as a family, and

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<sup>5</sup> jessie little doe baird spells her name without uppercase letters, a convention I follow here.

comments that “work[ing] towards immersion and eventual fluency [is] a process that will easily take us two to three generations” (Baldwin, 2013, p. 7).

Jessie Little Doe Baird, a linguist and language activist of the Wampanoag language being revived in and around Massachusetts, USA, faced similar challenges to Baldwin in her attempts to revive use of her heritage language in her home. Two thirds of the Wampanoag tribe were wiped out by the introduction of yellow fever on a trading ship between 1616 to 1619, and the tribe’s land, spirituality, and language were further devastated by “settlers’ processes of religious conversion, laws against the use of the language, mainstream education, and commerce” (Baird, 2013, p. 19). Similar to Baldwin, Baird (2013, p. 21) notes accepting and taking responsibility for the language, writing that:

Step one of my language journey was accepting that I was responsible for, and capable of, making a place for my language to be welcomed back into my community, and that creation of such a place had to begin in my own home.

Unlike Baldwin, Baird and her family decided to use language in the home as soon as they decided to have a baby, and reports that now the child is more proficient in Wampanoag than the rest of the family.

Jack Buckskin is the most notable documented Indigenous person to have the goal of raising children as first language speakers of a no-longer-spoken language in Australia, featuring in a documentary film, *Buckskin* (2013), made about the process of learning and teaching his children the Kurna language as an act of language revitalization. Kurna was spoken and is being revitalized in and around the Adelaide area in South Australia. Because the last native fluent speaker died in 1931, Jack Buckskin started learning Kurna from dictionaries made by German missionaries in the 1830s and 1840s, when he realised as a teenager that he was speaking a mix of words from different Aboriginal languages of the area without really knowing which ones were from Kurna (Amery & Buckskin, 2012). He notes that “[a] lot of other family members are starting to actually learn words and speak language now, because my daughter speaks a lot of language and they try and communicate with her now” (Fuss & Tomlinson, 2014).

We have, then, an impetus to look at the possibility of new, non-fluent speakers reinstating intergenerational language transmission of their heritage language as a method of language revitalization, guided by theoretical scales of language vitality and shift such as the GIDS, which have been criticised by some language activists, whilst the goal of bringing language home into the family has nevertheless been embraced by others as a heartfelt responsibility.

### 1.2.1 An aspirational model of intergenerational language transmission

In order to interrogate the idea of new speakers reinstating intergenerational language transmission, I propose an ‘aspirational ideal’ of what reinstating intergenerational language transmission entails, such that we can compare new speakers’ perspectives to the range of possibilities espoused in theory, referring in particular to the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (Fishman, 1991) and the UNESCO (2003) language vitality assessment, and what language transmission looks like when it has not been interrupted. I use the word ‘reinstating’ intentionally to evoke the idea that there is some earlier process of intergenerational language transmission that has been lost or destroyed, which can be copied and brought back. As such there are a number of features of the aspirational model, which can be used as points of comparison for new speakers’ perspectives:

- a) Reinstating intergenerational language transmission utilises ‘native-like’ methods of language transmission, including that
  - a. Language transmission is unidirectional and contiguous, from older to younger generations but not younger to older, and from grandparent to parent to child without skipping a generation and
  - b. Language transmission is conducted by the caregivers themselves in the home and other domains of the family, i.e., not school
  - c. Languages are transmitted by ‘naturalistic’ methods that are most similar to how languages are transmitted outside of, or prior to, contexts of language shift, and not by methods that are more similar to second language teaching
- b) with the intention of creating a new generation of ‘native’ i.e., first- or fluent- language speakers.

I expand briefly on these features of the model here.

#### *Reinstating ‘native-like’ methods of transmission*

If we are looking at reinstating intergenerational language transmission, and in particular to reverse language shift, we might say the ideal is to reinstate ‘native-like’ or ‘naturalistic’ transmission in the family, as opposed to, say, language teaching in the classroom. This suggests it would be helpful to have some idea in mind of what ‘native-like’ transmission looks like, so that we can evaluate which perspectives and practices align with the ideal, and in which ways; and which perspectives challenge the ideal. In fact, it is not so easy to define ‘native-like’ or ‘naturalistic’ language transmission. As a starting point we could limit ‘native-like’ transmission to more informal or incidental processes, and define less ‘native-like’ transmission/teaching as including more deliberate processes. However, can we really exclude deliberate teaching practices from the scope of ‘natural-like’ transmission? For

example, in the home a caregiver may choose a book to read to their child that has age appropriate language, the same way a language teacher may select a text to read with a student. Would this be categorised as a formal or an informal activity, implicit or explicit, ‘native-like’ transmitting or teaching? Perhaps the most functional definition for ‘natural-like’ transmission is based on domains – transmission is ‘natural like’ if it occurs on the home, and includes the speakers and topics of the home. As Berardi-Wiltshire (2017, p. 332) describes it, “[i]n the case of the family domain, the family members are obviously the main addressees, the main setting is the home and common topics would encompass everyday matters”. Conversely, transmission is *not* ‘natural-like’ if it occurs in the school setting. This does not necessarily exclude practices of transmission that may have originated within the school context, but does at least tend more towards the kind of transmission practices that were available pre-colonisation.

### *Creating a new generation of native speakers*

I operationalise the goal of creating a new generation of native speakers as raising children to acquire and speak their heritage language as a first language, or to become fluent speakers of the language as a second/additional language. ‘Fluency’ itself is “an unfortunately vague term” (Hobson, 2010) as it covers both linguistic proficiency in terms of accuracy and complexity, and communicative ‘flow’ in terms of being able to be speak or to have a conversation with minimal pauses and hesitations (Lennon, 1990); but however defined, it represents something categorically different to the level of proficiency that children are currently acquiring in their heritage languages in Western Australia (see 3.5.2). There is also the issue of setting up and valorising the ‘native speaker’ as the goal of language revitalization quite apart from the level of fluency required to be considered a native speaker (Bernadette O’Rourke & Pujolar, 2013), and overlooks the possibility seen in Australia of language speaker status through *ownership* of the language, determined by social group affiliation, rather than through *knowledge* of the language, determined by level of proficiency (Evans, 2001) – but that is a discussion I return to in chapter 9.

#### 1.2.2 Ideological clarification and expansion

The purpose, then, of this study is in essence to pursue ‘ideological clarification’ (Fishman, 1991) from the perspectives of new speakers of very endangered Aboriginal languages in Western Australia, about the aspirational ideal of reinstating intergenerational language transmission. I start with the simple definition that a ‘perspective’ is a subjective, mental position about something in the world, encompassing but not limited to a person’s or community’s ideologies, values, attitudes, beliefs, and so on. In this study, I am of course interested in new speakers’ beliefs and attitudes regarding language, language learning, language transmission, language revitalization, and language norms. I

also refer to Family Language Policy theory, and in particular to Parenting Ethnotheories, as frameworks that would suggest the kind of perspectives that are relevant to the question of reinstating intergenerational language transmission. Family Language Policy is a field of research about how families make decisions about language within their families based on their perspectives or ideologies; their language practice, or what families do with language; and language maintenance, or how families try to do things and influence language practice (King et al., 2008; Spolsky, 2003). More recently researchers such as Lyn Fogle (2013) have broadened its framework to show how wider social and cultural belief systems influence caregivers' linguistic practices, including parental ideologies or 'ethnotheories' (Harkness & Super, 2006). In this context, 'ethnotheories' refer to the caregivers psychology and ideology regarding childrearing, including ideas about child development, what it means to be a 'good parent' (King & Fogle, 2006), and how children should be raised. Thus, language transmission in the family is not simply a transactional event, but one that occurs within the family environment, and within the context of the relationship between caregiver and child; so to understand new speakers' perspectives on reinstating intergenerational language transmission we want to include caregivers' perspectives on the family environment, on children's development, on the relationship between caregiver and child, and on what it means to be a "good caregiver" (Featherstone, 2016; King & Fogle, 2006).

Beyond a simple definition of perspectives, I also note that perspectives are not static – like language itself, perspectives on language, language transmission, and language revitalization are subject to variation and change, and this would seem particularly pertinent to Indigenous Australians who have seen so much political and social change in just a few generations (Austin, 2014). How did the current generation of adult speakers acquire and develop those perspectives? Once acquired, are perspectives consistent over a lifetime, or are they subject to influence and change? If beliefs are based in part on learnt information and experiences, what are the experiences and sources of information that influence speakers' beliefs about child language acquisition and language teaching?

Further, perspectives cannot be correct or incorrect, right or wrong, better or worse – they are simply how someone sees the world. They could, to an extent, be assessed in terms of how accurately those statements reflect the way the world is – for example, a speaker's perspective may include a belief about how old children are when they say their first words, which can be confirmed or refuted by observation. Even here, as Niedzielski and Preston (2000, pp. 201–202) note with respect to language acquisition, it is no simple task to compare 'folk' beliefs to scholars' beliefs because 'no other area divides the field of linguistics itself like that of child acquisition'. In this thesis I deliberately choose not to spend too much time assessing whether a belief is 'right' or 'wrong', although I am interested in how such perspectives may guide speakers' towards the so-called ideal of intergenerational language

transmission. Much more interesting is to see how a perspective may improve understanding of why an individual or community behaves in a certain way, how the perspectives come to be, and what they illuminate about previously held ideals.

The process of ideological clarification recognises that individual perspectives about language and language revitalization are multifarious, and that this has an impact on the outcome of language revitalization efforts. In one sense, we could think of the pursuit of ideological clarification as an attempt to understand why language revitalization efforts often ‘fail’, and to mitigate that failure by clarifying speakers’ underlying assumptions about what they want. For example, as Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998) observe, rather than addressing the assumption that all members of the language community even want the same outcomes and have the same capacity for commitment, communities will often focus on the more technical aspects of language revitalization (such as resources, materials, teachers). Kroskrity (2009, p. 78) likewise argues that ideological clarification is a necessary basis for the full support of the community for any language renewal resources; without such community support, language resources are “likely to become a matter of social division”.

In this sense, ideological clarification is also a process of discovering why speakers with the same linguistic proficiency may use language differently, or engage in different language transmission practices, leading to potentially different language revitalization outcomes. I elaborate on this point here specifically to problematise the oversimplification that children don’t learn their heritage languages in endangered language communities because their caregivers are not fluent speakers. Of course, the caregiver’s language proficiency has an effect on many qualities of the language they use with children – for example, on the lexical and grammatical properties – that are associated with the child’s language acquisition outcomes (Hoff et al., 2019). However, the position that children do not acquire language simply because adults are not fluent would suggest that when it comes to child language acquisition, caregivers who are more fluent in a language pass on more language to children than caregivers who are less fluent in that language, but this does not take into account caregivers’ choices: caregivers who are fluent in one language may nevertheless choose to raise their children in a different language, such as migrant caregivers who wish to raise their children in the dominant language of the community. The speaker’s linguistic proficiency has an advantage only in as much as the speaker’s *position* is to use the language with the child. Within the context of communities of very endangered languages where most caregivers are *not* fluent speakers, these perspectives of caregivers become critical. As we shall see, speakers with the same limited proficiency make different choices about whether and how to use their heritage language with children at all. In this way, speakers’ perspectives are part of the very context of language transmission, which makes them

critical as a component for understanding “the language acquisition situation and ultimate attainment of heritage speakers” (Silva-Corvalán & Montrul, 2019, p. 271).

That caregivers’ linguistic practices and subsequent outcomes are at least partially influenced by their perspectives is well documented in majority/non-endangered language transmission contexts (e.g. De Houwer, 1999; MacPhee, 1983; Pérez Báez, 2013). For example, De Houwer (1999) hypothesises that in order for families to support the acquisition and use of two languages by their children, speakers must have an ‘impact belief’ – that is, a belief that they can have an effect on their child’s linguistic outcomes, by intentionally using both languages with the child. As evidence for this hypothesis, De Houwer compares the case of Saunders (1988), whose children developed active bilingualism in English and German in an Australian context, and Don Kulick’s (1992) study of a Papua New Guinean village in which children acquired the emerging language, Tok Pisin, but developed only passive bilingualism in their traditional language, Taiap. In both cases, caregiver attitudes towards the two languages were positive, as were attitudes towards child bilingualism. Further, in both cases the caregivers had sufficient language knowledge to be comfortable using both, and they were motivated for their children to be bilinguals. However in the case of Saunders, there was also a positive impact belief – Saunders believed that what German his children learnt came directly from him as the sole German speaker in his family, and that his use of German thus made a difference to his children’s language acquisition. On the other hand, according to De Houwer’s analysis of Kulick’s study, bilingual caregivers in the Papua New Guinean village did not have impact belief – their beliefs about how children develop language didn’t include a belief about their own agency. Rather, they are reported to believe that knowledge of language is contained or generated within the child, and the child would only “start to learn” once that knowledge “breaks open inside of them” (Kulick, 1992, p. 120), and as such the caregivers did not use the language around the children.<sup>6</sup> Within language revitalization contexts, such as that of the Māori language in New Zealand, research also suggests that caregivers make choices about how to learn and teach language to children based in part on their beliefs and motivations pertaining to language transmission (Chrisp, 2005). This is not to say that caregiver perspectives regarding language learning and teaching *determine* how caregivers learn and teach language to children. Rather, perspectives are one factor in a cluster, which also includes external

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<sup>6</sup> It is worth stating that there is nothing ‘wrong’ with the belief that language knowledge ‘breaks open inside a child’. In monolingual speech communities, in fact, children do acquire languages without caregivers necessarily having an ‘impact’ belief or adapting their speech to be child-centred, due to the level of exposure to the language and language-in-context needed to acquire language. The issue with the beliefs attributed to the bilingual Taiap/Tok Pisin community is not simply that caregivers need to have an impact belief, but without such a belief and *in the absence of sufficient exposure to the language*, children only have the opportunity to acquire the limited language they are exposed to.

barriers and facilitators, and the caregiver's own linguistic knowledge. As Lyn Fogle puts it, we are concerned with "not what parents choose to do, but how they explain these decisions" (Fogle, 2013, p. 89). What then are the different perspectives of new speakers of endangered Indigenous languages that may explain differences in how caregivers use language, and the subsequent outcomes?

We can also pursue ideological clarification around language revitalization not only to 'mitigate failure', but as Stebbins et al (2017, p. 92) advocate for, to

push forward concepts which are central to talk about or research in language, but which have become defined in ways which assume standardised, stable languages, or languages fully spoken in their communities, or languages which have been able to change gradually over time rather than rapidly in response to intensive social conditions.

Thus in researching language revitalization and in particular new speakers' perspectives regarding language transmission in the context of non-standardised, non-stable languages (as Australian Indigenous languages largely are), we have the opportunity to expand and challenge our understanding of these seemingly elemental concepts of language transmission and native speaker status, as concerns languages of revitalization.

### 1.3 Further notes about terminology and notation

Before concluding with an overview of the thesis structure, I note here some terminology I use throughout that needs to be defined specifically for this context; or where, though there is a generally agreed upon definition, there may be a range of both positive and negative connotations to the word which I would like to address here.

#### 1.3.1 Why "new speakers"?

In this study I am particularly concerned with the perspectives of new speakers of endangered Indigenous languages in Western Australia, meaning, those community members who are learning the language now, or who otherwise did not learn the language to fluency as a child (O'Rourke & Pujolar, 2013). 'New speaker' is similar to Grinevald and Bert's (2012) category of 'neo-speaker', as it contrasts with the idea of the 'semi-speaker', but unlike the 'neo-speaker' I do not include a positive attitude towards the language as a necessary criterion for inclusion – as we will see, the participants in this study who are learning more language now as adults have a range of attitudes towards their language and language revitalization, both positive and negative. I also do not make a distinction here regarding level of fluency – a 'new speaker' may be relatively proficient, or may know a few words and

be thinking about taking some lessons. The majority of caregivers in these Western Australian communities would fall under the umbrella of ‘new speaker’.<sup>7</sup>

Further, I use the term ‘new speaker’ rather than ‘semi-speaker’ (Dorian, 1977), which generally refers to those speakers of a language who do not have as much linguistic knowledge as previous generations, suggesting that language is shifting towards loss and death. In contrast, ‘new speakers’, while they do not have as much linguistic knowledge as previous generations, are seen as emerging and agentic, in some way reversing language shift or at least moving language in a new direction (Jaffe, 2015). I do not refer to the participants in this study as ‘new speakers’ simply to be optimistic, although that may be reason enough, as optimism is in itself a vital tool of language revitalization; indeed,

The coining of the term [new speaker], however, prompts a movement away from the deficiency model sometimes implied in being a “non-” native, as opposed to a “native” or a “second” as opposed to a “first” language speaker of a language (Bernadette O’Rourke & Pujolar, 2013, p. 56).

I refer to these speakers as ‘new speakers’ to reflect the number of participants I interviewed who are in some way ‘taking the reins’ – as linguists, language workers, and language teachers – and further, to reflect that all potential language learners are situated in a context of shifting attitudes regarding Aboriginal languages and identities towards something more positive. While I hold up the ideal of ‘reversing’ language shift for interrogation, by using the term ‘new speakers’ I am already foreshadowing the fact that ‘new speakers’ does not necessarily, or need to, entail that language is shifting (back) towards whole generations of fluent, native speakers; what new speakers are moving to will be explored in throughout this thesis.

### 1.3.2 ‘Language’ in the singular, without an article

In this thesis I often refer to ‘language’ in the singular, without a definite or indefinite article, when referring to a specific language, as in “efforts to revitalize language in the community”. This reflects

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<sup>7</sup> To clarify, while a handful of the new speakers in this study have some conversational fluency, they would all consider themselves still to be language learners, not ‘full speakers’. To that end, I do not so much deliberately focus on ‘non-fluent’ new speakers to the exclusion of ‘fluent speaker’, but rather acknowledge that new speakers, who by definition have not learnt their traditional language as a first language, would not consider themselves to be ‘full’ or ‘fluent’ speakers.

the usage of the participants in this study, the members of these communities, and is a convention as concerns Australian Indigenous languages. Where there is ambiguity, I refer to language – meaning, the Indigenous language – as ‘the Indigenous language’, the ‘heritage language’, or simply use the language name.

### 1.3.3 Speakers and caregivers

I refer to the interview participants as ‘speakers’ rather than ‘interviewees’ or ‘participants’, as I feel this better indicates the relationship between interviewee and interviewer – i.e., that they have the most knowledge of the subject, that they are willing to share with the interviewer. The use of ‘speaker’ in this context does not indicate the person’s language proficiency. I use ‘caregivers’ to refer to speakers in this study who are in some role of care over children. This is more appropriate than ‘parent’, as it can include people who have a caregiving relationship with their own children, adopted children, grandchildren, nephews, nieces, and so on.

### 1.3.4 Notes on quotes

Quotes are given in the speaker’s own words as much as possible, which includes dialectal and language differences (e.g. Kriol, Aboriginal English), but for readability I have not included pauses, hesitations, etc. in the quotes unless they are important to understanding the speaker’s meaning. I have included the speaker’s first name, gender, age (by decade), and the language group with which they primarily identify.

## 1.4 Thesis structure and overview

The structure of this thesis is as follows:

In chapter 2 I describe the design of this research, which includes information about my background as a researcher; getting community approval and hosting for fieldwork; how the interviews were designed, conducted, and transcribed; information about the specific participants of this study; and my approach to data analysis.

In chapter 3 I explore the ideological context for language revitalization in the communities of study. I start with a brief outline of the pre-colonial and colonial history of Australia, and of Western Australia in particular. Then I discuss the causes of language shift and loss in these communities, with reference to displacement and genocide, the Stolen Generations, and ideologies that are antithetical to Indigenous language maintenance, such as the Monolingual Mindset. I provide further contextual information regarding the particular communities of this study, including the current efforts of language revitalization across the communities, and the status of the community languages from the perspective of community members.

I present my results and analysis in four thematic chapters (chapters 4 to 8) that answer each of the questions presented in 1.1.

In chapter 4 I outline new speakers' general positions on reinstating intergenerational language transmission, including what speakers think about the possibility of creating a new generation of first/fluent language speakers, the factors that speakers take into account regarding this possibility, and the alternatives presented and valued by speakers to the aspirational model of parent-to-child, unidirectional, 'naturalistic' language transmission in the home. In this chapter we see that new speakers differ from or indeed reject the aspirational model in a range of ways, from which point we can ask what intergenerational language transmission *does* look like in these communities in terms of why, who, what, and how.

I begin this exploration of what intergenerational language transmission looks like to new speakers of endangered Australian languages in chapter 5 by asking why speakers would want to pass on their heritage language to their children, looking at the range of speakers' ideologies pertaining to language and to the responsibilities of caregiving. This provides a necessary basis for understanding the rest of the results, and in particular for understanding speakers' motives. The premise of this chapter is that speakers transmit language in service of their particular language and parenting ideologies. I suggest that 'motives' for learning and teaching language to children can therefore be categorised and explained as those that are derived from ideologies about the value of language, and those that focus on fulfilling responsibilities to children; and that the difference between these suggests differences in strategy, and differences in when people will 'gain' those motives.

In chapter 6 I investigate who speakers perceive to have the role and responsibility of transmitting language to children, which includes the learner, personal and family responsibility, the role of grandparents, schools, future generations, and government institutions. In this chapter we can immediately see that while speakers may have their own motives for wanting children to learn language, they do not necessarily see themselves as best placed to undertake this task, given their perspectives on who has responsibility for transmitting language, what resources are available, and their own language learning and teaching abilities.

Chapter 7 discusses speakers' strategies for teaching language to children in the home and community (that is, outside of the school context), exemplifying that there is no one 'Indigenous' method of transmitting languages, but rather that new speakers approach language transmission in a myriad creative and adaptive ways. These strategies are broadly categorised by the perspectives they reflect: that children 'pick up' language through looking, listening, and learning; that children need to be supported to learn language; and that children learn to speak language explicitly through speaking

practice. I then look at two particular challenges for new speakers in reinstating intergenerational language transmission: how to normalise language use, including what is considered to be 'correct' language use, and how new speakers negotiate transmitting their heritage language when they are not themselves fluent.

In chapter 8 I explore one of the central tenets of my thesis, that speakers' perspectives and beliefs are dynamic. In other words, they have an origin, a path of development, and they are subject to influence and change – this speaks to the variety of new speakers approaches to the question of language transmission and revitalization generally. In this chapter I outline the influences on speakers' perspectives, including beliefs about the innateness of language, childhood experiences, relationships and peers, school based language education, the effect of age and social change on developing language ideologies, changing linguistic landscapes, the influence of specific, organised efforts to revitalize languages (such as language centres), and new speakers' observations of children.

Chapter 9 closes the thesis with a synthesis of how new speakers' perspectives, motives, beliefs, and strategies contribute to an understanding of how new speakers view the idea of reinstating intergenerational language transmission as a method of language revitalization in communities where the majority of caregivers are not fluent speakers of their indigenous heritage languages. This includes some discussion on what new speakers' perspectives 'add up' to and how they compare to and expand on the ideals of contiguous, unidirectional, intergenerational language transmission within the family for the purpose of creating a new generation of fluent/first-language speakers and reversing language shift. These ideals of native-like language transmission and first-language speakers are re-situated in a critique of why many scales of language shift – such as the GIDS and the UNESCO language vitality assessment – are problematic for use as scales of language revitalization, not least because they obscure the actual successes that new speakers have in revitalizing their languages. Nevertheless, new speakers need to have access to helpful, accurate information when it comes to making informed choices about language revitalization. I argue that this kind of informed choice feeds into speakers' commitment to any language revitalization efforts, which ultimately influences the outcome and their chances of achieving their own measures of success.

# 2 Research Design

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## 2.0 Introduction

As stated in the previous chapter, this thesis interrogates the possibility of reinstating intergenerational language transmission as a method of language revitalization across several communities of endangered Indigenous languages in Western Australia, through the perspectives of new speakers of these languages. In doing so, this thesis aims to achieve ideological clarification, or the clarification of new speakers' perspectives around the possibilities and processes of intergenerational language transmission in these communities.

To address these aims I suggested a series of smaller questions:

1. Is the reinstatement of intergenerational language transmission a desired method of language revitalization for these communities?
2. If intergenerational language transmission is desired – or indeed currently in operation – how do new speakers view the processes involved? In particular,
  - a. Why reinstate intergenerational language transmission?
  - b. Who is responsible for intergenerational language transmission?
  - c. What language content should be, or is, transmitted to children?
  - d. How should languages be transmitted intergenerationally?
3. Given this potential variety and range of perspectives, how do new speakers perceive that their perspectives regarding language transmission have developed and change?

These subquestions concern the perspectives of new speakers and language learners as represented in the broad communities of study – South-West WA, Mid-West WA, the Goldfields, and Kununurra – where the majority of caregivers who may be interested in passing language on to their children are not fluent speakers themselves but rather language learners.

These aims and questions provide the basis for the research design, namely, to interview new speakers across the communities of study to elicit a range of perspectives regarding language transmission to children, based on their own experiences of and reflections about language learning and passing on their heritage language to children in their family. I also draw on new speakers' perspectives regarding language teaching in school where relevant. In this chapter I discuss this research design in further detail, including who I am as a researcher (2.1); community approval and hosting (2.2); the rationale and protocol for the interviews (2.3); information regarding the participants (2.4); and data analysis (2.5).

## 2.1 Researcher background

I approach this research as a white, English-speaking Australian female in my late 20s-early 30s, living in a metropolitan area, with an Honors degree in Linguistics and a Masters of Speech Pathology, which positions me on most counts as an outsider to the communities of study. However, there have been some benefits to doing this research as an ‘outsider’ – for example in terms of not being involved in community politics. I have also attempted to mitigate the limitations of my position, as I explain in this chapter, in terms of seeking community approval and hosting, doing reciprocal work that utilised my linguistics background at the language centres, and taking steps to ensure a degree of comfort with interview participants.

My attraction to this particular research topic stems from the intersection of my interests, qualifications, and life experiences, as someone with a degree in Linguistics and experience working as a speech pathologist with young children and their families, and who has a keen interest in endangered languages, fuelled by my experience of learning Welsh as a second (and minority) language in my early twenties. These educational and professional experiences have shaped my own perspective on the question of reinstating intergenerational language transmission in endangered language communities – most significantly, that I come to this research topic believing that more can be done to revitalize languages. In particular, from my experience of learning Welsh through an audiolingual method that focused on core vocabulary for conversation<sup>8</sup>, plus ‘Welsh-only’ conversation practice with other Welsh learners and speakers, I believe that approaches to language revitalization efforts would benefit from more opportunities for speaking practice and for practising language that is useful for conversation – if indeed the goal is to create language speakers. Throughout this thesis and indeed, this project, I have tried as much as possible to curtail my own judgement that more *should* be done to revitalize languages, and instead to present individual’s perspectives as they are. The question of whether languages should be revitalized is a matter for the communities of speakers to decide, not outsiders. However, as a caveat, my own position is that language revitalization is a positive endeavour, and my preference is for people to be in the best possible position to revitalize their languages. As such, I believe that individuals and communities should have access to the best possible information and resources as part of the process of deciding whether they want to engage in intergenerational language transmission or in language revitalization activities generally, a question that I discuss further in 9.3.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.saysomethingin.com/welsh>

## 2.2 Community approval, hosting, and reciprocity

At the beginning of the project, I approached a number of Aboriginal-controlled language and cultural centres across my home state of Western Australia to discuss the possibility of visiting and being hosted by the centre to do fieldwork. It was important to be approved and hosted by these centres for a number of reasons. Firstly, observing protocols, the Board of each language centre controlled approval for working in each community, as the Board had some position of authority within their local community to make these decisions. The existence of the language centre in each community also indicated that there was some focus on language preservation and revitalization, which meant that I would likely be able to include speakers who had already given a lot of thought to the issues, into the range of perspectives. The language centres were also crucial in helping me contact language learners in the area; provided a physical place for interviews that the interviewees already had some connection with; and provided advice and consultation regarding the research design. Being hosted by the centres also gave me the opportunity to observe the kinds of language revitalization activities that people were already engaging in. Part of the agreement between myself and the community centres who supported this research was the negotiation of reciprocal, volunteer work. This reciprocity was an important part of maintaining an ethical relationship. Volunteer work included helping with smaller projects such as compiling historical records of pronouns in Noongar; organising databases; and writing a small phonological description of a Western Desert language.

Each community centre provided written approval to support and host the project for a period of time. The four community centres and the language groups they represented are as follows:

- Noongar Boodjar Language Centre, Bunbury, served as a hub for Noongar speakers
- Bundiyara Irra Wangga Language Centre, Geraldton, served as a hub for Wajarri speakers
- Goldfields Aboriginal Language Centre, Kalgoorlie-Boulder, served as a hub for Wangkatha and Ngadju speakers, and a Walmatjarri speaker and Pitjantjatjara speaker who were linked to Kalgoorlie
- Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre, Kununurra, served as a hub for Miriwoong speakers

These four communities represent a range of different language ecologies, experiences of colonisation, speaker demographics, and approaches to revitalization, as discussed further in chapter 3. This range of communities and ecologies was important for gaining the broadest possible range of perspectives regarding the research topic, rather than for example focusing more closely on one community for a case study approach.

## 2.3 Interviews

In order to gain speakers' perspectives on reinstating intergenerational language transmission as a method of language revitalization, I conducted semi-structured interviews between February 2017 and October 2017. In reality, these 'interviews' were closer to 'yarning' or 'research topic yarning' (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010) as they focused on the speaker's own experiences and stories of learning and teaching language, and were often led by what the speaker wanted to talk about and share with me. While I do also include occasional references to observations made opportunistically in each community, particularly of language classes in which I participated, I chose to focus on interviews and yarning as a research method rather than observations of what speakers 'actually do' with children. This project hinges on the value of understanding what speakers *think* about language learning and transmission and how they articulate these perspectives in their own words, as expressed through interviews. As argued Armstrong (2012, p. 153) amongst others, such perspectives and ideologies are distinct from behaviour. In his study of speaker ideologies about the use of Irish in Ireland, Armstrong (2012, p. 153) says that language ideologies are not to be understood from language *use*,

[r]ather, I read language ideology from explicit, metalinguistic statements about the value and proper use of language embedded in the texts that form the data for this study, e.g. policy documents, websites, publicity literature, and particularly, interview transcripts.

As discussed in the Introduction chapter, I incorporated research from the field of parental ethnotheories by using speakers' descriptions of specific acts of language learning and teaching, including their own evaluation of the act, as "a window into cultural beliefs" (Harkness & Super, 2006, p. 75). In fact, unlike observations of these acts, which may be determined or limited by the barriers and facilitators of the caregiver's external circumstances, speakers' descriptions of what they do, what they think they do, or what they would like to do, would seem to offer a better window on their internal beliefs. Similarly, conducting interviews rather than observations also avoids the issue of the researcher interpreting speakers' actions in ways the speakers would not choose to do so themselves. In the context of working with Aboriginal communities, this was one of the most practical factors in the decision to use interviews compared to questionnaires or other qualitative methods, as it allows the maximum contribution of participants to the research; and to value the knowledge and wisdom of those participants, 'acknowledg[ing] and affirm[ing] the right of people to have different values, norms and aspirations' (NHMRC, 2003, p. 11).

Yarning, as a way of 'having a conversation', has the additional benefit of being a method for exchanging information that most speakers in this study were likely to be familiar and comfortable with, compared to trying to 'act normally' while under observation. Yarning also contrasts with other

forms of ‘non-observational’ methods, such as written questionnaires or surveys, which may be administered frequently in some contexts (such as universities) but are not necessarily prevalent in the context of the communities I worked with. Yarning also benefits from not being limited in its scope. I had the opportunity to elicit responses to a set of prescribed topics; however, as many of the questions are open ended and I could follow the participant’s lead, I was not limited to what I assumed would be relevant, and could further explore the complexity of speakers’ responses. Because the interview protocol that I started with was semi-structured, I was also able to adapt and modify the questions for the speakers, in terms of re-phrasing questions for speakers with less proficiency in Standard Australian English; making questions more concrete or more technical/abstract depending on the speakers’ familiarity with the topics of discussion; and focusing on the areas that speakers were most able to talk about and moving away from topics that speakers didn’t seem willing or confident to speak on.

The obvious challenge of conducting these conversations as a method of gaining insight into information about speaker perspectives is that speakers may say what they expect the interviewer will want to hear, or may not have thought about the issue to such a degree that they are able to articulate their perspectives. They may also be uncomfortable sharing their full perspectives with an outsider researcher. I have mediated these possibilities in a number of ways.

Firstly, as I was volunteering at the language centre and most of the interview participants were associated in some way with the language centre, I had opportunities to get to know the speakers – and vice versa – before conducting interviews. I asked a range of questions as appropriate for the speaker, from those that referred to speakers’ concrete experiences to those that probed their more abstract perspectives, as discussed in the next section. While I would not expect either speakers’ meta-perspectives or narratives to be truly ‘objective’ accounts of their behaviour – of which people are often not fully aware – these two types of perspectives often illuminated each other in terms of revealing subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, differences, which showed the variation and complexity of speakers’ perspectives. For example, a speaker may articulate that a particular method is the ‘best way’ to transmit language, and then in their narratives talk about using a range of different methods. Such observations need not be understood as contradicting each other, but instead reflect the different levels of perspectives.

### 2.3.1 Interview method and protocol

Initially there was some concern that semi-structured interviews, while lauded for their relative lack of formality, may not have been culturally appropriate for every context. This follows Eades’ (2013) description of the sociolinguistic and sociocultural differences in the way that ‘middle-class white

Australian' people and South-East Queensland Aboriginal people ask questions, suggesting that middle-class white Australians people tend to ask questions directly – the way a teacher might ask questions of a student on class, for example, or even as a friend might ask a friend – and also tend to expect an answer. There is an assumption of having “rights to knowledge” (Eades, 2013, p. 32). In contrast, Eades (2013, p. 32) notes that in the particular South-East Queensland Aboriginal community, “all knowledge is considered an inalienable part of relationships between people and has no value on its own separate from these relationships”. Knowledge existing in the relationship between people means that not everyone has a right to knowledge, except by being part of that relationship.

Keeping in mind that asking direct questions may have been culturally-inappropriate for some interviewees, I designed an interview protocol with a range of direct and indirect questions, where the direct questions can be used at my discretion if they are deemed to be appropriate as the interview progresses. (For a list of questions, see Appendix 11.1).

While the topics of language and communication may be common to people’s everyday lives (everyone learns a language as child; everyone talks to other people), ‘language learning’ and ‘intergenerational language transmission’ are more abstract ideas, and not everyone will have thought about these at some generalised level, or be able to articulate their ideas about these topics. I started by asking questions that invited the participant to bring a real experience to mind first – for example, asking the participant to talk about the language they heard their family use when they were growing up, or to give their perspective on a language class they took recently. From there, we moved organically to more abstract topics as appropriate, talking about speakers’ perspectives at a ‘meta’ level, e.g. what they think about the possibility of teaching language to children so that they learn it as one of their first languages.

### 2.3.2 Recruiting participants and data collection

Interview participants were sought from each of the four communities through the contacts provided by the language centres and through snowballing (word-of-mouth). Individual participation could then be independent of community organisations if the participant wished.

Criteria for participation was that:

- the person identifies and is recognised by others as a member of that language community
- the person is 18+ years old, and

- the person has regular contact with a child/children outside of school (e.g. as parent, grandparent, aunt/uncle, other primary caregiver) about which they can refer to and reflect on

There was no criterion for the minimum ‘amount’ of linguistic knowledge required by participants, although as discussed in the next section, all participants knew at least a few words of their heritage language.

I provided each individual with a Participant Information Form and a Participant Consent Form, following ethical protocol. (Information provided to participants can be found in Appendix 11.4 and 11.3). I conducted all the interviews inside or directly outside the language centre in a quiet location, as requested by the interview participants. I recorded the interviews on a Samsung S7 Smartphone, using the built-in microphone in ‘interview’ mode, so that the phone recorded sound from both ends. This is adequate and appropriate recording quality for the type of analysis required in this project. Before each interview I spent some time talking generally with the participant, and specifically about the project so that they could ask any questions. I made fieldnotes after every interview to record observations about extra-linguistic information.

## 2.4 Participants

I interviewed 31 speakers from seven language groups centred around four broad community centres/geographical locations (see *Table 3*). I have counted speakers against the community centre/location they have spent most time in. To that end, there were two speakers whose primary language group lay outside of their designated community (Walmatjarri, Pitjantjatjara), but who have been included in the Goldfields language grouping as the community they are most affiliated with. All speakers’ everyday languages of communication were Standard Australian English, Aboriginal English, and/or Kriol; two speakers grew up speaking their heritage language (Miriwoong and Pitjantjatjara) as their primary language of communication, so would not technically be considered ‘new speakers’ of the language, but of course provided valuable insights and perspectives as traditional speakers. Participants ranged in age from their early 20s to their late 70s, and ranged from those who were not the primary caregiver but had close familial contact with a child/children, to those who were a primary caregiver for one generation of children, and those who were primary caregivers for more than one generation of children. I have categorised participants in this way rather than according to age, as some perspectives on language transmission related to the participants relative status as a ‘parent’ or ‘(great) grandparent’ rather than their age per se.

Participants had a range of linguistic experience and proficiency in their own heritage language(s), from a few speakers who were relatively proficient due to advanced study (or the eldest speakers,

	No children (= 6)		Parent (= 11)		(Great) grandparent (= 14)	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
Noongar (=10)	4		2	1	3	
Goldfields (=7)						
Wangkatha (= 3)	1		1		3	
Ngadju (=2)			1		1	
Walmartjarri (= 1)						
Pitjantjatjara (= 1)						
Wajarri (=6)	1		2	2	1	
Miriwoong (= 8)			1	1	5	1

*Table 3. Speaker demographics based on speaker's primary location.*

who were included as the only first-language Miriwoong and Pitjantjatjara speakers), to those speakers who only had some experience of learning language in school. Most speakers would be considered to be 'near-passive bilinguals' according to Nancy Dorian (1981, p. 107), in that they "often know a good many words or phrases, but cannot build sentences with them or alter them productively."

Because participants were selected by word-of-mouth from each community language centre, many of the participants were already associated with the language centre, such that their perspectives could be considered as those of people who were already in the best possible position to reinstate intergenerational language transmission; but participants were also sought from each community who were not currently involved in language revitalization activities. In particular, four participants from the Geraldton community were relative 'outsiders' to language revitalization activities, and they provided valuable and significant observations to understand the experience and perspectives of community members who are not linguistically inclined.

## 2.5 Data Analysis

I transcribed the interviews verbatim to capture information such as pauses, sighs, re-starts, hesitations, etc. This information in conjunction with the fieldnotes was important to provide extra information about what the speaker was saying – for example, whether they appeared to be confident

about the topic, or whether they were talking about an idea for the first time. However, as stated in 1.3.4, for readability I have only included these pauses and hesitations when quoting speakers where these provide extra-linguistic information. I imported the interview transcripts into the MaxQDA software, which provides tools for coding interviews at multiple levels of categorisation. The nature of the research question determined that I analysed the interview data using thematic analysis, which has the benefit of allowing for both deductive and inductive approaches for coding and interpreting the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). An earlier form of the research question – ‘What are the complex and dynamic attitudes, beliefs, and motivations that semi-speakers of Australian Indigenous languages have about intergenerational language transmission and language learning?’ – determined the deductive categories for coding: namely, ‘attitudes’, ‘beliefs’, ‘motivations’, and how these originated, developed, and changed. The themes that emerged from this, e.g. the value of language, roles and responsibility, and approaches to language transmission, gave rise to the inductive categories (i.e. ‘why’, ‘who’, and ‘how’) by which I re-framed the research question and further coded the data. After compiling speaker responses according to these categories, I sought to interpret these further both by comparing the responses to the literature, in order to expand and challenge theories that have been developed only for ‘majority’ languages; and to situate the responses in the context of the rest of the interviews.

As an outsider to the communities and cultures of this research, I have endeavoured to use as many quotes as possible from the participants of this study in order that participants tell their own stories in their own words. Further, the interview data is rich, so in some instances I have quoted the same speaker twice to illustrate different points in different chapters. However, the analysis of the results, while discussed with many members of the communities, nevertheless remains my own interpretation, according to my understanding of the broader, universal issues of language revitalization and intergenerational language transmission.

## 2.6 Summary

By conducting semi-structured interviews with 31 new speakers and language learners of a range of endangered Indigenous languages in Western Australia, and analysing them using a mixed-methods approach, I interrogate the reinstatement of intergenerational language transmission from the perspectives of these new speakers. This method values speakers’ qualitative perspectives above observations or quantitative data, to seek ideological clarification amongst speakers regarding language transmission. In the next chapter, I describe the context of these speakers’ perspectives in terms of their communities’ history and experience of colonisation, the causes of language loss, their current language revitalization efforts, and their children’s current language abilities.

# 3 Context

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## 3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I ask ‘how did we get here?’ – from more than 250 Aboriginal languages spoken before European contact, to a situation where most Indigenous adults have to intentionally learn their heritage languages if they want to pass on their languages to their children. ‘Here’ also refers to the perspectives that have prohibited previous generations and new speakers alike from using their language, including beliefs of the inferiority of language and accompanying feelings of embarrassment, shame, and fear; and the monolingual mindset, which imposes limits on the norms of language use. In this sense I also explore the historical, social, and ideological context for the emergence of the current generations of new speakers, describing the point from which new speakers must ‘recover’ if they are to reinstate language transmission.

I start with a brief overview of Indigenous history in Australia as it intersects with European colonisation and language shift in the last 200 years, focusing on the specific issues of displacement and genocide, the stolen generations (past and ongoing), and the imposition of the monolingual mindset (sections 3.1 and 3.2) Where possible I include statements from speakers given in the interviews in this study, because this is their history and knowledge. I then discuss the four geographical communities of this study in more detail, including each community’s own particular histories since European contact, their language statuses in terms of the broader surveys of speaker numbers (3.3), and their ongoing language revitalization efforts (3.4). Finally I look at the current language status of each community from the speakers’ own perspectives, as presented in the interviews, including speaker observations of their children’s current language abilities (3.5).

## 3.1 Pre-colonisation and colonisation

Archaeological data places the arrival of the first humans to Australia at about 65,000 years ago (Clarkson et al., 2017), which some speakers in this study commented on as a source of pride, such as Godfrey, a Wajarri linguist:

There’s a reason why we’re the world’s oldest, oldest and still practising culture because of the strict and harsh rules that we’ve had to abide by for the, you know, sixty to a hundred thousand years or however long we’ve been here, there’s a reason why we’re

still, we still hold that, which I'm quite proud of actually to be the world's oldest practising culture.

[Godfrey, 40s, M, Wajarri]<sup>9</sup>

There is also much evidence to suggest that, contrary to the commonly received myth that all Aboriginal peoples were nomadic hunter-gatherers, many Aboriginal peoples engaged with farming and agricultural practices, as documented in Bruce Pascoe's book *Dark Emu* (2018). Pascoe argues that according to journals and letters, early White settlers were indeed aware of Aboriginal peoples cultivating the land, but chose to ignore this.

In terms of linguistic diversity, before the colonisation of Australia in 1788 there were at least 250 different Aboriginal languages spoken, constituting at least 600 different dialects (Marmion et al., 2014a). Languages belong to the land, and are understood as being placed there by spirits. Similarly, people are connected to the land, and therefore people are connected to languages, via the land (Rumsey, 1993). Aboriginal people were and still are multilingual, as people married across language groups/lands, conducted trade, and so on (Singer & Harris, 2016). Speakers in this study saw this kind of multilingualism as a given – as for example Pamela, a Noongar speaker, suggests when talking about the number of languages spoken by children in different parts of the country:

[...] and those kids up north they could speak three or four different languages and English was probably fifth.

[Pamela, 40s, F, Noongar]

The First Fleet from Britain landed on the east coast of Australia in 1788, which had a devastating effect on the Aboriginal tribes of that area in terms of displacement and genocide. Along the west coast of Australia, significant instances of European contact before colonisation include the landing of the Dutch explorer Dirk Hartog in Kalbarri in 1616, and the wreck of the *Zuytdorp*, a Dutch ship, near Geraldton in 1712. However, the point of European contact of most historical significance to the west was in 1791, when George Vancouver landed in the harbour of what is now known as Albany, in Noongar Country<sup>10</sup>, and claimed Possession Point for the British. During the first few years of settlement, contact between Aboriginal peoples and British settlers was recorded by some as having been fairly amiable (e.g. Dale, 1833), with the British relying on Noongar people's knowledge and skills for survival. Some settlers, such as Sir George Grey and G.F. Moore, endeavoured to record words in

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<sup>9</sup> I refer readers to section 1.3.4 regarding treatment of speaker quotes

<sup>10</sup> I use the convention of capitalising Country when referring to specific land, and the idea of land and place itself, with which the speakers in this thesis have a particular relationship.

the Noongar language, which constitutes the earliest written documentation. However, contact soon became fraught as settlers possessed Aboriginal land, Aboriginal people hunted the animals that were introduced by the settlers which the settlers perceived as stealing, and amiable relations soon turned to warfare and genocide.

## 3.2 Causes of language loss

European colonisers of Western Australia introduced the main factors that caused, or forced, Indigenous people to stop speaking and transmitting their languages. Following other academics such as Jenny L. Davis (2017), I do not talk about languages ‘dying’ in a passive sense, but rather – if the metaphor of death is to be used at all – then languages are ‘killed’, as their speakers are forced to stop using them, whether through other people suppressing them, or through a speaker’s own decision to stop using the language in order to avoid negative consequences and seek the positive benefits of the dominant societal language. In the Australian context, the factors of language loss discussed here are the displacement and genocide of Aboriginal people (section 3.2.1); the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families (section 3.2.2); and the ongoing invisible language policies that privilege English at the expense of language maintenance and revitalization efforts (section 3.2.3).

In some ways these factors have affected each language community differently across Western Australia, as a result of how close each community was to European settlements, and how the groups interacted. For example, Noongar speakers, who live in the south west coastal region, were closest to the early settlements of Perth and Albany; whereas at the time of settlement, Miriwoong speakers lived in relative isolation in the Kimberley, and Wajarri speakers also enjoyed relative independence from colonisers. Nevertheless, over the decades these factors have become relevant to all speakers to some degree.

In each of the factors discussed, we can see the effect on speakers’ language use not only in terms of a disruption in language transmission and the number of children growing up to be fluent speakers of their heritage languages, but also in terms of a shift in ideologies about the languages. We do not have records of speakers’ ideologies before colonisation, but it seems safe to assume they were different to speaker ideologies and perspectives held by or imposed upon speakers since colonisation as a result of these factors – in particular, the ideologies that speaking the language is wrong, or sinful, and punishable; and that it is best in Australia to be monolingual.

### 3.2.1 Displacement and genocide

The relationship between languages and land is significant to the survival of Indigenous languages (Rumsey, 1993). Early settlers – and indeed, ongoing practices (Shannon, 2016) – displaced Aboriginal peoples from their land for the settlers’ own use, which in turn, through non-native farming practices,

exploited the land beyond what was sustainable. As explained in the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991, p. 8), “the loss of land meant the destruction of the Aboriginal economy [... and] threatened the Aboriginal culture which all over Australia was based upon land and relationship to the land”. Many Aboriginal people, including speakers in this study, still cite a strong ideological link between language and land/Country, including the choice to learn and speak one language over another because of the Country one inhabits, and the sense that language is best learnt and spoken on Country. Forcing Aboriginal people off particular areas of Country doesn’t necessitate that they can no longer use the language of that Country, as evidenced by people who learn heritage languages in universities off Country – for example, via the Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara language classes run by the University of South Australia in Adelaide.<sup>11</sup> Further, such a connection between language and Country should not be reduced to ‘rural’ Country or ‘bush’, of course, as

[i]n urban localities, as in other geographic localities, Aboriginal peoples still have Indigenous belonging and Indigenous ownership of place. This exists regardless of whether multi-story buildings, freeways, sports grounds, houses and places of worship have been built within that geographic locality (Fredericks, 2013, pp. 4–5).

Many domains of language use such as Dreaming stories and songlines (stories and paths of Aboriginal ontology and cosmology), and ethnobotanical knowledge, are inherently connected to Country, and without access to that Country, many speakers consider that opportunities to learn and use the language are lost, as Maree Klesch (as cited in Marmion et al., 2014a, p. 14) from Batchelor Institute describes in the National Indigenous Languages Survey:

Getting kids on country is very important as much of the knowledge of dreaming and spiritual associations with place is being lost due to lack of access to country. Ethnobiological knowledge is also being lost as children spend almost all of their time in the community.

### 3.2.2 The Stolen Generations

The Australian government’s forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families is one of the biggest factors that forced Indigenous Australians to stop using their languages. It is not the intention or scope of this thesis to give a comprehensive account of the systematic removal of children from their families in WA; the reader is referred to the *Bringing Them Home* report (Human Rights and Equal

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<sup>11</sup> More information about these classes can be found at <https://study.unisa.edu.au/short-courses/Pitjantjatjara-Yankunytjatjara-language> [accessed December 5th, 2020]

Opportunities Commission, 1997). Here I give only a brief overview of the historical and ongoing practice, as well as discussing the impact this had on the speakers of the languages.

The removal of Aboriginal children from their families in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was situated within broader legislation designed to control Aboriginal people. This includes the *Aborigines Act 1897 (WA)*, which made the West Australian government, in particular the Chief Protector, responsible for Aboriginal people; and the *Aborigines Act 1905 (WA)*, which made the Chief Protector the legal guardian of every Aboriginal child under the age of 16 years. The ideology behind the bill, as lobbied by first Chief Protector Henry Prinsep and as stated by the Honourable J.M. Drew, was that so-called ‘half-caste’ children were ‘savable’ from growing up to become “vagrants and outcasts, as their mothers are now”; and the intent of the bill and its amendments were to create a White Australia. In 1911 the bill gave the Chief Protector power to remove ‘illegitimate’ or ‘half-caste’ children such that the parents did not have rights to the child, and thus to separate ‘half-caste’ children from ‘full blooded’ Aboriginal children, and to enforce the assimilation of the half-caste children into white society. Across the state, children were taken from their families and removed to missions such as Beagle Bay Mission in the Kimberley, the Mount Margaret Mission near Kalgoorlie, or the Wandering, Roelands, and New Norcia missions in Noongar Country. The West Australian government removed between one in ten and one in three children from their families (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 1997).

These policies were in place up until the 1970s, and were a lived experience of some of the speakers in this study. It is important to note that although the Australian Government apologised to the Stolen Generations in 2008, the practice of removing Aboriginal children from their families is still ongoing, albeit encased in different legislation. Aboriginal children are massively overrepresented in out-of-home-care, being ten times more likely to be removed from their families than are non-Aboriginal children, under the guise of child protection (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2017). As well as the negative effects of separation on children’s health and well-being, separation from families is still affecting children’s language use, as described in a 2017 ABC news story by an aunt of two boys from Arnhem Land who were put into foster care rather than placed with relatives:

They were asked not to speak their language and weren’t called by their Aboriginal names, this in comparison to the Stolen Generation is exactly what happened back then and it’s happening again now (Bardon, 2017).

The literal removal of children from their families physically disrupted the intergenerational transmission of Aboriginal languages – the children who were removed no longer had their primary language input from their families. Second, the missions which the children were removed to, discouraged and punished the children for speaking their languages on the missions, another physical

disruption to the language. Third, these practices – both the physical beatings and the dominant social message of the inferiority of Aboriginal people – have had an ongoing psychological impact on Aboriginal people and their willingness to speak or even learn languages now, as described by Godfrey:

Children had it literally beaten out of them with a stick by them lay missionaries, so-called people of the cloth, nuns and priests, they said it was the devil's tongue, it was jabberwocky, it was evil you know, which is why Elders today are very reluctant, you know, in the last ten years we've only opened them up slowly, twenty years ago Elders would not, that's why a lot of people of my father's generation haven't learnt it because my grandfathers, my grandparents siblings and then my grandparents were at that age bracket, generation if you like, were the ones that had it belted out of them, literally belted out of them, [...] and, so it was, they had to they couldn't speak their language.

[Godfrey, 40s, M, Wajarri]

It is against a background of such language ideologies, past and present, that I explore why new speakers would want to pass on their heritage languages to their children.

### 3.2.3 The Monolingual Mindset and current norms

Having looked at the specific practices of displacement, genocide, and the removal of Indigenous children from their families, and the effect of these on speakers' language use and perspectives, I turn now to the general policies and attitudes of White Australia that have had an impact on Indigenous languages and language transmission (and, indeed, many multilingual families in Australia (Eisenclas & Schalley, 2017)).

Regarding Indigenous language speakers who were under the care of white Australians, such as in schools, missions, and foster homes, the general practice by white Australians was to ban the use of the local Indigenous language(s), and instead to force the speaker to use English (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 1997). This overt prioritising of English over Indigenous languages continued in the general community up until at least the 1970s.

According to the Inquiry into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language Maintenance report (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 1992), these practices were based on a number of attitudes, including the perspective that Indigenous technology was primitive, and that Indigenous languages must therefore also be primitive and should be wiped out. Similarly, the first two hundred years of colonisation were characterised by a lack of effort on the part of most non-Indigenous people to learn Indigenous languages, leaving Indigenous peoples – who were and are overwhelmingly multilingual – to learn English in order to communicate.

Since the 1970s, the practices supporting or suppressing Indigenous language speakers and languages have become more complex, with the rise of overt language policies in favour of Indigenous languages, coupled with ongoing covert or 'invisible' language policies that still serve to privilege English (Truscott & Malcolm, 2010).

Firstly, with respect to support for Indigenous languages, there are many ongoing, grassroots-level efforts to revitalize Aboriginal languages across the country, and in section 3.3 I describe the actions of the Aboriginal Language and Cultural Centres of each of the communities of this study. This support for Indigenous languages culminated in the *National Policy on Languages* (Lo Bianco, 1987), which recognised both community (i.e. non-English) languages and Indigenous languages in terms of their status, teaching and learning, and language services, and was the 'high point of language policy at the national level in Australia' (McKay, 2011, p. 301). This policy only lasted four years. The most recent policy document at the time of writing relating to Australia's Indigenous languages is the 2009 'Indigenous Languages – A National Approach'. The objectives of this policy are to bring national attention to Indigenous languages; to reinforce the use of critically endangered Indigenous languages; to utilise the Indigenous languages that are being spoken fully as part of the Close the Gap agenda; to strengthen pride in identity and culture; and to support Indigenous language programmes in schools.

However, while there are still some overt policies such as these in support of Indigenous languages, efforts to maintain and revitalize languages – whether through schools, language centres, or in the home and community – need to contend with a 'de facto or invisible form of language policy' in Australia (Truscott & Malcolm, 2010, p. 7). Truscott and Malcolm (see also Michael Clyne (2004) , Lo Bianco and Slaughter (2009), Oliver and Exell (2020)), and indeed the speakers in this study, argue that standard Australian English is prioritised and privileged in Australia, through language testing, education curricula, and the media, to the detriment of non-standard varieties of English and certainly to the detriment of Aboriginal languages. Speakers in this study recognised these invisible forms of language policy:

I don't think the government and education department see language, Aboriginal languages as important, I don't think, and I think if language is going to change in the schools, then I think that people like, that are in higher up and that, have got to change

their attitudes towards these languages, this language, and recognise that it's very important.

[Judy, 50s, F, Noongar]

These invisible forms of language policy also extended to the way Aboriginal people spoke English, through the devaluing of Aboriginal English and other non-standard varieties. Some speakers commented that their use of Aboriginal English was discriminated against by their peers and teachers at school, while Miriwoong speakers in particular saw the monolingual mindset and the prestige of Standard Australian English as a barrier for people who don't speak Standard Australian English to participation in the workforce and language classes:

There's lot of white man things in this world, you know today [...] if you wanna job you can't go there talking language, you know, you gotta go there talking the high English.

[Rozanne, 30s, F, Miriwoong]

Speakers also saw members of their own communities internalising the prioritisation of English:

Do the young fellas come back and use it? No, because it's all about Western world today, and it's all about Americanised, um, the language shift has changed, and it changes all the time.

[Denise, 50s, F, Noongar]

Such ideologies are reflected in the current norms of language use. In all communities there were speakers who felt that it would be normal to call out a greeting on the street in language, or to give instructions to their kids at the shops in language, but this was generally the extent of what new speakers were comfortable and confident with as a norm. Other speakers in this study, notably in Bunbury, Kalgoorlie, and Geraldton but not Miriwoong speakers in Kununurra, observed that the norm was that Indigenous languages are used and spoken by *other* Aboriginal people usually those living more remotely, who are perceived to have sustained other aspects of a more 'traditional' lifestyle such as hunting and fishing. Some speakers also felt more generally that it was normal for people to speak language in other places, such as 'up north' or 'over east', regardless of their lifestyle. In sum, it is very much not the norm to use Aboriginal languages as a language of everyday communication, except as a part of Aboriginal English or Kriol.

### 3.3 Western Australian Communities

Having looked at the general effect of colonisation on Indigenous people, languages, and ideologies in Australia, we can see more clearly the experiences of White contact on language use and on people

across the four West Australian communities of this study: the Noongar community along the south-west coast (3.3.1), the Wajarri community in the mid-west (3.3.2); the Wangkatha and Ngadju language communities of the Goldfields (3.3.3); and the Miriwoong community in the far north of the state (3.3.4).

These are communities in which the majority of people who speak the language at all are new speakers, rather than traditional language speakers, representing an alternative starting point for intergenerational family language transmission, in which the family caregivers are language learners themselves. There are of course differences between the communities and between individuals within the communities: new speakers in the Miriwoong language community in Kununurra reported having had the most exposure to their heritage language (and neighbouring family languages) as children compared to the other three communities. Nevertheless, these communities and the individuals who took part in this study all represent a demographic of new speakers who engage in an alternative model of language transmission.

### 3.3.1 Noongar – South-West WA

The Noongar (also ‘Nyungar’, ‘Nyoongar’) community is diverse and widespread, the largest Indigenous nation in Australia both in terms of land mass and number of individuals who identify as Noongar, from Dongara in the north, to Esperance in the south-east (see Figure 1). Noongar people speak the Noongar language, which is said to have three main dialects: Djiraly (northern), Kongal-marawar (south-western), and Kongal-boyal (south-eastern). In the 2016 Census, 475 people self-identified as Noongar-speakers (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016), but as with many Aboriginal languages, the accuracy and validity of the census is up for debate. While there are only a handful of fluent speakers, there are certainly many thousands of Noongar people who know some words or phrases (NBLCAC, 2017).

The Noongar nation was one of the first areas to be colonised by the British in Western Australia, starting with the settlement of Albany – home of the Minang Noongar group – in 1826, and the Swan River Colony in Perth – home of the Wadjak Noongar – settled in 1829. While it is reported that there was a brief early period of accommodation between Noongar and British settlers, conflicts soon arose over use of land and resources, resulting in the British using force against Noongar people, as well as the introduction of diseases. The Noongar nation was particularly affected by the ‘repressive and coercive system of control’ of the Aborigines Protection Act of 1905, due to the location of Perth on Noongar Country as an administrative centre (DPC, 2018). This saw the Western Australian government move Noongar people onto ‘native camps’ outside of towns, with a curfew introduced.

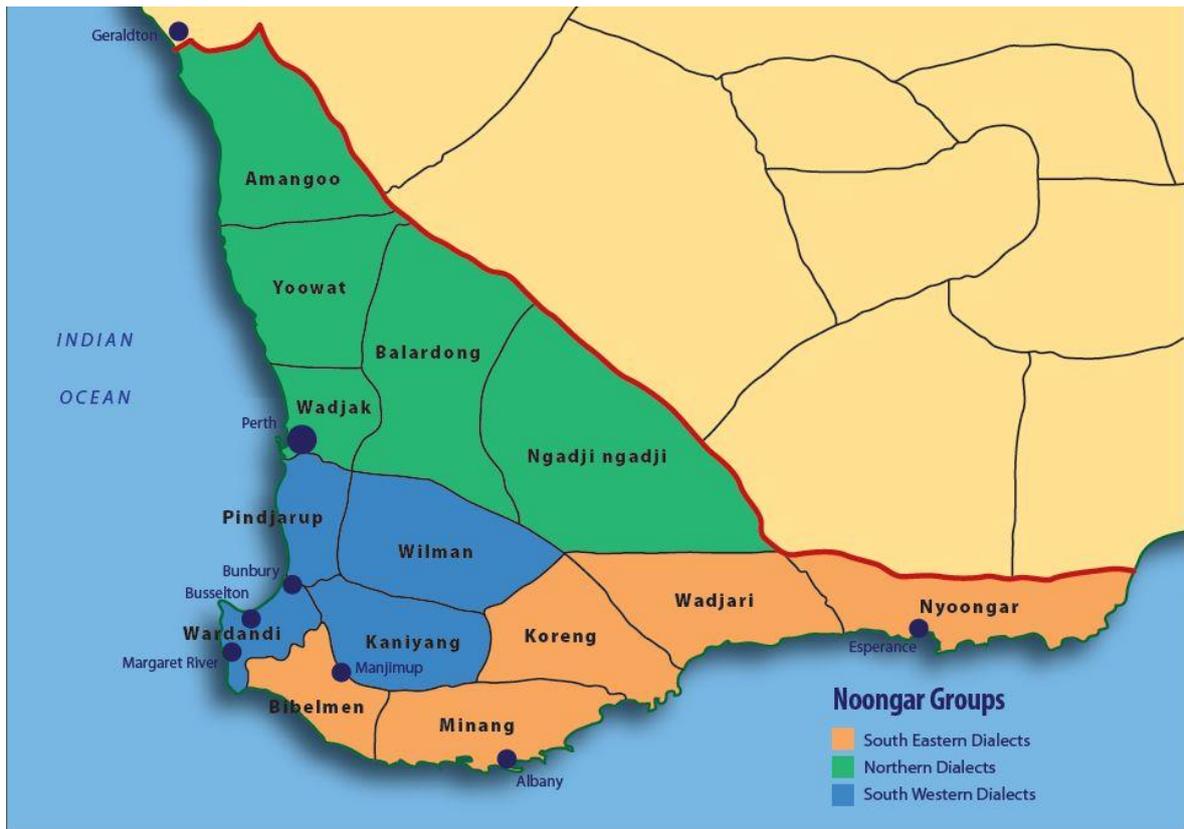


Figure 1. The Noongar Nation. Courtesy of Noongar Boodjar Language and Cultural Centre

Some of the Noongar people interviewed in this research talked about experiencing these curfews in their lifetime, such as Pamela, whose family is Noongar but whose paternal grandmother was non-Indigenous:

We lived in East Perth and that was on the boundary of the city, so the curfew was that you had to be out of city limits by six o'clock [...] my grandmother lived in East Perth, so come six o'clock when it was dark it didn't matter, sneak back to Nan's house and carry on like a normal family.

[Pamela, 40s, F, Noongar]

The Aborigines Protection Act also saw Aboriginal children being removed from their families and placed on missions – again, a lived experience for some of the people in this study, as recently as 1960.

I grew up at Wandering mission with the German nuns [...] they started closing [the missions] in the seventies but I was still a ward of the state til I was eighteen, so they were sending us people to like, boarding schools and hostels cause they didn't really want



Figure 2. The Mid-West languages. Courtesy of Bundiyarra Irra Wangga Language Centre

to send us back to our families, cause they still probably didn't think our families were good enough to have us.

[Delys, 40s, F, Noongar]

In this study I approached the Noongar Boodjar Language Cultural Aboriginal Corporation (NBLCAC) as a representative of the Noongar community around Bunbury, which is where the NBLCAC was located at the time. The NBLCAC was established in 2015, and initiates and supports language activities such as language documentation and description, language classes, and creating language learning resources.

Within the south west, Noongar is taught as a language other than English at a number of primary and high schools, including the Djidi Djidi Aboriginal school in Bunbury.

### 3.3.2 Wajarri – Mid-West WA

The Mid-West languages are situated from Carnarvon in the north to around Geraldton in the south and the Western Desert in the east, and bound by the West coast (see Figure 2). The languages of the mid-west include Badimaya, Malgana, Nhanda, Ngarla, Wajarri, Warriyangka, Yamaji, and Yingkarta. The main languages still spoken and/or remembered today are Badimaya, Nhanda, and Wajarri. In this study I interviewed adults who had a connection to the Wajarri language. A conservative estimate of the number of Wajarri speakers is 20; at least 145 Wajarri speakers were self-identified in the 2016 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

The Wajarri language and people are linked to the Murchison River that flows through the larger Murchison area in the mid-west, consisting today of 29 pastoral stations and only 114 people (as of 2011). In terms of the experiences of colonisation of the communities in this study, the Wajarri experience was unique in that

within the Shire of Murchison uniquely there are no towns, and this has meant that many of the problems faced by Aboriginal people in other parts of Australia were not so immediate for the Wajarri people. Instead they were able to adopt a semi-nomadic station-orientated life that allowed them to maintain close contact with their traditional lands and at the same time to obtain some of the benefits of contact with European culture (Irra Wangga Language Centre & Yamaji Language Aboriginal Corporation, 2011, p. 227).

Nevertheless, Wajarri people have still been subjected to the same laws and policies as the rest of the state, which has had a severe negative impact on the use of the language, as Godfrey, a Wajarri linguist, described earlier in this chapter regarding the fact that his grandparents had the language 'belted out of them'.

Today the Mid-West language communities are supported by the Bundiyarra Irra Wangga Language Centre in Geraldton, which was established in 1991 as the Yamaji Languages Aboriginal Corporation.

Activities undertaken by the Irra Wangga Language centre include language documentation, description, and archiving; creating language resources such as books, posters, consultation on script developments, and the Wajarri dictionary app; and providing on- and off-site language classes. Wajarri is taught in a number of primary and high schools in the area; and is one of only three Indigenous languages taught as a WACE (Western Australia Certificate of Education) subject in Western Australia.

### 3.3.3 Goldfields language groups

The Goldfields languages are located on the western edge of the Western Desert, extending to the east of the coastal town of Esperance in the south, and across to the Noongar language border in the west (see Figure 3). The languages of the Goldfields include Wangkatha, Ngadju, Kuwarra, Ngalia Tjupan, and Kaalamaya. Of these, Wangkatha has the most speakers, with 225 people identifying as Wangkatha speakers in the 2016 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016), centring around the



*Figure 3. The Goldfields Languages. Courtesy of Goldfields Aboriginal Language Centre Aboriginal*

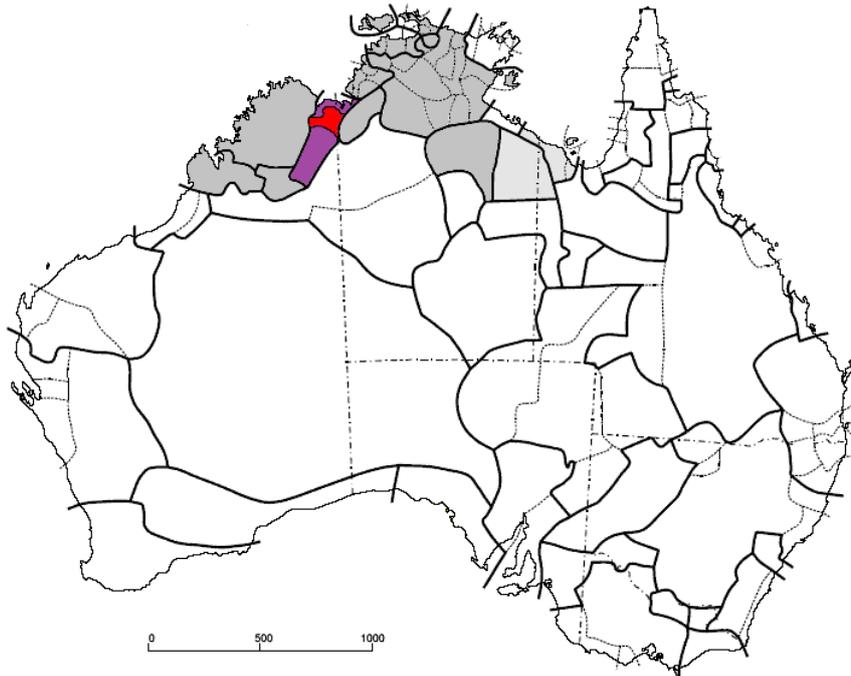
small city of Kalgoorlie-Boulder with a population of about 30,000 people. Ngadju speakers are centred around the smaller town of Norseman, in the Woodland forests Country between Kalgoorlie and Esperance. (There are no figures for number of Ngadju speakers reported in the 2016 Census).

As it sits on the edge of the Western Desert, Kalgoorlie-Boulder provides services for many Western Desert people, including some Pitjantjatjara speakers, who represent a relatively strong language group in that it is still learnt as a first language by children.

The Goldfields language communities are supported by the Goldfields Aboriginal Language Centre in Kalgoorlie, which was established in 2011. Previous research on Wangkatha speakers' perspectives and ideologies was conducted by Jessica Boynton (2015), to which I refer in this study. However, the linguistic demographic of the speakers in Boynton's study were significantly different to those in this study, as she mainly interviewed older, more fluent speakers. In this respect my study diverges in my focus on including the perspectives of younger, more 'urban' new speakers.

### 3.3.4 Miriwoong – Kununurra, WA

The Miriwoong community is situated in and around Kununurra, in the far north of Western Australia in the Kimberley region (see Figure 4). Miriwoong people speak Miriwoong, Kimberly Kriol, Aboriginal English, and English; and also speak, or are closely connected to speakers of, Murrinpatha, Gadjerung, Jamajung, and Ngariman. A conservative estimate of the number of speakers is 58; in the 2016 Census, 156 people identified as Miriwoong speakers (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). From observation, the Miriwoong language community represents the 'strongest' language community in this study in terms of the amount of language remembered by Elder speakers and is even used on the street by



*Figure 4. Miriwoong language, in red; neighbouring languages in purple; non-Pama Nyungan languages in grey. Kwamikagami at English Wikipedia [GFDL (<http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html>) or CC BY-SA 3.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>)], via Wikimedia*

new speakers. The Miriwoong language community is supported by the Mirima Dawang Wooralb-gerring (MDWg) Language and Culture centre, which was established in the 1970s.

The Miriwoong language is the only non-Pama-Nyungan language represented in this study, and is also unique in its compound system of coverbs and inflecting verbs, “[exhibiting] a level of complexity hardly found elsewhere” (Olawsky, 2013, p. 44), a point I return to in chapter 7 regarding speakers’ perspectives about how to teach language.

As a service centre of the Miriwoong people, Kununurra was established relatively recently in Western Australia’s colonial history – some speakers in this study remember Kununurra being built in the 1950s. For many Miriwoong speakers, their experience of White contact was through employment on cattle stations, to which they attribute the increased use of Kriol amongst Miriwoong speakers, as described by Jimmy, a Miriwoong language worker in his 40s, with respect to his own parents and family:

They worked in the stations see, my mum and dad and my granny, they was working out over there Newry station all around there, so yeah, the station mob told them not to

...speak their language, yeah, that's why they speak Kriol and that's why I never learn much language, yeah, how to speak it properly.

[Jimmy, 40s, M, Miriwoong]

Many speakers in this study also went away to boarding schools and missions in or near Broome, coming home to their families on school holidays.

The Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring centre has initiated and supported a range of language activities, including a modified language nest (a set of language immersion activities for young children, run in at least seven schools and learning centres in the area); community language classes; language learning resources including a dictionary app and bilingual audio books; cultural awareness training; and language consultancy for projects such as town signage. The Centre is also involved in documenting, describing, and archiving language from older records and through working directly with Miriwoong Elders.

### 3.4 Language revitalization efforts

Efforts to revitalize language take many forms. In this section I provide an overview of the broad range of language revitalization efforts that are taking place across Australia, in order to contextualise the reinstatement of intergenerational language transmission at home as a language revitalization method. This range of language revitalization efforts also provide a prominent context for the development of communities' and individual speakers' perspectives regarding language use and transmission, and the emergence of an alternative model of language transmission.

In each community, the process of full language transmission has been disrupted for the current adult and child generations, so all the efforts to work with language in these communities fall into the language revitalization rather than language maintenance category. These language revitalization efforts, then, include a broad range of activities, including bilingual signage in towns to increase the visibility, awareness, and status of the language; language and culture camps, which may include lessons, songs, recording older speakers, and creating an environment where people feel comfortable to use the language they have; Indigenous dance classes that incorporate language; and a few other structured/recognised programmes, as discussed below, including community/adult language classes, LOTE education, Master Apprentice Programmes (MAPs), and language nests.

I discuss the various activities and programmes that the communities in this study are engaged in, and comment on how these contribute to reinstating intergenerational language transmission in these communities. Some of these language revitalization activities go a long way to supporting people to

learn and use more language in their community,. However, they are not targeted specifically to supporting adult caregivers and families to learn and teach language to children.

### *Community/adult language classes*

Each of the language and culture centres in this study has run language classes for adults in the community, except for the Goldfields Aboriginal Language Centre which at the time of this study predominantly had a documentation and research focus. Classes have largely focused on developing early language skills (pronunciation, greetings, question words etc.), and many community classes, from my observation, have been predominantly attended by non-Indigenous adults – for example, by local non-Indigenous school teachers at the Noongar Boodjar Language Cultural Aboriginal Corporation in Bunbury. This is not to fault the language classes, but rather to point out that their intent has not been specifically or explicitly to support adults to pass on language to their children in the family home.

### *Language workshops*

All of the centres in this study have been involved in running language and cultural education workshops. I consider that these differ slightly (sometimes greatly) from language classes in that the focus is often not on teaching language for communication per se, but teaching *about* language – phonology and orthography, basic vocabulary, and so on.

### *LOTE education*

In recent decades there has been a push to train teachers to teach Aboriginal languages as a LOTE subject in schools, and at least 13 speakers in this study have received LOTE qualifications or similar and are teaching or have taught their local Aboriginal language in primary schools. This movement has been positive in many respects, not least in terms of challenging ideologies that language should not be spoken at all, as Brodie, a young woman, comments with respect to her own experience of studying Noongar in primary school:

It's sad because they [the older people] were told not to speak their language, and that's I think one of the main reasons for the older people, is what makes it hard [...] whereas I got to learn it in school.

[Brodie, 20s, F, Noongar]

However, it must be acknowledged that as a school subject, exposure to language is often limited to four, 40-minute classes per week, and students are often reluctant to use language outside of the school grounds. Further, as observed by some speakers in this study, lack of employment options for

LOTE teachers of Aboriginal languages in Western Australia has limited the effectiveness of this push to train teachers.

### *Master Apprentice Programme (MAP)*

The Master-Apprentice Program is an approach to language revitalization developed by Leanne Hinton with the Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival (AICLS) (Hinton, 1997), that brings native-speaking elders together with adult language learners to learn the language through immersion. The long-term goal of a MAP is to create a generation of younger professionals and parents who can transmit language intergenerationally in their schools and homes, where elder speakers may not have the energy or training to do so.

The MAP involves a period of training Elders and adult learners to learn language according to a set of principles, include the principle that language should be learnt through immersion ('Don't use English, not even to translate'); that language should be learnt communicatively rather than through learning grammatical rules ('Find things to talk about. [...] Encourage conversation'); and that language learning takes time ('Be patient. An apprentice won't learn something in one lesson') (Hinton 1994 as cited in Tsunoda, 2006).

While popular in North America, MAP projects are only starting to find their footing in Australia. According to the 2014 National Indigenous Languages Survey, which collected information from language resource centres and individuals around Australia, there have in fact been 20 such Master-Apprentice programs (Marmion et al., 2014a); however the results of these have not reached publication. According to Knut Olawsky, a linguist at the Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre, there have only been two MAP projects in Australia (Olawsky, 2013). The first MAP was a "proof of concept" pilot project conducted in 2008 for the Bandjalang speakers in Tabulum, New South Wales. This program ended after a few months due to lack of training and support for participants. The second MAP project, which was led by Olawsky, took place at the Miriwoong language community in the East Kimberley region of Western Australia. Preliminary data suggests that linking Elder speakers and adult learners has been successful in terms of increasing language production of the learner participants. Another outcome of the project was the increase of language transmission between Apprentice participants and younger community members, either through structured language-classes led by the Apprentices, or through use of the language with their own children; as Olawsky (2013, p. 54) states:

All participants stated they found it relatively easy to produce single words or short phrases but tended to struggle with producing full sentences. Yet most participants would attempt using sentences when talking to children in the traditional language.

This transmission was encouraged informally, although at the time of the project, the language centre was still exploring ideas of how to incorporate families into the MAP without affecting what was already working. In terms of training, Olawsky reports that all participants who attended the MAP workshops considered it useful.

### *Language Nests*

Whereas the aim of Master-Apprentice Programmes is to develop language skills of adult apprentices through the tutelage of Masters, language nests focus on early child language development. Language nests were first developed in New Zealand in 1981 by the Department of Maori Affairs, in response to the apparent lack of success of schools to support children's Maori language acquisition. Known as *kohanga reos*, these Maori-language-only kindergartens brought in older, fluent Maori speakers to work with the children. As with the Master-Apprentice Program, language nests have the element of meeting the needs of a community where the current generation of parents are not full speakers of the language. *Kohanga reos* have met success in New Zealand, at least in terms of the number of children serviced by them – currently, *kohanga reos* service 5% of early childhood education in New Zealand (*Te Kohanga Reo National Trust, 2016*).

According to the National Indigenous Language Survey 2014, there have been 22 Language Nests in Australia (Marmion et al., 2014a); again, as with the Master Apprentice Programs, there is a paucity of published information about individual nests save for mentions of their existence on Language Centre websites. The requirement of a fluent speaker to work with children limits the applicability of these programs to language communities in which there are no full speakers.

### **3.5 Children's current language abilities – speaker observations**

In this section I look at the status of children's proficiency in Indigenous Western Australian languages through the perspectives of the speakers of this study. This is in comparison to the 'speaker number' data provided by surveys etc., as referred to in the previous section. These perspectives provide insight into speakers' sense of the status of child language acquisition in their communities. Having said that, while some speakers expressed that their children 'speak' and 'understand' language, it must be noted from my observation of speakers' interactions with children, and from speakers' own perspectives, no child in any of the communities could be said to speak language fluently.

### 3.5.1 Children's language comprehension

Within each community, speakers talked broadly about their children understanding particular aspects of language, usually kin terms, concrete nouns (e.g. animals, body parts), and responding appropriately to instructions. For example, Julie, a Miriwoong language worker, observed that children understood the words for household items and instructions in Miriwoong:

We learn here we go home and teach our kid back home, they pick up words too in Miriwoong, yeah [...] all that stuff I told you about knowledge and all them stuff, tea, sugar, tell them to get it in language, clean up, do clean up.

[Julie, 50s, F, Miriwoong]

Charmaine, a Noongar language teacher, likewise observed that children were learning and understanding simple instructions in Noongar, giving this example of an interaction she observed in church:

My cousin, he's in his 50s now, never spoke much language before, but he sang out to his kids you know, '*koolangka yoowarl koorl*' you know 'children come here' cause they wanted to sing a song, and they got up and they ran up the front and the youngest one would have been about two, still in nappies trying to get up the front there and heard this and they went along.

[Charmaine, 40s, F, Noongar]

Of course, speakers also gave examples of children not understanding language, which fleshed out the overall picture that across these communities, not all children understood single words and instructions, and that children didn't understand longer phrases or conversations.

The examples given by speakers about their children's comprehension abilities showed there was more difference between families within a community, than there were between communities.

### 3.5.2 Children's language production

Speakers also gave a range of examples of children speaking and using language, usually qualified in terms of the specific words and phrases they knew, which included being able to speak a few words or short phrases, either in isolation or as code-mixing, as Judy, a Noongar language teacher, described in the school context:

[...] and then of course as they got a bit smarter, little buggers they actually learnt that they could put things together like connect two other language words, and I was actually walking through the playground, when one said, one of the kids said in language, yelled

out as a teacher went past *koomba, koomba mooly* – and I looked, he was calling the teacher ‘big nose’, so they’d learnt to put the word *koomba* big and *mooly* together to call him a – [...]

[Judy, 50s, F, Noongar]

Some speakers did observe that children used the bits of language they knew at home and in the community as well as at school. This was true across all communities.

Well we talk back at home we talk Kriol and mix in Miriwoong [...] my own little family, I talk back home to my family, well they talk back to me like that same way again.

[Sylvia, 50s, F, Miriwoong]

The way speakers perceived their children’s language abilities represented a marked difference to how they perceived the abilities of their parents or grandparents: many talked about their parents and grandparents as having been reasonably fluent. This highlights speakers’ conceptualisation of language shift – most often, they perceive that they (and their parents) were the generation(s) that didn’t acquire much language, but that nevertheless they have memories of stronger language speakers. As with language comprehension, there were no significant differences between communities in terms of children’s (perceived) expressive language abilities.

### 3.6 Summary

In this chapter we have seen the community language contexts within which we want to explore the possibility of reinstating intergenerational language transmission. While the details of each community differ in terms of timelines and degree of contact with colonisation, they are all now communities in which active suppression by White colonisers, including the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families, and the introduction of ideologies linking language use with fear and shame, has disrupted language transmission and use of the heritage language, to the point that children now know and speak only a few words and phrases in the heritage language. Further, these communities have to deal with the far-reaching ideology of the monolingual mindset that besets Australia in general.

In the context of a quest for ideological clarification regarding the reinstatement of intergenerational language transmission, this range of ideologies – particularly those of fear and shame – are so important to take into account, as they may underlie and undermine new speakers’ spoken support of language revitalization; as Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998, p. 63) suggest with respect to ideological clarification of Tlingit:

For Southeast Alaska, "prior ideological clarification" means, in its simplest form, an answer to the question: "Do we really want to preserve the Tlingit, Haida, or Tsimshian language or culture?" While it is generally politically and emotionally correct to proclaim resoundingly, "Yes!," the underlying and lingering fears, anxieties, and insecurities over traditional language and culture suggest that the answer may really be, "No." What does a "Yes" answer mean? We often find that those who vote "Yes" to "save the language and culture" expect someone else to "save" it for others, with no personal effort, commitment, or involvement of the voter.

As a response to this shift in language ideology and disruption in language transmission, each community, in partnership with its local language and cultural centre, has deployed a range of language revitalization efforts, notably including language classes and workshops, Master Apprentice Programmes, and language books and other resources. These revitalization efforts have to contend with introduced negative language ideologies and the limited norms about language use that still guide many new speakers today. Most of these efforts have not been specifically designed to support new speaker caregivers to reinstate intergenerational language transmission in the home, but provide the context for the development of caregivers' perspectives, ideologies, and strategies within that domain.

With these contexts in place, we can now look at new speakers' general perspectives on reinstating intergenerational language transmission.

# 4 Overview of New Speakers' Perspectives

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## 4.0 Introduction

The first and broadest subquestion of this research is whether reinstating intergenerational language transmission is a desired method of language revitalization, from the perspective of new speakers of Indigenous languages in Western Australia. Therefore, it behooves us before anything else to consider new speakers' general position on this question. Do new speakers of endangered languages see reinstating intergenerational language transmission as a possibility? Is it desired? Are speakers already engaged in learning and teaching language to children at home? What do new speakers perceive to be the possible outcomes of attempting to reinstate intergenerational language transmission – can there be a new generation of fluent, first language speakers? And what factors might affect these outcomes?

While all families in this study reported raising their children to speak Standard Australian English, Aboriginal English, and/or Kriol as their first and primary language(s) of communication, about two-thirds of the speakers in this study also reported already being involved to some extent in passing on their heritage language to children in the home and community. This included nearly all the language workers and language teachers across each community, with the exception of Delys, a Noongar language teacher, who I discuss further below. For example, Paige, a young Noongar speaker, commented that she teaches her nephews and nieces words in Noongar, describing a very typical kind of language transmission that most speakers in this study talked about:

I've got younger nieces and nephews, I don't have any kids but I'd always say like, point out animals and stuff to them in Noongar.

[Paige, 20s, F, Noongar]

A smaller percentage of speakers in this study, those who weren't actively involved in language learning and transmission at the time of interview, nevertheless consciously saw it as desirable to teach their heritage language to children, and saw themselves as having a potential role in this transmission:

Interviewer: Would you ever use language with them [nieces, nephews, little cousins]

Sophia: Yeah like, yeah I would, definitely [...] I would wanna like teach them too like, more language so we can speak it more at home and stuff.

[Sophia, 20s, F, Noongar]

Finally, a small minority of speakers expressed that they either did not see it as possible to pass on the language that they knew to children, or weren't interested in it at this point in time. For example, Delys, who trained and works as a Noongar language teacher, talked about her own experience of starting to learn language when her children were growing up. She didn't see it as a possibility to teach her children what she was learning because she was 'just learning' the language herself:

Interviewer: But when um, when they were growing up, did you think about using –

Delys: No, cause I, cause they were still in primary school when I started, so I just, I was just learning myself.

Interviewer: Oh they were born after, uh before, before you started, yeah.

Delys: Yeah, so I was just learning myself still, yeah.

[Delys, 40s, F, Noongar]

Similarly Ada, who had a very immersive language background growing up in a remote community, didn't see the possibility of teaching language to her own (future) children because she wouldn't be able to do it in the same way that she had experienced as a child. If she was to teach her children language, she saw herself as having to do so in a much more formal way, e.g. with lessons:

I don't see there being an opportunity for me to teach my kids unless I take them out bush, um, or you know we are living in [...] Jigalong sort of thing, I might have to you know sort of rely on my mother to help teach that or take you know take on the way that you teach, that everyone is taught language in a sense is by doing it by paper or you know doing lessons, and might be the way that I have to teach my children, yeah.

[Ada, 30s, F, Walmatjarri]

Concerning the new speakers who weren't interested in learning and teaching their heritage language to their children, these speakers themselves framed their lack of interest as a more 'contentious' perspective that they were hesitant or reluctant to state explicitly in the interview, as Latoya (a Noongar speaker) and I discuss here.

Interviewer: Do you want to learn more Wajarri or more Noongar or, or it's not important to you at the moment or –

Latoya: I don't know I think, oh, it'd be a bit weird, weird to say that I'm not interested in it at the moment.

Interviewer: I was gonna say because, this is what no one will say, no one will say that I don't want to learn it –

Latoya: Yeah, yeah

Interviewer: But a lot of people will say, now that I'm older I do.

Latoya: Yeah.

Interviewer: Like when they're forty.

Latoya: Yeah that's how I'm, yeah like I would want to know it yeah.

[Latoya, 20s, F, Noongar]

I explore these alternative perspectives on language and language revitalization further in 5.1.3.

#### 4.1 Possible outcomes of reinstating intergenerational language transmission

The majority of speakers in this study are engaged to some extent in passing on their endangered heritage language to children, but as concerns the aspirational ideal of reinstating intergenerational language transmission, do these speakers think it is possible to create a new generation of first- or fluent- language speakers? If not, what do new speakers perceive to be the possible outcomes of intergenerational language transmission and language revitalization – what so-called 'language trajectories' do they have in mind (Van Mensel & Deconinck, 2019)?<sup>12</sup>

About half the speakers in this study thought that it was possible to raise a new generation of first/fluent language speakers, including those who thought this was a possibility for future generations, and those who thought it was possible for any generation given the right conditions. A third of the speakers in this study were unsure about this possibility and about the future of the language in general – they expressed that it was 'too hard to say' what would happen. Finally, the remaining speakers (7 speakers, spread across each community) did not think it was possible for there to be a new generation of first- or fluent- language speakers.

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<sup>12</sup> Since the time of this study I have been in contact with a Noongar couple who reported acting to raise their recently-born child to speak Noongar as one of the child's first languages, with a similar intention to the examples mentioned here. This couple described themselves as being unique in this particular endeavour.

As an example of a speaker with positive expectations, Godfrey, a new Wajarri speaker, observes that his sister Amanda has as a matter of course been teaching her own children Wajarri as one of their 'first languages':

Interviewer: Do you think we'll get to a stage where, you know, parents are teaching the kids as the kids' first language?

Godfrey: Well my sister is now, for the last twelve thirteen fourteen years with her own kids.

[Godfrey, 40s, M, Wajarri]

Admittedly what is meant by 'first language' here does not imply fluency or 'native-like' speaker status. Amanda did not describe herself as teaching her children Wajarri as a first language but rather saw it as a possibility for future generations:

I think it like it's gonna take a bit of time but, um, I'd like to think that by the time my kids have kids, that they'll know the language enough to be able to teach it to their kids as a first, as, as Wajarri or Badimaya or Nhandu or Mulgana to be their first predominant language spoken at home.

[Amanda, 30s, F, Wajarri]

Indeed the speakers who were more optimistic about the possibility of creating a new generation of first-language speakers talked about what they believed each successive generation would be able to learn, centering on the idea that each generation would see a cumulative effect of language transmission – although speakers did not necessarily articulate how each successive generation would be able to learn more than the previous generation, except perhaps that their fluency would increase as a function of increasing confidence. Nadine, a Wajarri speaker, thought it was possible for kids to learn Wajarri as a first language, if the main challenge at present, namely parents' confidence to learn and speak language, could be addressed through adult language classes. That is, she perceived that the future of the Wajarri language will change as parents gain confidence:

Oh gee anything's possible [...] anything's possible, you don't know [...] cause I was thinking about, see a lot of parents probably embarrassed, they're probably my age group where they would've heard a lot of language but they're not as confident to speak it or say the words, and might think it's, you know, they might think they gonna get it wrong like how I thought and I was thinking maybe when we're not so busy and when we're

more relaxed, start doing an adult class and start teaching them the basics doing the sounds and just start again.

[Nadine, 40s, F, Wajarri]

Finally, Charmaine, a Noongar language teacher, also spoke positively about the future of language based on what she perceived as a positive trend in her own life of people using language more and more with children:

Interviewer: You've got kids learning language in school and Elders learning language, do you think it's possible to get to a stage where that kind of younger generation of parents are learning language that they then teach their kids as their kids first language?

Charmaine: Oh, I think it will happen. Yeah, I think this next generation coming through have had some language experience, I can say with the ones that I've taught over the last thirteen, ooh, thirteen or fourteen years, they've all remembered something in language and I reckon they would teach their kids.

[Charmaine, 40s, F, Noongar]

A minority of speakers, though still a significant proportion, did not feel it would be possible for children to ever become first- or fluent-speakers of their heritage language. This position was expressed by speakers across each community regardless of the relative strength of the language. For example, Glennis, a Miriwoong language worker in Kununurra which had the most number of fluent Elder speakers, didn't expect that within the home domain her grandchildren would be able speak Miriwoong *fluently* as a result of language transmission, on the basis that they already had English and Kriol as their first languages:

Interviewer: Do you think kids now, can they grow up to learn Miriwoong as their first language?

Glennis: Too late [...] I'm saying too late for them cause they already got English and Kriol [...] we here you know to encourage them to, encourage our kids, and we hope in the future that they will speak it, like, **not fluently** but at home you know, when we're

together sitting, well like I speak it sometime you know, just make a whole sentence in Miriwoong at home.

[Glennis, 40s, F, Miriwoong] (emphasis added)

Denise, a Noongar linguist, also expressed reservations about the possibility of parents raising their children as first language speakers, based on what she perceived to be the strength of English in the community – although she was hesitant to rule out the possibility entirely:

Interviewer: Do you think it's possible in the next, you know with kids coming through school now and becoming adults as well, do you think it's possible for there to be a you know like, um, first speaker, uh first language Noongar speakers –

Denise: Nah I don't think so, lot of people don't converse and I really don't think that, the English is too strong, everybody talks English you know so, no I really don't think so, well not in my lifetime.

[Denise, 50s, F, Noongar]

I explore the 'right conditions' that speakers referred to when evaluating the possibility of raising children to be first- or fluent- language speakers in the next section, including speakers' perspectives about the status of their heritage languages relative to English, Aboriginal English, and Kriol further in 4.2.3.

## 4.2 Factors affecting the possibility of creating a new generation of speakers

Speakers' beliefs about these possible outcomes of reinstating intergenerational language transmission seemed to be related in part to their own personal sense of optimism (which is beyond the scope of this study to measure!). Speakers also perceived the possible outcomes of intergenerational language transmission as being negatively affected by (perceived) barriers and limitations regarding language teaching, learning, and proficiency (4.2.1); and differentially affected by whether children were able to attain multilingualism (4.2.2), the status of the heritage language relative to English, Aboriginal English, or Kriol (4.2.3), and the individual differences within children (4.2.4).

### 4.2.1 Perceived barriers and limitations

Speakers flagged a set of barriers and limitations regarding their own abilities to learn and teach language to children, which limit the possible outcomes of language transmission. These barriers pertain first of all to how speakers perceived their own linguistic knowledge and proficiency. Whilst I will return to the argument again in this thesis that speakers' linguistic proficiency does not solely

determine their linguistic behaviour, and thus does not solely determine children's language acquisition or language revitalization outcomes, nevertheless an obvious limitation on the possibility of creating a new generation of first language speakers is that new speakers do not have the requisite knowledge of the language, as Paige discusses:

You could obviously teach words to them [children] but, like if you teach them at a young age, I think they may, I don't know [if they could] speak it fluently [...] you'd have to have a lot of knowledge and not much people have a lot of knowledge these days.

[Paige, 20s, F, Noongar]

Speakers cited limits on their ability to improve their linguistic proficiency and knowledge in terms of limited or no opportunities to learn, practice, or speak the language; the perceived difficulty of the language; and not having enough modern vocabulary to talk about everyday things, as Judy comments with reference to not being able to teach her grandchildren the Noongar vocabulary to talk about everyday things:

You have to evolve the language for it to be able to survive the twenty first century [...] otherwise we're going to get so far and, we're still going to be back there instead of up here. Quite often my grandkids say to me, 'Nan [...] What do you call a beanbag? What do you call a playstation?'

[Judy, 50s, F, Noongar]

Some speakers also felt the possible outcomes of language transmission were limited by their own limited knowledge about how to teach and learn language; and lack of resources (such as time, and money for lessons); and confidence, including the internalised fear of being judged or shame for using the language. I examine these barriers more fully in chapter 6 regarding whether individuals feel they are able to take personal responsibility for reinstating intergenerational language transmission.

#### 4.2.2 Beliefs about childhood multilingualism

Another factor that was relevant to the language transmission outcomes that speakers perceived were possible were speakers' beliefs about childhood multilingualism, in terms of whether speakers thought it was possible for children to become multilingual and under what conditions. As expected, all speakers thought that childhood multilingualism was *possible*, but within this broad possibility speakers nevertheless expressed a range of beliefs regarding the details and features of childhood multilingualism that would have an effect on the actuality of a new generation of speakers being fluently multilingual.

In the first instance, for some speakers, such as the Pitjantjatjara speaker who was also familiar with language communities in the Western Desert, it was a matter of course that children would learn multiple languages fluently, citing the similarity of the languages as a supporting factor:

Interviewer: How many languages do you think kids can learn, can fit into their little heads?

Marna: they can learn a lot cause each word is similar.

[Marna, 50s, F, Pitjantjatjara]

Similarly, many speakers in this study observed that their own children picked up multiple languages to varying degrees, or commented that they themselves had done so. These speakers consider it feasible for children to learn multiple languages given enough exposure at a young age, as expressed by Pamela, for example, whose son had exposure to a range of different languages growing up through family and through (non-Indigenous) neighbours.

Well my son could speak a few dialects, a few different languages, [...] obviously he had English, but he would have had three or four different ones that he could speak at six years of age, yeah [...] I think at a young age it's much better.

[Pamela, 40s, F, Noongar]<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, by and large speakers in this study did not have concerns about the feasibility of childhood multilingualism, given the right conditions; where speakers expressed reservations about this possibility, they mostly referred to the amount of exposure that children would need to achieve and maintain their multilingual status. For example, Brodie reflected that her experience of learning French as an additional second language at school meant that she started to lose her first L2, Noongar, particularly as in practice this correlated with less opportunity to continue learning or practising Noongar outside of the classroom:

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<sup>13</sup> In this excerpt Pamela uses the construction 'would have had' in the potential rather than the conditional mood, to express a degree of certainty that her son could speak three or four different languages

Don't let them [children] learn another language cause that's what threw me off.

[Brodie, 20s, F, Noongar]

Only a couple of speakers discussed childhood bilingualism or multilingualism as presenting an extra cognitive challenge to children in terms of being able to understand and differentiate between two languages, as Paige suggests:

Their first language that they will be speaking is English so they need to have an understanding of, that's another language, a Noongar language as well.

[Paige, 20s, F, Noongar]

These speakers felt that this cognitive challenge would need to be taken into consideration when considering the possible outcomes for language revitalization and child language acquisition.

#### 4.2.3 Status of heritage language relative to English/Aboriginal English/Kriol

Speakers further related their perspectives about the possibility of children learning multiple languages, and in particular the possibility of children acquiring their heritage language as a first language, to what they perceived was the status of the heritage language relative to the dominant language (English, Aboriginal English, Kriol) in their community. That is, where speakers perceived the dominant language to be too strong – or as Lo Bianco and Rhydwen (2001, p. 393) comment regarding Aboriginal languages in Australia, where 'the power imbalance between these languages and English is too great' – speakers did not see a possibility for children to learn their heritage language as a first language. As stated above, these perspectives were held by one or more speakers interviewed in each community, suggesting/confirming the extremely endangered status of the heritage languages in each community.

For example, as presented in section 4.1, Glennis, a Miriwoong language worker, suggested it was 'too late' for children to grow up learning Miriwoong as a first language "*cause they already got English and Kriol*". A couple of speakers in Geraldton, Kalgoorlie and Bunbury held similar views, as expressed by Denise, a Noongar linguist, that "*English is too strong [...] everybody talks English, you know so, no I really don't think so, well not in my lifetime*".

Jimmy, another a Miriwoong language worker, confirmed that English was too important for communication and had too high a status within Kununurra for the Miriwoong language to ever fully take hold:

You got to learn English too you know, and your language, because we gotta work together, like when you go to, when you go to shop you gotta speak English there, can't speak language, go in the bank or to the city.

[Jimmy, 40s, M, Miriwoong]

These speakers see limited opportunities for 'new roles' or domains for their heritage languages (Moriarty, 2011), and on this basis were not optimistic about the possibility of children acquiring the language as a first language. Given that the linguistic communities in this study were chosen because of their endangered language status in terms of there being at most only a few Elders who could speak the heritage language fluently, this is not surprising. And yet, other speakers, as documented above, *were* optimistic, and language activists such as Jack Buckskin, a Kurna speaker, explicitly intended to raise his daughter to become the first native speaker of a language that had not been spoken at all for decades. I suggest again that at some level, regardless of the factors given here, speakers are optimistic or not about language revitalization based on their own internal sense of optimism. For the speakers mentioned above, in any case, the bottom line as concerns creating a new generation of language speakers is the relative status of the language – for them it is 'too late' to reinstate the heritage language as a first language.

#### 4.2.4 Individual differences

Finally, speakers referred to a range of so-called 'individual differences' (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015) that they perceived were relevant to children's success as language learners, and the ultimate outcome of reinstating intergenerational language transmission.<sup>14</sup> Individual differences of importance cited by speakers include how old children are when they (can) first start learning, their willingness to learn, their innate language learning or general learning ability, and the advantage they have as Aboriginal children learning Aboriginal languages. While some of these beliefs may be 'unremarkable', they are reported because they are significant to the speakers; further, how speakers specifically articulate these beliefs is often unique.

#### *Beliefs about age*

Overall, speakers believed that the age at which children can or should start learning their heritage language – whether through acquisition or through deliberate instruction – is a major factor in their

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<sup>14</sup> There has been some debate about whether to still talk about 'individual differences' per se – Dörnyei and Ryan argue that we should keep using this terminology, for the sake of being able to compare present and future research to past research 'within a recognizable organizational structure' (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). This debate does not affect the analysis of this study.

language learning outcomes and the possibility of children becoming first-language or at least fluent language speakers, where the younger a child is when they start learning *within the limits of how young is appropriate for the learning context*, the better. Speakers justified this belief on the basis that children are ‘sponges’; they learn quickly; they learn without being taught; and if they start younger they will develop more confidence with language. Nadine, a Wajarri speaker, articulates this from both her own perspective and that of her teenage son, who she says wishes she had started language with him when he was ‘little’:

I think the younger the better, um, like my nineteen year old says why didn't you start teaching me language properly when I was little I woulda been awesome now, and I'm like I'm sorry I didn't think of that.

[Nadine, F, 40s, Wajarri]

However, as alluded to, speakers differed on what they considered to be an appropriate age: while some speakers were very clear that children should start learning language as soon as they are born, or even when they are in utero, not all speakers believed that children should start learning language as newborns. While they believed ‘younger is better’, this was sometimes delimited by what the speaker perceived as being *too* young for language learning. For example, some speakers expressed that children should start learning (any) language only when they begin to walk or talk:

Interviewer: Can they start learning when they're first born?

Jimmy: Nuh, not when they're first born, when they're walking around talking, yeah.

[Jimmy, 40s, M, Miriwoong]

This perspective suggests that some speakers see language as something that needs to be taught to children when they have reached other stages of physical and cognitive development, not something that they acquire in stages (e.g. babbling in the sounds of the language) from birth.<sup>15</sup> For example, as we saw regarding childhood multilingualism in 4.2.2, Paige expressed that children need to be old enough to tell the difference between English and their heritage language:

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<sup>15</sup> Some of the variation or range in speakers' beliefs about how old children are or should be when they start to learn language may have to do with potential variation in how confident or interested each speaker was in using 'age' (measured in years and months) as a marker. Kruske et al. (2012), for example, describe how in two remote Aboriginal communities, mothers talked about milestones in 'vague' terms, or in terms of the concurrent emergence of other milestones (e.g. when the baby starts crawling). This may be a point of cultural difference; or we might also expect that regardless of culture, many people who haven't studied children's development may not be able to give 'exact' milestones.

Their first language that they will be speaking is English so, they need to kn[ow], under[stand], need to have an understanding of, that there's another language, Noongar language as well, and that's something that um, I don't know they at least have to be old enough to understand the difference, yeah.

[Paige, F, 20s, Noongar]

### *Willingness to learn*

New speakers also flagged children's willingness to learn their heritage language as an individual difference affecting the possible outcomes of reinstating intergenerational language transmission; as Maureeka summarised:

It's up to the kids if they want to learn it or not.

[Maureeka, 40s, F, Wangkatha]

This issue of 'it's up to the kids' wasn't restricted to language learning, but was expressed by speakers with respect to other areas of development – children learn by themselves, and are responsible for their own learning:

Either you learn how to climb that tree or you fall out of it.

[Valma, 50s, F, Ngadju]

The 'willingness to learn' factor is similar to what we might generally think of as motivation, which is identified in the literature as one of the major factors of individual difference that predicts success in general second language acquisition (Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003). Thus, some speakers perceived that children – particularly older children – were not interested or willing to learn language, and that this was a significant factor in language shift and why reinstating intergenerational language transmission would be limited in its outcomes. For example, speaking about Noongar teenagers, Denise suggests that the reason they aren't interested in learning language is because their world is too 'Westernised' or 'Americanised':

I think if you really wanna learn language you have to really wanna do it, you gotta have the drive, if you, if you're not committed and not serious about it, I don't think you'd be really interested. I know that they learn language in school [...] but do the young fellas come back and use it, no, because, it's all about [the] Western world today [...] so I don't

know if they are at a place in their life where they wanna find themselves and wanna find their language.

[Denise, 50s, F, Noongar]

Denise identifies interest in language as dynamic – young people may not be in a place right now where they have motives for learning language. Latoya, a young Noongar woman, also hypothesised that children in general just aren't interested in language because there is no reason for them to be interested, particularly in areas where language is spoken less and less:

These kids nowadays like, ha- I know for a fact half of the kids won't probably wanna learn it they'll probably think like, you know like what's the use of this, I know like the grandparents would be like, you know like, learn it but they're just, kids nowadays I notice they're not really into the, yeah you only just find a couple of kids that's really into the like talking lingo.

[Latoya, 20s, F, Noongar]

Here, Latoya points to the significance of children's environment on their willingness to learn language, supposing that without the environmental cues and necessity to learn and speak language, only a select few children are inherently motivated to learn their heritage language.

Conversely, some speakers believed that Indigenous children actually had a great willingness to learn their heritage language. For example, Judy, a Noongar language teacher, observed that at least the Aboriginal children in her class were willing to learn an Aboriginal language, more so than they were willing to learn other languages:

Kids are very good at learning languages and Aboriginal kids when they know it's an Aboriginal language they're more willing to learn it, a lot of them talk about 'oh do we have to go to Indonesian Aunty, why do we have to go there, we're never going to go to Asian countries?'

[Judy, 50s, F, Noongar]

### *Language learning aptitude*

The third individual difference that a couple of speakers flagged as important for the feasibility of reinstating intergenerational language transmission is the child's perceived ability to learn a second language.<sup>16</sup> As Zoe, a young Wangkatha mother, puts it:

Well, if you, your head's screwed on and you really want to learn it, you should be able to pick it up, not easy but like you should be able to pick it up.

[Zoe, 20s, F, Wangkatha]

Similarly, Maureeka comments that a percentage of the population are naturally going to pick language up, partly because they are 'around it at all times', but also suggesting that there are children who don't have the ability to pick up language except through immersion, pointing to a possible innate language learning aptitude that some children have.

Maureeka: You get some kids out there that just picks it up just like that, not all of them but maybe thirty percent of them.

Interviewer: What do you reckon's different about them? the ones that pick it up? ... is there a difference?

Maureeka: Well, some of the kids are around it at all times, some kids are not, and you'd be lucky to bash it into them [unless] someone speaks it in the house.

[Maureeka, 40s, F, Wangkatha]

Particularly as concerns non-immersive language environments, then, these speakers did not expect that children would be able to 'pick up' their language as a second language to much degree of proficiency if they weren't naturally talented in language learning, seeing language learning as a specific skill.

### *(Aboriginal) children respond differently to Aboriginal languages*

The last factor I list here as a perceived influence on language transmission outcomes is that of the child's identity, particularly whether or not they are Indigenous. Some speakers observed that Aboriginal children responded differently to Aboriginal languages than to other LOTEs, and even to English or Aboriginal English. That is, the fact that the child is learning an Aboriginal language is a point

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<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, Roehr-Brackin and Tellier (Roehr-Brackin & Tellier, 2019) point to the fact that there is relative little evidence about the role of aptitude in children's second language learning.

of individual difference that may influence their success and the positive outcomes of reinstating intergenerational language transmission. Godfrey, for example, expressed the belief that Wajarri children had an innate preference for Wajarri:

[...] but, speaking to kids in another lang[uage], in in Wajarri, it's, it'd be good to get it on, to have it recorded like on video, where I could speak to 'em in English and you'd see for your own eyes, start talking Wajarri, and, even when the kid's half asleep and they're nodding off and I start talking they, they literally fight that sleep back.

[Godfrey, 40s, M, Wajarri]

Similarly, Valma observed that Ngadju children picked up Ngadju language even more quickly than they did English:

They pick it up more easier, that's what I believe, um, they take to that word more faster than the English word of that particular thing, that's what I've seen.

[Valma, 50s, F, Ngadju]

In practical terms, a possible explanation for this observation is that Indigenous children who have been exposed to some language at home may respond differently to use of that language in public because they recognise it. This would not be expected of non-Indigenous children who have not been exposed to an Indigenous language at home. Amanda describes this observation with respect to her own children's response to being exposed to Wajarri at school:

The teacher was reading [the book] and she actually said, you know, she'd read it and she'd go 'and the big *marlu* [kangaroo]', and she looked at my daughter and [my daughter's] eyes just lit right up, it's like 'oh wicked, oh my teacher knows, my teacher knows how to speak Wajarri'.

[Amanda, 30s, F, Wajarri]

The belief some new speakers hold that Indigenous children are better able to learn or acquire Indigenous languages suggests those speakers are more likely to engage in language transmission, anticipating their children's likelihood of success, particularly as compared to, say attempting to pass on high school Italian or Japanese to their children. I discuss further in 8.1 the belief that children are hardwired for language, and turn to the question of whether speakers' perceptions of factors that affect the possibility of creating a new generation of language speakers act as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

### 4.3 A self-fulfilling prophecy?

While speakers perceive that the above factors (perceived barriers and limitations, the possibility of childhood multilingualism, status of the heritage language, and individual differences in children) affect the possible outcome of language transmission, we can also ask whether speakers' beliefs about these factors are a 'self-fulfilling prophecy'. This is really a question about what it means for perspectives to guide behaviour. Taking individual differences as a case in point, we would be tempted to hypothesise that if a caregiver believes that children have to really *want* to learn language (where 'willingness' is an individual difference) then the caregiver will be discouraged from pursuing language transmission activities with children who don't seem interested. According to this hypothesis, the caregiver in essence takes the child's 'lead' on whether they pursue language transmission – and certainly, the idea that caregivers' beliefs about their child's volition guide the caregivers' behaviour, is substantiated with examples from non-linguistic areas. For example, whereas Dutch parents believe that they can set their children's sleep schedule, 'broadly middle-class' parents in the United States believe that children's sleep schedules are determined by the child's own age and temperament, leading to different parental practices across cultures (Harkness & Super, 2006). Cheraze, a Ngadju speaker and young mother, makes a comment that would confirm this specific link between caregivers' beliefs about their children's volition and their own behaviour, as she suggests that when children 'do whatever they want', it 'puts parents off':

Cheraze: It'd be good if they [caregivers] talk it [language] more to their children, just make 'em learn it, um, yeah.

Interviewer: What stops them from doing that now?

Cheraze: I don't know, people, kids just think they can do whatever they want when they please and they don't have to listen.

Interviewer: Yeah, does that put people off, like if you're trying to teach, language to your kids and they're not listening to you, do you stop trying?

Cheraze: Yeah, most people do.

[Cheraze, 20s, F, Ngadju]

However, as I discuss in both chapters 7 and 8, speakers in this study report engaging with and responding to children's language use and behaviour in a variety of ways, and their reported responses are often *not* determined by their perception of the child's individual differences per se. Instead, speakers report behaving in response to whether they feel they have some level of control over these individual differences – whether they have a sense of perceived agency, or 'impact belief', as

introduced in 1.2.2, the belief that caregivers “can exercise some sort of control over their children's linguistic functioning” (De Houwer, 1999, p. 83). Speakers may believe that a child’s lack of willingness or ability to acquire a language will make it harder for them to acquire the language, but that doesn’t necessarily determine that the speaker won’t try to teach them.

#### 4.4 Alternatives to parent-to-child, unidirectional language transmission

We have seen that most speakers engage in some kind of heritage language transmission with children, and perceive a range of outcomes in terms of the possibility of children becoming a new generation of fluent speakers. Before looking at new speakers’ perspectives about the specifics of why, who, and how to transmit language to children in the following chapters, I discuss speakers broad-scale alternatives to the aspirational model of reinstating intergenerational language transmission. In the Introduction to this thesis, I proposed that such an aspirational or ‘ideal’ model of intergenerational language transmission should utilise ‘natural-like’ methods of language transmission, implying that:

- a) Language transmission is unidirectional and contiguous, from older to younger generations but not younger to older, and from grandparent to parent to child without skipping a generation, and
- b) Language transmission is conducted by the caregivers themselves in the home and other domains of the family, e.g. not school
- c) Languages are transmitted by ‘naturalistic’ methods that are most similar to how languages are transmitted outside of or prior to contexts of language shift, and not by methods that are more similar to second language teaching

However, in evaluating the possibility of reinstating and supporting intergenerational language transmission in these communities, we need to understand the other models or patterns of language transmission already in effect that speakers recognise and value. Indeed, as Stebbins et al. (2017, p. 67) note, what we typically think of as language transmission in the home is only one type of language transmission when it comes to revitalizing languages in the Australian context, and here we have an opportunity to expand the definition to include transmission

by exposure to the usage of speaker/learners, by reading and research, by structured teaching in communities or schools, by raised awareness of old Language in English usage (including place names and elements of Aboriginal English), by learning the land and

participating in reclaimed cultural practices of communication (dance, cloak-making, etc.), and by keeping in touch with cultural ways of being and relating to others.

In this section I discuss the different patterns of transmission that speakers valued, with a focus on the between-person modes of transmission that differ from being unidirectional and contiguous between parent-to-child.

#### 4.4.1 Community-level strategies

Strategies outside of the family for transmitting language to children make use of the speakers and resources in the wider community. These strategies include sending children to playgroups where the caregivers speak language, school language lessons, language nests, and culture camps,. For example, Zoe, a young Wangkatha mother with one child at the time of interview, expressed that a good strategy for revitalizing language would be to introduce language into community organisations such as mothers' groups and schools:

They should have it in the school [...] even if they have it at the mother's groups, playgroup, and then into the kindies, you know, and then into the school, high school, and like half an hour a day or something you know or whatever their classes would go for.

[Zoe, 20s, F, Wangkatha]

Denise, a Noongar linguist, similarly advocates for community-level, immersive strategies like language camps and Master Apprentice Programs as a way of revitalizing language and restoring language transmission, if money permitted:

I would like to do the camps, I would like to do the camps, I'd like to run a lot of Master Apprentice workshops, you know where you're just doing the, you know the speaking, and bring more Elders in that we do have left, and really provide the goodness for them to, to do this you know, to do these camps. I would really flood the whole community with it not just little bits here and there, everywhere you know, flood it, if you had the money yeah.

[Denise, 50s, F, Noongar]

This raises a question of whether utilising community-level playgroups and schools that focus on language, might nevertheless be considered a 'natural-like' method for transmitting language, routinely chosen by caregivers to support their children's language development, particularly within a new model of language transmission. In a study of Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel (Schwartz

et al., 2011), parents' use of so-called 'external' strategies to support their children's Russian language acquisition, such as sending their children to bilingual kindergarten, are seen as equivalent and in addition to 'internal' strategies concerning language use in the home. This was a way of 'supporting the socio-linguistic environment outside of the family' (Schwartz et al., 2011, p. 150). For these parents, it was not a question of *not* transmitting the language themselves, but rather utilising the kindergarten in their endeavours. Certainly in each of the communities in this study, making the choice to send children to language-focused schools or at least schools that include the heritage language on their curriculum is a pro-active family-level choice in the scheme of language transmission.<sup>17</sup> However, as one speaker points out, the caregiver involvement may end there, observing that many caregivers choose to send their kids to a language-focused school but aren't involved any further than that – sometimes because of the 'protective' nature of the school itself:

It's just at school [that kids learn language], whereas it'd be good if the parents could come in and see how important the language is [... but] schools can be a bit funny now, they're a bit protective of who comes onsite, they see it as their own property now.

[Delys, 40s, F, Noongar]

In terms of interrogating the aspirational model of intergenerational language transmission and comparing new speakers' approaches against it, sending children to a kindergarten or school that teaches the heritage language without being involved any further would have to be considered an alternative to the model.

#### 4.4.2 Skipping a generation – non-contiguous transmission

Contra to the aspirational model of language being transmitted contiguously from grandparent to parent to child, speakers observed that learning and using language with children often 'skips' a generation – grandparents will use language with their grandchildren in ways that they didn't use language with their own children. Charmaine, a Noongar language teacher, talked about how the grandparents were using more language with their grandchildren because they felt that they had missed the opportunity with their own kids:

So I think the grandparents are really, [my cousin is] a grandparent now but he's like 'oh missed my opportunity with my own kids, I'm going to really –', so even my mother now

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<sup>17</sup> In all the communities in this study, choosing a language-focused school was optional, as there were alternative schools without a language-focus.

with her grandson he's only four, just turned five, she teaches him as much language as she can, cause she missed out, we missed out.

[Charmaine, 40s, F, Noongar]

Why might this be the case? In part, Charmaine attributes this pattern of skipping a generation to the increased opportunities grandparents have for focusing on language learning once they have fewer priorities:

[...] 'cause the grandparents have more time on their hands, they didn't have, you know, [a] strict schedule I suppose.

[Charmaine, 40s, F, Noongar]

We see this phenomenon in other endangered language communities as well, as Dorian discusses regarding Gaelic: "In a community where language shift is proceeding strongly, it is often the second ascending generation rather than the parental generation which transmits the local-currency language to the children" (Dorian, 1980, p. 89). Other speakers in each community also talked about hearing their grandparents speak language and learning from their grandparents rather than their parents, as a result of the Stolen Generations, where the grandparents were the last generation to have learnt language as a first language and the parents did not have the opportunity – still intergenerational transmission, but not contiguous.

The phenomenon of language transmission 'skipping' a generation from grandparents to grandchildren may also be valued as taking advantage of a feature of some traditional Aboriginal family structures and practices, as suggested by some speakers who saw grandparents as being responsible for part of children's education and development. Ada, for example, observed that traditionally children would go to live with their grandparents, so parent-to-child language transmission was not necessarily the norm:

[...] and because lot of in the traditional way like, a lot of the kids like the first born, goes and lives with the grandparents [...] because the grandparents their kids have all grown up and it's sort of to get the kids like, yeah, I'm not too sure but to me it seems like you know, get the kids back out there with their grandparents.

[Ada, 30s, F, Walmatjarri]

These perspectives already suggest that any attempts to support intergenerational language transmission need to take into account that for both practical and historical reasons, intergenerational

transmission should be broadened to include grandparent-to-child transmission that may skip a generation, not just parent-to-child transmission.

#### 4.4.3 'Reverse' Intergenerational Language Transmission

As well as valuing grandparent-to-child language transmission, speakers observed the occurrence of child-to-parent and child-to-grandparent language transmission, as a result of children learning language at school and bringing it home to teach their families. I refer to this here as 'reverse' language transmission, and is a phenomenon that has also occurred in the efforts to revitalize other languages such as Hawaiian and Māori, where language revitalization in the school has preceded "and may become the inspiration for" language revitalization at home (Hinton, 2011, p. 294). So noticeable was this phenomenon that Charmaine, a Noongar language teacher, talked about starting a class at the Noongar language centre just for Elders, in order to address the fact that it was children who were bringing language home and the grandparents not understanding them:

One of the Elders in the community said, um, 'how come you're teaching our kids but we don't get to have a go?' And I said, 'Well no one's stopping you!' 'Oh, can we have a class?' 'Yeah!' 'Oh cause we, our grandkids are coming home talking to us and we don't know what they're saying'.

[Charmaine, 40s, F, Noongar]

In communities where Elders are seen as the language experts, this raises some interesting questions about whether reverse language transmission, such that children know more language than adults, can be truly valued as a method of language revitalization; but Charmaine portrays the Elders in the Bunbury community as being initiators of the class, honest about their language ability, and keen and open to learning more. This does not necessarily mean there isn't shame or embarrassment about having to attend a language class in order to understand your children's or grandchildren's use of language; as Nadine commented with respect to Wajarri,

I feel a bit sad for my age group because it's sort of skipping, and it's going back to the kids in school, so just imagine if a kid come home and started talking in language to you, and it's your language, you'd be pretty embarrassed.

[Nadine, 40s, F, Wajarri]

Further, some speakers suggested that it might be inappropriate for the younger generation to have knowledge of language before the older generations and to share that knowledge with the older generations, alluding to the fact that children and young adults needed to be of a certain age before they could learn some things, as Cheraze elaborates:

Cheraze: I get told I'm too young to know stuff, but that's what happens when you grow up with people that like, like my family they're [?bush whole time] and everything, so they teach us out there what's, about stuff and everything, that happened all my life, and then I go rattle it off to people that hardly got anything to do with the bush, that look at you like how should you know you're too young

Interviewer: What like white people or Ngadju people?

Cheraze: Even family.

[Cheraze, 20s, F, Ngadju]

However the example given by Charmaine about setting up a class just for grandparents and Elders to learn what their grandchildren have already learnt, would seem to suggest that while it is important to respect Elders' role and indeed cultural obligation to pass on knowledge, including knowledge of language (Gibson et al., 2020; Warburton & Chambers, 2007), there are ways to address the imbalance. The practical implication for creating language classes for grandparents and Elders, then, is to create a safe environment in which they can learn without the embarrassment of not knowing as much language as the children in school.

#### 4.4.4 Intragenerational 'sharing', and the ripple effect

Finally, new speakers valued the process of sharing language in a broader network, as opposed to a linear transmission, with those who know more language sharing their knowledge with those who know less, regardless of their generation.

For example, Charmaine suggests the idea of 'sharing' language as a way of challenging children to not treat the language they learn in school as only a school subject and not something that can be used outside of school grounds. In particular, 'sharing' language is a challenge to not using the language at home, which is the most valued domain in the aspirational model of reinstating intergenerational language transmission. This is in addition to the observation that some children *do* take language home and use it with their parents and grandparents, as discussed in the previous section regarding 'reverse' intergenerational language transmission. Charmaine doesn't acknowledge or justify any contradiction in these two observations – likely they have both been observed, under different circumstances. She talked about this problem of language staying in school in her own experience of teaching, noting that many students didn't realise language was something to be shared.

[...] and the problem with that was the language didn't go outside the school, it stayed in the school compound, and children started to use the language at school, when they left the classroom they switched into Aboriginal English or just English and they thought it

was a school based program, they didn't realise that was the language of their people or their culture so they didn't think they could share it [...] so I would give tasks to the kids, you know like when you go home can you teach your family this word? 'Oh okay,' they'd say, tell them how to respond you know, when you go out to school, talk to your bus driver, teach him *kaya*, you know, say some language on the bus, you don't have to do it in the school.

[Charmaine, 40s, F, Noongar]

This model of language 'sharing' was similarly captured in the idea of a 'ripple' effect, which Charmaine refers to when talking about the Master Apprentice programme training she had taken part in in Kununurra. (See 3.4 for a description of the Master Apprentice Programme).

It was meant to be catered for a speaker and a learner, just two people and then that other person would teach someone else, like a ripple effect.

[Charmaine, 40s, F, Noongar]

Nadine also referred to the 'ripple effect' as a mechanism for transmitting something important, when talking about attracting people through the Irra Wangga Language Centre in Geraldton to learn the language:

[...] so if we get two people interested it's like that rippled effect, you get two more, and then two more and two more from it.

[Nadine, 40s, F, Wajarri]

Valma, a Ngadju speaker and teacher, valued *intragenerational* sharing generally as a way of maintaining and passing on knowledge, and saw it as a teaching technique that children particularly benefited from – for example, having children teach each other in the classroom:

It's just ten kids from all these different age groups that's sitting out there in front of us, so that our kids teaching sometimes where there's children that are teaching, other children, it sticks, it stays in their head a very long time.

[Valma, 50s, F, Ngadju]

As with many other processes regarding language, intragenerational sharing was not restricted to language, but was a way that speakers in this study talked about transmitting different kinds of cultural knowledge, something that Valma, recognised her daughter doing when her daughter taught the cousin a whistling technique:

So, my daughter goes 'oh I'm going to', so she starts whistling just to show her [cousin] what she been taught and she's like, 'I didn't know you could do that' and my daughter's like, 'yeah, I been doing this since I was little', so it's just passing that on making sure it continues.

[Valma, 50s, F, Ngadju]

## 4.5 Summary

In this chapter we looked at new speakers' general positions on the possibility of reinstating intergenerational language transmission, and examined some of the broader factors involved therein, including what speakers were already doing; speakers' beliefs about the possible outcomes of reinstating intergenerational language transmission and the factors that affected these; and the alternatives to an aspirational model of intergenerational language transmission.

As expected, speakers' general perspectives on the possibility of reinstating transmission covered a range of positions, with about half tending to believe that it was possible for children to learn language as a first language to a reasonable degree of fluency (either now or in future generations), to a third who were unsure either way, to a minority who thought that children would only ever continue to acquire language as a second/additional language, never fully achieving proficiency. Speakers justified these positions in terms of their beliefs about the problems or barriers of learning and teaching language: that adult speakers did not have the requisite proficiency to teach children language as a first language, and that there were limited resources for mitigating this. Speakers also referred to their beliefs regarding whether children could truly be multilingual in the current context i.e. whether their endangered language – or any language – could be a part of their multilingual repertoire. Again, some speakers perceived it to be entirely natural that children could acquire multiple languages to a native-like degree of fluency, whereas other speakers felt that this was not possible in the given context, for example, because it was too late for them to acquire an additional language, or because learning any additional languages would interfere with their proficiency in other languages. The possibility of raising children to speak their heritage language at least to a reasonable degree of fluency was also discussed in terms of the children's abilities to learn language – a factor of their age, aptitude, willingness to learn, and innate advantage as Indigenous language learners – such that in the current context, some children may be able to achieve fluency, and others simply did not have the right combination of factors. As we will see in later chapters, speakers' reported behaviours are not determined by these beliefs about their children's abilities per se, but rather by speakers' sense of their own ability to nevertheless have an effect on their children's language acquisition. 'Willingness to learn' and 'language learning aptitude' in particular point to speakers' perspectives that children

are, or would be, learning their heritage language as an additional language, rather than acquiring it as a first language. This is not surprising given the status of the language in the community, of course, but is relevant as the perspective that children are *learning* their heritage language feeds in to speakers' perspectives about their own ability to *teach* the language, as we will see in chapter 6.

Although speakers' expectations regarding the possibility of children becoming first- or fluent-language speakers of their heritage languages are obviously limited by the fact of the language not being spoken in an immersive environment, nevertheless speakers' beliefs about the possible outcomes of language transmission are not wholly determined by the degree of language spoken in their community. That is, we might have expected that speakers from slightly more vital language communities, such as Kununurra, would have more positive expectations regarding the outcome of intergenerational language transmission, but in fact speakers within the same language communities had different expectations.

Beyond the aspirational features of intergenerational language transmission – that it is contiguous, unidirectional, and is conducted by caregivers in the home – speakers recognised and valued the potential for language and cultural transmission or sharing between teachers and students, children and their families (including from children to parents and grandparents, and from grandparents to grandchildren), and amongst children. Further, both the 'ripple' or sharing model of language transmission, and 'reverse' intergenerational language transmission (from children to parents or grandparents), have implications for interpreting the role and value of schools: in these alternative models, schools may be the centre of the ripple. I explore the role and responsibility of schools in detail in chapter 6.

Across the communities in this study, whether or not speakers consider it possible to create a new generation of fluent speakers, nevertheless many new speakers see intergenerational language transmission as a desirable method of language revitalization, and are engaged or interested in activities of the more archetypal model of intergenerational language transmission at home. With these general positions staked out, we turn now to new speakers' perspectives on the reinstatement of intergenerational language transmission at home, starting with the question of 'why'.

# 5 Why

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## 5.0 Introduction

We have established that most speakers in this study broadly engage in some kind of intergenerational transmission of their heritage language already, but have a range of perspectives regarding what the possible outcomes of that language transmission might be. In this chapter we start looking at speakers' responses to the details of such a model of reinstating intergenerational language transmission, by exploring the subquestion:

- a. Why reinstate intergenerational language transmission?

More specifically, why would new speakers, who are not fluent in their heritage language, want to transmit to children a language that is rarely or no longer spoken in the community?

This is where reinstating the intergenerational transmission of an endangered language diverges significantly from the usual model of family transmission of non-endangered languages – we must explain why new speakers would want children to learn a heritage language that is not the everyday language of the community. Secondly, such a question diverges from the typical research regarding motives in the field of (Second) Language Acquisition, as we are asking why speakers want children to learn language, rather than why speakers want to learn language themselves as language learners – the motives pertain to language transmission and language acquisition within the relationship between caregiver and child. Finally, where new speakers were unsure or ambivalent about the aspirational goal of creating a new generation of language speakers (as discussed in chapter 4), we have an opportunity to look at speakers' perspectives regarding realistic and desired goals for language transmission and language revitalization.

A review of the current research regarding Australian Indigenous language speakers, as given by respondents in the second National Indigenous Languages Survey (Marmion et al., 2014a), frames speakers' reasons for transmitting language to children largely in terms of 'keeping language strong', which is seen to be beneficial for everyone because of a perceived connection between language and wellbeing, culture, and self-esteem. Specifically, respondents perceived that knowledge and use of language, regardless of language status, contributed to wellbeing through facilitating a sense of belonging, empowerment, and (for a small percentage of the respondents) communication. One respondent, Brook Joy, a Boandik descendant (as quoted in the Second National Indigenous Languages Survey (Marmion et al., 2014a, p. 28), explains it like this:

Strong cultural identity enables one to feel proud of themselves, and speaking and maintaining one's language raises self-esteem and enables one to feel good about themselves. Traditional language is important for maintaining strong cultural connections. Where traditional languages have been taken away from communities, a sense of loss, grief, and inadequacy develops. To keep communities and generations strong, traditional language being passed from one generation to another is vital.

Similarly Ray Burns, a Butchulla descendant (as quoted in the Second National Indigenous Languages Survey (Marmion et al., 2014a, p. 32)) expresses the value of language transmission for children like this:

I want my kids to be able to learn what I couldn't at a young age, so that they can learn culture and language to help find their identities. I want my children to know who they are and be proud of themselves no matter what obstacles or negatives get thrown their way.

As is typical of endangered languages, these motives reflect speakers' desire to connect with their culture and identity, giving language learning a symbolic rather than a strictly communicative purpose.<sup>18</sup> The literature regarding second-language learning offers some theoretical frameworks for conceptualising these motives, that I briefly discuss here, looking at the explanations they offer as to why speakers would want to pass on a language that isn't spoken as a language of everyday communication, and then highlight the inadequacy of these frameworks to explain motivation as concerns intergenerational language transmission within the relationship between caregiver and child.

Gardner and Smythe (1975) propose that when it comes to motivation for second language learning, individuals differ in terms of their Instrumental and Integrative orientation – meaning, respectively, their desire to learn a language for 'practical' reasons such as to gain employment, and their desire to learn a language fuelled by an openness to or willingness to 'integrate' with other communities and cultures.<sup>19</sup> In this framework, we would describe individuals' motives for learning an endangered language as both reflecting an Instrumental orientation, in that language revitalization is perceived to have positive benefits for community in terms of health and wellbeing, and an Integrative orientation,

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<sup>18</sup> By 'strictly communicative purpose' I mean needing to learn the language as a code of everyday communication, or to communicate with someone who only speaks that language, for example.

<sup>19</sup> I make the point here and return to it in chapter 9, that motivation, in the sense of 'drive', is distinct from motives, or reasons. A person with motivation has motives; in this chapter, I am only concerned with those motives, and not with motivation as a whole construct.

as a desire to integrate more fully with their own community and culture.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, from this theory we would predict that individuals are more motivated to learn their heritage language when they a) perceive that there are more Instrumental benefits, and b) feel an openness to the culture of that language community. Similarly individuals are predicted to be less motivated when they don't perceive there is a practical gain to learning the language, and/or when they feel shame, embarrassment, or fear about appearing to be part of that language community – and indeed, this is the case as expressed by some speakers in this study, for example with respect to the effect of the Stolen Generations (see 3.2).

However, while this framework can theorise why people might want to learn a language that is no longer spoken, it does not offer anything specifically regarding the *relational* nature of intergenerational language transmission. It is about the individual learner's motives for acquiring language themselves, not for passing it on.

As concerns motives in relational contexts of caregivers transmitting language to children, Van Mensel and Deconinck (2019) are one of the few to look at motivation within families rather than individuals, in their study of why parents in Brussels, a multilingual city, want their children to acquire the different languages of the city – languages that the parents themselves do not speak. In this study, Van Mensel and Deconinck apply another theory of language learning motivation, that of Dörnyei's (2009) Ideal Self theory, which I outline briefly here.

In the last few decades, L2 motivation research has shifted away from focusing on the individual's desire to integrate with an *external* target community, to focus instead on how the language learner's motives are linked to their *internal* concept of themselves. Within Dörnyei's (2009b) 'L2 Motivation Self System', for example, the learner has a sense of an ideal second-language-knowing self. This Ideal self includes a 'possible' self, which is concerned with pleasure and the promotion of positive outcomes, and an 'ought' self, which is concerned with a sense of duty and the prevention of unwanted outcomes. The Ideal L2 Self is thought to be motivating because the person is moved to reduce discrepancy between the actual self and the ideal self (Higgins, 1987).

The appeal of positing a form of motive derived from an internal focus on identity is that it can account for motivation in contexts where language learners do not have access to an external community of current language speakers with which to integrate, such as in endangered language contexts where

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<sup>20</sup> This is not a unique desire of individuals learning endangered languages, in that all languages give their speakers the capacity to integrate more fully into a community and culture; the point here is that in the absence of communicative purposes, the connection between language, community, and culture takes on a distinct significance and plays out in particular ways.

learners may identify with *past* communities of fluent language speakers, or with current communities that do not speak the language but still hold it as an important part of the community's identity. It is also interesting to consider the idea of the motivating 'Ideal Self' vs. the 'Ought-To Self' as a way of understanding speakers' motives that are personal to them, compared to the motives that are part of the general community rhetoric of what should or *ought to* be done – an essential question of ideological clarification, to tease apart what individuals hold as their ideals for themselves, compared to what they feel they ought to desire as a community member, but don't. How might this theory explain the motives for intergenerational language transmission within a caregiver/child relationship?

Using this theory, Van Mensel and Deconinck (2019, p. 535) conclude in their own study that such a desire to learn language as part of one's own identity "is not limited to the construction of an inwardly generated identity; it can also be projected outwardly onto other individuals, in this case by parents onto their children". That is, they posit the external projection of the internal ideal self onto the child as a motive for language transmission, suggesting that parents are acting vicariously through their children – they want for their children what they do not have for themselves:

In this sense, it could be argued that the parents in question are continuously reconstructing their own (projected) identities through imagining a (linguistic) future for their children. At the same time, however, this desire remains solely a projection or an expression of these parents' own inner-most aspirations, awarenesses, and conflicts, as the future (language) identities they conceptualize or imagine for their children obviously reveal more about themselves than about their offspring (Van Mensel & Deconinck, 2019, p. 545).

Whilst some speakers in this study did indeed explicitly express wanting their children to have the opportunity to learn language that they themselves missed out on (5.2.2), this perspective is more simply analysed as an example – amongst many others given – of new speakers wanting to meet childrearing responsibilities that have emerged in the specific historical and cultural contexts of the speakers' communities, without needing to further speculate about whether speakers are also projecting their psychological states onto children.

Thus, rather than taking a more traditional 'Second Language Acquisition' approach to motives, I look instead at language transmission motives from an ideological approach that centres families. In particular, as well as looking at individuals' perspectives about the value of language, I look within the context of the family at individuals' ideologies about caregiving, as motives for non-fluent speakers to transmit endangered languages intergenerationally. In this context, language ideologies can be defined as those beliefs and attitudes about language that influence the decisions that family

members make about what language to use (King et al., 2008); while caregiver ideologies – sometimes referred to as ‘ethnotheories’ (Harkness & Super, 2006) – refer to the system of beliefs or ideologies that caregivers have about children and childrearing, i.e., what it means to be a ‘good parent’. Within this approach, if we understand speakers’ broader linguistic and caregiver ideologies, we have a good basis for understanding the motives that new speakers have for wanting their children to learn an endangered heritage language. This provides the best categorisation of the data: in this study, new speakers’ motives for transmitting language to children can be broadly divided into a) wanting children to learn language so that the language is strengthened for the benefit of the community – i.e. the motive is language-oriented; and b) wanting children to learn language in order to fulfil the context-specific responsibilities of childrearing – i.e. the motive is child-oriented. The overlap between the two is the perceived ideological value of language in terms of its link with Country, culture, and past (the ‘integrative orientation’ to language), and the concomitant benefits to identity, self-esteem, belonging, and health and wellbeing (the ‘instrumentative orientation’). However, whether the childrearing responsibilities motivate language transmission depends on whether caregivers perceive that acquisition of the heritage language will help them meet those responsibilities.

## 5.1 Ideologies about language

First, I explore the range of ideologies that new speakers have regarding the value of language: that language is connected to culture, Country, and identity (5.1.1); that (perhaps via this connection) language is beneficial for health and wellbeing (5.1.2); and that not every new speaker holds these ideologies to be true (5.1.3). In doing so I take the position argued by Armstrong (2012, p. 146), that

[l]anguage ideology tells us why our languages are important to us and how they should be used. Without an attendant ideology, a language would be an abstraction locked away unused in dictionaries and grammars. **It is in the service of a particular language ideology that we acquire a language, that we speak a language and that we pass it on to the next generation.** And behind the attrition of a language, we will often find a newer ideology that leads speakers not to pass on that language and not to use it (emphasis added).

New speakers’ ideologies that are served by language transmission are notably different from the colonising language ideologies discussed in chapter 3, concerning the inferiority of Indigenous languages and the Monolingual Mindset. Whereas such negative colonising beliefs constitute the ideological force that stopped people using the language, these positive ideologies that link language to culture, Country, wellbeing, and so on have guided and continue to guide people to use the language and arguably form the basis of one set of motives for reinstating intergenerational language transmission, as a means for strengthening language in the community for these ideological purposes.

### 5.1.1 Language, culture, Country, and identity

One of the most prominent ideologies expressed by speakers in this study, across all communities, is that language links you to your culture, Country, and where you come from. Establishing this connection can also support your sense of identity. In the first instance, the strong link between language, culture, and Country is articulated by many speakers as simply a given, as Barbara, a Miriwoong language worker, describes it, where ‘our language and our culture’ are part and parcel:

I just hope that it, just keep on going, just don't wanna lose our language and our culture  
[...] well for me it make me feel happy, cause my grandmother teach us and I want to pass  
it on and keep it going.

[Barbara, 30s, F, Miriwoong]

Speakers also linked language and Country more broadly in terms of the way a language belongs to Country; if you are on that Country, you need to learn the language that belongs to the Country, as Julie, a Miriwoong language worker, puts it:

We here in Miriwoong Country see, we gotta teach them Miriwoong.

[Julie, 50s, F, Miriwoong]

Denise, a Noongar linguist, more specifically articulates this link in terms of connecting to elements of Country by knowing the language vocabulary and associated knowledge about those elements:

Learning language is good cause you can go through the Country and you can identify  
everything that you would want to look at, and you'd know those words in language [...]  
anywhere you go in Noongar Country you can say oh that's the tree, you know the name  
of that tree, you know what tree is used for, you know the medicine for that tree [...]  
that's the beauty of learning language, you're not just going to drive through some place  
and not know it, even the sky dreaming, you can look up in the sky and you can read, you  
know, the stars, what those stars are, what their names are in Noongar.

[Denise, 50s, F, Noongar]

Zoe, a Wangkatha speaker, also expressed that it was important in general to be aware of Indigenous history and that language supported this awareness as being a marker of where you came from:

I think it's important to keep the history and, cause it [language] is part of the history, you know, to keep it going and keep it alive, don't forget where you come from.

[Zoe, 20s, F, Wangkatha]

Judy, a Noongar language teacher, sums up this relationship simply, as language connecting you to everything that makes you a whole person:

[...] and that makes a whole person because you know, it does make a whole person, I said well you know that you can connect that language to Country and language does connect you to every aspect of your culture, language does, it's what identifies us as being who we are so language is very important for Aboriginal people to learn.

[Judy, 50s, F, Noongar]

This ideological link between language and identity has been well-described elsewhere as concerns Indigenous peoples around the world; see for example the 2012 United Nations General Assembly Paper, *'Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Study on the role of languages and culture in the promotion and protection of the rights and identity of indigenous peoples'* (United Nations, 2012). As well as through the links to Country, and culture, speakers articulated the ideological link between language and identity in other ways, for example talking about the importance of language as something that inherently marked them as different to other Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups:

It's a part of our identity, our language, it's part of who we are, it makes us who we are actually, it separates us from other tribes, other language people.

[Nadine, 40s, F, Wajarri]

They [teenagers] like it, cause it gives them a sense of identity even non-Indigenous teenagers, they like it cause it gives them a sense of identity to Kalgoorlie, it's a uniqueness about them they don't have to be, you know like they say oh everyone wants this, everyone wants to be the same, but kids like their own identity as well.

[Jacqui, 40s, F, Wangkatha]

For this reason, some speakers expressed the imperative that Aboriginal people from one language group shouldn't learn other Indigenous languages (as was commonly expressed by Miriwoong speakers):

[...] cause we in Miriwoong Country and we talk Miriwoong, we got no other language to talk, we can understand Jaminjung, but we don't talk them we just talk Miriwoong.

[Julie, 50s, F, Miriwoong]

Brodie, a young Noongar woman, offers an enlightening account of the way that even the use of a small amount of language in a language revitalization context can index identity and, through code-mixing, convey who she is and how she wishes to position herself in the world as she purposefully uses Noongar vocabulary in her (Aboriginal) English as a way of marking her 'Kriol' or Black identity<sup>21</sup>:

When my cousin [started at my school] and she has no shame, she spoke the language, she was so Kriol<sup>22</sup> and everyone's like 'oh she's so black, 'it's so cool' [...] and she was like '*ana* this, *ana* that, you're *koonyi*'<sup>23</sup> and everyone's like 'oh she's so funny, she's so cool' and I was like 'oh' [...] and um, then from then on I started speaking it more and now all of my friends speak it and they're like, oh, '*ana* this, *ana* that' it's like it's so cool and like I wish I did this in the beginning.

[Brodie, 20s, F, Noongar]

In some ways unique to the context of endangered language communities, some speakers' sense of identity was also linked to their role of having language knowledge and working with the language, as Denise talked about with respect to her own work:

Interviewer: Do you think your reason for learning more Noongar has changed over time, from when you were a kid to now?

Denise: Yes, yeah there's, there is a different concept now, because I'm aware of how deep the language is with my Noongar people and with myself, my own self-esteem and my own drive to be a Noongar person working on my language.

[Denise, 50s, F, Noongar]

Another dimension to the ideological link between language and identity is the sense for many speakers that as an Indigenous person they *should* know their own language, in the sense of being

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<sup>21</sup> While this thesis is primarily concerned with code-switching and code-mixing as a way for new speakers to transmit language to children where they are not fluent themselves (see chapter 7), the reader is referred to Starks (2018) for further discussion of how the processes of moving between languages may be utilised by speakers in a language revitalization context to construct and express their identity.

<sup>22</sup> Brodie uses the word 'Kriol' in this context to refer to Aboriginal English, not the Kriol language

<sup>23</sup> *ana* is a tag word in Noongar and Aboriginal English as spoken by Noongar, meaning 'isn't it?' *koonyi* is a Noongar word meaning 'crazy'.

entitled – or obligated – to know language and the feeling that something has been lost or stolen without it:

[Wangkatha is] my second language, and our kids and we should know it, I'd love my kids and my grandkids to speak it [...] because that's just like a, how can I say it, that identifies us, that we are part of that Wangkatha, not because we want to learn it, because that's part of us.

[Maureeka, 40s, F, Wangkatha]

Sophia: Well because I don't know my own language, and it's, I don't know I just think it would be good to learn.

Interviewer: Do you feel like it's an important part of your identity or – ?

Sophia: Pretty much yeah, cause like we did try to get like bred out to the point like

[Sophia, 20s, F, Noongar]

### 5.1.2 Language, health, and wellbeing

One of the corollaries of the ideological link between language and identity is that language was also seen by some speakers as being important for health and wellbeing. This view is espoused by researchers such as Zuckerman and Walsh (2014, p. 113), who point to the research that language is an important part of identity, and 'a strong sense of identity is a necessary condition for mental health'; this research was also referred to in this study by Charmaine, a Noongar language educator:

If we start to get people to look at the positive things with regards to language, how does that affect your health and wellbeing, and they said the same thing, that studies have shown that it helps people with self-esteem, sense of belonging.

[Charmaine, 40s, F, Noongar]

Charmaine also points to another, more tangible benefit of language to health, that the knowledge contained in learning and using language as part of a set of wider cultural practices, is perceived to teach people how to take care of themselves. I discuss speakers' perspectives further with respect to health and wellbeing for children in 5.2.1.

### 5.1.3 Alternative ideologies

However, not all speakers expressed such a strong positive link between their heritage language and their identity. For example Chris, a Wajarri father, was the most hesitant about this link; in the first

instance he observed that there wasn't any communicative use to learning Wajarri, and he seemed to be working out how the perceived lack of communicative use changed the relationship between language and identity:

Interviewer: Do you think it's uh like um still an important part of, being a Wajarri person to speak it or – ?

Chris: Yeah

Interviewer: has it changed now that you can

Chris: I think things have just, changed so much that maybe not as, I don't know, it is important but it's, uh I'm not really sure but [...] yeah I don't know if it's, if it's worth even worrying cause I don't know if it'll even be, you know you learn and it's not really gonna be of any use, got no-one to talk the language with.

[Chris, 40s, M, Wajarri]

Zoe, a young Wangkatha mother, gave a similar perspective:

It's alright [learning Wanggai] but I know, like, this is, we in two thousand and seventeen, you know, most of the language people speak is English, so, it would be just, good just to speak it amongst your families.

[Zoe, 20s, F, Wangkatha]

Latoya (Noongar) also expressed some ambivalence about learning language, and talked more about Noongar identity in terms of knowing who all the people are in your family, rather than the language you know. She also didn't see as much scope for expressing an Indigenous cultural identity, particularly in urban areas:

He [Pop] knows all the mob like who we're related to, who we're not related to and where they're from, where we're from you know like, who was, I don't really know who Nan and Pop's mother and father was and he would know you know like, I don't really know all of that stuff, yeah like we just, yeah, not really cul- like not really a cultural family like, coming from Perth.

[Latoya, 20s, F, Noongar]

It is important to recognise that even while speakers may articulate the general importance of language to identity, many did not hold these ideologies true for themselves, and certainly other

speakers in this study recognised that not everyone in their community felt strongly that language was important to identity, and were often very understanding of the reasons why:

Like I think 'cause Aboriginal people are um, more socialised in modern society they don't think the language is important, yeah so, I don't know just, I guess it all depends on the individual, their self.

[Paige, 20s, F, Noongar]

For some new (or potential) speakers, then, language is not perceived to be of value if it does not have a communicative function, and, as expected, these speakers do not perceive it to be appropriate or normal to learn or use their heritage language. As Moriarty (2011, p. 448) summarises, "If an endangered language is to carry any significance for the young and they are to maintain it and indeed pass it on to the next generation, it must be seen to be able to compete with the other language(s) that exist within the given community" – a perspective that is also recognised by those speakers discussed in chapter 4 who, whilst valuing their heritage language and engaging in language learning and transmission for themselves, did not see the possibility of creating a new generation of fluent language speakers due to the dominance of English, Aboriginal English, or Kriol in their communities.

## 5.2 Ideologies about childrearing

The second set of ideologies that are useful for understanding speakers' motives for intergenerational language transmission as a relational process are those that concern caregiver responsibilities. I use 'caregiver responsibilities' here to refer to those objectives that caregivers perceive are a part of their role in raising children, and what it means to be a 'good parent' (Harkness & Super, 2006). These caregiving responsibilities can range from the more physical and concrete responsibilities, such as what children should eat, when they should sleep, and other aspects of physical health, to 'social-emotional' competences (Gokiert et al., 2015), referring to aspects of child development such as emotional and behavioural regulation, social awareness, and relationship skills. Importantly, these competences and associated caregiver responsibilities may be different across cultures and even within communities, reflecting that each community – indeed each family – has different ideas about what children need, based on their own particular histories, current experiences and contexts, and what they perceive are the challenges that children need to be equipped to face.

Gokiert et al. (2015) illustrate the context-specific nature of caregiving responsibilities as concerns Aboriginal Canadian children, the fastest growing segment of Canada's population. They report that Aboriginal Canadian children are the lowest ranking in terms of health and social, educational, and economic wellbeing; and have a unique experience as a result of colonisation of growing up across

multiple different and potentially incongruous contexts, including urban, rural, on-reserve, more traditional, and less traditional contexts. Concerning the particularity of challenges that Aboriginal Canadian children face, Gokiert et al. (2015, p. 1) suggest that

Aboriginal children and youth may receive and have difficulty reconciling contradictory information about who they are, how they fit into their heritage culture and the dominant culture, as well as the meanings associated with being a visible minority.

Within these specific contexts, Aboriginal Canadian caregivers identified that it was important for their children to have cultural wellness, emotional wellness, mental wellness, and social wellness. Central to these objectives was the need for children to have a strong identity, which parents defined in terms of 'knowing who you are; being confident, proud, and accepting of who you are; having self-respect; loving yourself; and having a sense of authenticity' (Gokiert et al., 2015, p. 3). Their particular caregiving responsibilities are derived from and are intended to meet the particular challenges children face in such a 'post-colonial context'.

Similarly, speakers in this study expressed a range of responsibilities and objectives for their children, including that the child have good health and wellbeing (5.2.1) – a general concern of parents – as well as responsibilities that emerge from the social/cultural/historical context in which they are raising their children. This includes the child's development of a strong sense of identity – which speakers in this study articulated within the context of seeing their children having low self-esteem; a knowledge of Country and culture; and the development of respectful relationships, again articulated in specifically Indigenous ways. Finally, speakers felt a responsibility to provide for their children the opportunity to learn language – something they never had (5.2.2).

These objectives in terms of identity formation and esteem of self, Country, culture etc., clearly overlap to an extent with the language ideologies discussed above; the significant point is that while the language ideologies directly inform motives for language transmission as a method of strengthening language, speakers' caregiving ideologies (of which this list should not be understood to be exhaustive) are concerned directly with the child, for which language transmission may meet the objectives, but not necessarily. Further, these caregiving ideologies provide a cogent background for understanding motives for language transmission within a caregiver/child relationship, i.e. caregivers' and new speakers' motives for having children acquire language. Unlike Van Mensel and Deconinck's (2019) explanation that caregivers try to achieve their own Ideal Selves vicariously through their children's language acquisition, a discussion of new speakers childrearing ideologies provides an understanding of why caregivers would want their children to acquire language for their children's sake, within their unique contexts.

### 5.2.1 Health and wellbeing

Beginning with the more 'unremarkable' responsibilities, most speakers saw the primary responsibility of childrearing as ensuring that children have good health and wellbeing. In the first instance this includes physical health and education, as Zoe suggests:

Well, nowadays, your main priority is to make sure your child is healthy, he has all his, or she has all their check-ups, and send them to school, I think that's, well that's what I did.

[Zoe, 20s, F, Wangkatha]

This caregiving responsibility also includes the much broader and more complex aspect of raising children to have good mental wellbeing, which speakers articulated as including a range of interconnected factors to do with children's identity and self-esteem, their knowledge of and connection to Country and history, and their understanding of social obligations, such as respect and being able to take care of the next generation.

Highlighting the imperative to support children's development of identity and self-esteem, Amanda, a Wajarri mother, talked about the importance of raising children – particularly girls – to have positive self-esteem, to 'be proud of who you are and where you come from', so that they would have the confidence to make the most of life's opportunities. This was an understanding of responsibility that she developed with reference to her own experience growing up as a young girl in a boarding school, and of feeling shame:

It was on the news this morning actually, talking about teenage girls and self-esteem issues and just so many different variety of things that they're missing out on because they have low self-esteem [...] I always tell my kids you know [...] if you walk into a room always hold your head high, be proud of who you are and where you come from, and, because growing up like out at boarding school, we used to have this like it used to be the mentality like you'd walk into a room and you know you'd creep along the wall like, you know, you'd be so shy you'd be giggling and laughing, and it's like, I don't want my kids like, you know, they're losing out on so much more just with that whole shame factor, I always tell 'em you know just be proud of who you are.

[Amanda, 30s, F, Wajarri]

A strong sense of self and belonging is generally recognised as important for health and wellbeing, as a factor in people's ability to deal with challenges and mediate anxiety and depression (Kickett-Tucker et al., 2015). The particular challenge for children in more urban areas – such as the communities in this study, where children are often in the minority against a majority that has been historically

oppressive and which continues to be overwhelmingly dominant – is to be able to define that identity ‘clearly and confidently’ (Usborne & Taylor, 2010, p. 883). The literature suggests that children are not born with an in-built sense of their racial and cultural identity – rather, they start to develop a sense of who they are at four years of age, and continue developing this sense throughout their teenage years (Usborne & Taylor, 2010). This includes children’s awareness of different races, self-identification of their own race, and their attitudes about the differences between and characteristics of racial/ethnic groups, including their evaluation and ideologies (Byrd, 2011). To meet this responsibility of supporting the development of their children’s identity and their pride in it, speakers in this study talked about specifically teaching children their history, where they come from, and who their family is – as suggested by Cheraze, a young Ngadju mother, and Valma, a Ngadju speaker and grandmother, who articulated this link specifically in terms of having knowledge of Country and being grounded:

Interviewer: What makes you want to learn more Ngadju?

Cheraze: um, keep my culture going [...] just make sure my kids know where they come from, what tribe we all.

[Cheraze, 20s, F, Ngadju]

We tell our kids this is where you come from, this is your grounding, your roots are from here, this ground, this *barna*, and you’re tied to this bloodline [...] you need to have this grounding before you can go out there, otherwise if you run out there without learning about here, you gonna be lost.

[Valma, 50s, F, Ngadju]

Knowledge of Country was a very important competence that speakers talked about developing in their children, including having the competence to survive on Country. Amanda, for example, talked about the trips she would take with her children and the specific skills they learnt.

We actually went up the river in Kalbarri a couple of years ago and we were out there all day and then the kids wandered off and one other little boy came over and he goes don’t wander off because you know youse will starve and youse will get lost and youse will probably die at the river, and this was like one extreme to the next, and then the kids turned round and they said ‘no we won’t’, because at every time I took the kids up there I always said you know like make sure you stick along the river, make sure you do this

make sure you do that, so I always told them what you can and can't eat, where they can and can't go, where the water, the springs and natural springs.

[Amanda, 30s, F, Wajarri]

Rozanne, a Miriwoong language worker and mother, also talked about the importance of teaching children what they needed to know in order to be out on Country, specifically in terms of being able to identify and name animals and plants:

Next generation gotta see there's a lot to explore in Miriwoong Country and they need to know all the places, all the main things you know like places, animal [...] they wouldn't even know what that, what they're killing in language, probably bird, turkey, you know, you know what I'm saying, turkey that's the main bush tucker in the bush for us, and goanna.

[Rozanne, 30s, F, Miriwoong]

These competences reflect the fact that even in more urban areas, many families in this study still have a strong connection to the land and to being out on Country. This was true even of those speakers who had the least involvement with language activities. Indeed, the responsibility of raising children to have a strong sense of identity and knowledge of culture extended to future, unborn generations, as expressed by Rozanne, who saw it as her duty to raise her children to know Miriwoong language and culture so that they could care for their own children:

My next generation children, they have a family of their own, and what if they children ask them what do you call this in language – "I don't know!" See it's important to learn them like that's why I keep going and learning my family, my children they can care for the next generation that'll come, yeah.

[Rozanne, 30s, F, Miriwoong]

Another aspect of wellbeing that was important for speakers in this study was to raise children to have respect for culture and for people, particularly older people and Elders, a fundamental aspect of Indigenous cultures in Australia (Gibson et al., 2020):

It's a good thing to bring it back, and then kids, kids these days, younger generation they might learn to respect people, you know, they've gotta learn to respect their culture and, and language goes with your culture so, cause lot of kids these days got no respect, you

know, they get into other stuff and another thing they don't, they don't wanna listen to, adults, not be the, think they're men and women before their time, be a kid first.

[Rosalie, 50s, F, Wajarri]

Charmaine's summary of the responsibility to raise children to have good health and wellbeing, and the factors involved in it, speaks for itself:

If you learnt plants of the land, you learnt that this one's, this plant could be for healing purposes, this plant will sustain you if you lack water, this plant will help you if you have some skin condition or something or this will protect your skin and, you gotta know those language names, then once you know that then you gotta know where to find them, then you gotta have a story like a song to lead you to those, to that location, and how do you learn that? Through knowledge of, passing of knowledge, culture dance, [...] everything's all about your health, your health and wellbeing all the time, and then it's about your mental wellness too you know, about how to show respect, what you do in social settings like how you conduct yourself in a social setting towards your elders, to your brothers and sisters, to your mother and father, your obligations, [...] that's also going to help you know who you're going to marry, what skin and group you're allowed to marry and what you're not allowed to marry, and that's also going to teach you to teach your kids who they can marry and not marry, it's all about all those social obligations that upon you with language and culture, and all those things that you gotta be so busy doing you're not going to get into trouble are you? 'Cause you're so busy making sure you're maintaining and all this, it's all about you surviving.

[Charmaine, 40s, F, Noongar]

### 5.2.2 To give them something we never had

Another childrearing responsibility that has a unique articulation in the context of endangered language communities, particularly where the current generation(s) of adults did not have the opportunity to acquire their heritage language as a first language, some speakers talked about the responsibility of the older generations to provide or encourage the younger generations with opportunities they never had. Denise, a Noongar linguist, suggested this specifically in relation to teaching language:

So, I think the more that you speak it around the children, the more they're gonna learn, and what a wonderful opportunity cause we never had that, you know?

[Denise, 50s, F, Noongar]

Charmaine embedded this narrative in the bigger picture of social and political change in Australia, and of certain things improving for Indigenous people as part of a historical trend, such as the trend she has observed for younger people to want 'careers' where older generations only wanted 'jobs'. To this end she talked about grandparents and parents taking on the responsibility of encouraging children to get qualifications and look for better jobs than the previous generation 'settled' for:

You know, [kids], they got high expectations these days which is good, we were just like, couldn't wait to get out just any old job but these guys are looking for careers now I think that's a big change and I think our families and grandparents are starting to say you need to get careers, something you wanna do, don't waste your time doing anything, if you wanna go for it go for it so slowly changing.

[Charmaine, 40s, F, Noongar]

This desire for the next generation to have more opportunities would appear to be a common theme across the country, as Ray Burns expresses in the National Indigenous Languages Survey:

I want my kids to be able to learn **what I couldn't at a young age**, so that they can learn culture and language to help find their identities. I want my children to know who they are and be proud of themselves no matter what obstacles or negatives get thrown their way (Marmion et al., 2014a, p. 32) (emphasis added).

### 5.3 An ideological typology of language transmission motives

I have argued that in the contexts of the communities in this study where endangered languages don't need to be used for communication, speakers' relational motives for learning and teaching heritage languages to children can be usefully thought of as reflecting and being guided by their ideologies about the value of language, and about childrearing. In sum, speakers want to transmit language to children in order to keep language strong for its own sake, according to the values placed on language: it is connected to Country and culture, and facilitates identity, belonging, health, and wellbeing. Secondly, speakers also want to transmit language to children in order to fulfil their perceived responsibilities to their children. These responsibilities included supporting their children's health, and the complex factor of their wellbeing, which includes helping them to have good self-esteem, to know where they come from, and to have knowledge of Country and social obligations such as respect for

Elders. It also includes the responsibility of giving and encouraging children in opportunities that the previous generation never had.

Of course, these language and childrearing ideologies, as a basis for motives for reinstating intergenerational language transmission, are not mutually exclusive: speakers may be motivated by both. However, what this typology accounts for is that speakers whose motives are primarily concerned with keeping language strong for language ideology reasons are likely to behave in different ways to speakers who motives are primarily concerned with fulfilling their responsibilities to their children. In the first instance, motives relating to ideologies around language would seem to necessitate transmitting language – but motives relating to the responsibilities of caregiving are interesting because they may be met through language but may also be met in other ways, and indeed may not refer to language at all. Whether language transmission is involved depends on the extent to which caregivers see language as a way of meeting their caregiving responsibilities. For example, caregivers may ensure their children are healthy by getting their check-ups and vaccinations; they may pass on important knowledge and competence of Country to children in a non-heritage language such as English or Aboriginal English; or they may teach children to have respect for Country through the demonstration of other respectful practices. This was suggested by Zoe, a young Wangkatha mother, as quoted above, who did not see the urgency of transmitting language to children when there were many other priorities of being a parent:

Well, nowadays, your main priority is to make sure your child is healthy, he has all his, or she has all their check-ups, and send them to school, I think that's, well that's what I did [...] I didn't really think about the language and that then [...] yeah, so I, I don't, it's not like I'm, oh I'm going to have this baby and I'm gonna teach, teach him language.

[Zoe, 20s, F, Wangkatha]

However, while Zoe does not see transmitting language as a priority for ensuring health and wellbeing, someone else such as Charmaine argued that transmitting language in fact helps with health and wellbeing; the difference is not in whether the two speakers prioritise child health as a responsibility of caregiving, but the relevance and potency they see language having in meeting that responsibility. Charmaine may see language as having a greater role in child health as she has access to research and professional development opportunities. jessie little doe baird (2013, p. 23) expresses a similar perspective, concerning the way some speakers of American Indian languages may not integrate language transmission into their cultural instruction:

Sometimes i think Indian folks recognize our responsibilities to provide cultural instruction to our children but we do not always see our heritage languages as part of that responsibility. We want to ensure that our daughters and sons know about ceremony, story, and dance. We think it is important for our children to know how to catch and prepare traditional foods. We find it almost as important as teaching them how to make a particular recipe taste better than anyone else's dish. Maybe we do not realize that our children have a birthright to their language.

Further, the use of language to fulfil caregiving responsibilities to children also suggests a certain subset of language to be transmitted, compared to the use of language to keep language strong. For example, wanting to ensure that children know where they come from suggests encompassing more symbolic aspects of language (such as the names of animals), compared to wanting language to be spoken in conversation on the streets, which implies a much larger set of language to be transmitted to children such as greetings, conversational turns, grammatical structures, and a broad range of everyday vocabulary items.

An ideological approach to motives also accounts for differences in timing of new speakers wanting to be involved in language learning and transmission activities. While those new speakers who would be motivated to pass on language to children based on their caregiving ideologies *can* learn more language themselves at any time (even before they have children), many may wait until they have children or grandchildren in their care before getting involved. As Daryl Baldwin (2013) suggests with respect to learning more Myaamia, it wasn't something his family was actively engaged in until the birth of their second child. Charmaine also suggests that the birth of children or grandchildren may be an instigating event to learn more language in the case of Noongar grandparents:

I think when parents become grandparents they sort of think 'Oh gee it's a bit more important now'.

[Charmaine, 40s, F, Noongar]

Speakers' motives, as a function of their language ideologies, may also develop and change over their lifetime as their ideologies change, through socialisation, reflection, community changes, and so on. These changes in language ideologies can account for speakers' observations that they, and other community members, had an increased desire to use language with children as they got older, as a result of valuing language more and not just as a response to having children. That is to say, as a generation grows older, then, some of its members may acquire new motives for language use. I discuss this dynamic nature of evolving motives and ideologies further in chapter 8.

## 5.4 Summary

In this chapter we looked at why new speakers of endangered Indigenous languages want to transmit their heritage language to children. This question is particularly pertinent given that the languages in question are no longer spoken as the primary code of communication, and that the speakers are language learners themselves, making the process of transmitting the language a significant challenge. Speakers' motives for transmitting language to children are also relational, in the sense that they pertain to their children's language acquisition within the relationship they have with the child, and not to their own personal motives as language learners *per se*.

Mainstream theories of language learning motivation, namely the Socio-Educational Model (Gardner & Smythe, 1975) and the L2 Self Motivational System (Dörnyei, 2009b), would characterise speakers' motives respectively in terms of their Instrumental value and level of Integrative orientation, or the Ideal Self created by the individual. Certainly, speakers' motives for transmitting language to children – the desire for children to connect to Country, to support their health and wellbeing – could be analysed as examples of an openness and desire to integrate more fully with one's own heritage language community, or perhaps a speaker's view of their Ideal language-speaking self. However, these typologies of language learning motives do not incisively describe the motives for transmitting language within a caregiver-child relationship. That is, we want to categorise the types of motives that people have for wanting *others* to learn or acquire the language.

In this chapter I have suggested that speakers' motives for wanting to transmit language in the family can be best understood in terms of their ideologies regarding the value of language and regarding the responsibilities of childrearing. As concerns language ideologies, we saw that speakers expressed motives for reinstating intergenerational language transmission in terms of their ideologies about the value of language and its perceived links to identity, culture, and Country; language and health and wellbeing; and the communicative function of language (specifically, the lack thereof). As concerns caregiving ideologies and what it means to be a 'good parent', speakers expressed that the primary responsibilities of caregiving included ensuring that their child was healthy and had a strong sense of wellbeing in terms of their identity and self-esteem, facilitated by their knowledge of and connection to Country, and their understanding of their social obligations. Speakers also suggested that caregivers were responsible for giving the child something that they never had. While for some speakers these caregiving ideologies underpinned their motives for transmitting (or wanting to transmit) language to children, others felt that these responsibilities could be met in ways that didn't include language transmission, depending on whether they saw language as meeting those objectives. In terms of interrogating the aspirational goal of creating a new generation of first-language speakers, then, we

can expand this goal to include a whole range of desired outcomes, driven by the communities and new speakers themselves.

Categorising speakers' motives for language transmission in terms of their language and caregiving ideologies is also helpful as a way of understanding how speakers' motives may change over their lifetime, as a function of changes in their ideologies and life circumstances, including whether or not they have children.

Finally, it is worth noting (as alluded to in the introduction to this chapter) that motives, in the sense of a reason for learning and passing on language to children, are just one part of the concept of motivation, in the sense of drive. That is, motives are a necessary component of having motivation, but are not sufficient in themselves to create a motivated individual – they do not provide the full story of why new speakers may start, continue, or stop learning and transmitting language to children. Personal motivation in the context of this alternative model of intergenerational language transmission also involves the speaker's sense of responsibility and ability, two aspects we will explore further in the following chapter.

# 6 Who – Roles and Responsibilities

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## 6.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter we started interrogating the possibility of reinstating intergenerational language transmission from new speakers' perspectives by examining speakers' ideologically grounded motives for transmitting language to children in terms of the perceived value of language and the responsibilities of childrearing. These motives do not necessarily imply that individual speakers themselves want to transmit language to children, but rather are concerned with why speakers wanted children to acquire language from older generations. In this chapter I turn to the question of who speakers feel should transmit language to children. This is important because not all adult speakers who have children feel that they should be, or could be, the ones to transmit language to them. It is certainly not a given, for example, that parents who attend language classes will take it upon themselves to teach the language they learn to their own children, and as discussed in chapter 4, speakers cite a range of perceived limitations in general on their own ability to transmit their heritage language as a first language to children.

Given that this research is about interrogating the possibility of reinstating intergenerational language transmission *in the home*, the crux of the research is to what extent caregivers assign responsibility to themselves and their families for teaching language to children, and to what extent they assign responsibility to external individuals and groups – in particular to schools. This is significant because it would seem that if *family* language transmission was to take place, families need to feel that it is in some way 'their job' – and indeed in many heritage language contexts, this is the case. For example, Weekly's (2018) study of multilingual British South-Asian English language teachers in Leicester, UK, saw the primary responsibility of heritage language teaching being placed on the parents and families, because "the ideological construction of heritage languages" was such that they were primarily seen as a community and parental responsibility (Weekly, 2018, p. 45). Is this the case across Indigenous Western Australian language communities?

In section 6.1, I outline speakers' answers to the question of whose job is it to teach children language, simply by listing everyone to whom responsibility is assigned for children acquiring language. Within this range of responses, a couple of themes emerge concerning the idea of 'responsibility', and how to define it and assign it, as I discuss further in 6.2. In one sense of the word, speakers assign responsibility to those who are in what is perceived to be the most natural position to transmit language to children. In the second sense, speakers assign responsibility based on who is most *capable*

of transmitting language. These two ideas don't always point to the same person or group. For example, a speaker may express that the family 'should' be the ones to transmit language to their children, based on some perceived natural order of things – *however*, the family may not have the language knowledge to do so, and so in the second sense of the word, are not responsible.

## 6.1 Whose job is it?

Speakers implicated a range of individuals and agencies in the act of transmitting Indigenous heritage languages to children. This included assigning responsibility to the language learner themselves and future generations of language learners; to the child's caregivers and family; to the grandparents and Elders of the family specifically; to schools; going all the way out to the government. Note that except for grandparents and Elders in some cases, none of these individuals and agencies are or include fluent, first-language speakers. As concerns the 'ideal' of reinstating intergenerational language transmission in the home, one of the biggest questions for this study is whether speakers assigned more responsibility to themselves and their families, or to the schools, where the schools potentially represent the greatest deviance from the aspirational 'natural-like' family language transmission. As we will see, while most speakers assigned some responsibilities to schools (as expected), no speaker assigned responsibility exclusively to the schools without also attributing some responsibility to the family.

### 6.1.1 The learner and future generations

In the first instance, a couple of speakers talked about the responsibility children themselves had as language learners to learn their heritage language. For example, Maureeka suggested that the difference between those children who were successful language learners in the classroom and those who were not came down to the willingness of the child, discussed as an individual difference amongst children in chapter 4, and that as such while teachers may be responsible for *teaching* the language, children were responsible for their own learning:

It's up to the kids if they want to learn it or not.

[Maureeka, 40s, F, Wangkatha]

Sophia, a young Noongar woman, similarly recognised the responsibility of the learner, but framed this responsibility not as an individual difference, but as reflecting the reality of the situation – she perceived that in her community, the child or adult language learner had to take that job on for themselves, because no one currently had the role or responsibility to teach language:

It's like no one really, no one really has that role, it's like if you wanna learn it, *you* learn it, you know, it's like the schools, these schools aren't gonna force these kids to learn language unless we go and tell them.

[Sophia, 20s, F, Noongar]

Similarly, some speakers saw the next generation as having a greater role or opportunity than the current generation to learn and transmit languages to children. As Paige suggests below, the younger generation have more opportunities to learn and speak their language, and society is changing generally in ways that she perceives to be favourable for Indigenous languages (a theme I discuss further in 8.5):

Interviewer: how do we support adults to support kids, to get language out of the schools and into the community?

Paige: I don't know, could be possible within the next twenty odd years I guess for the younger generations obviously cause um, I don't know cause the society that we live in now, there's more opportunities and because of the Australian history like, the languages a lot of the adults now probably weren't able to speak their language when they were younger so, I don't know I guess um, I don't know having the language in school now when this generation gets older maybe it could be possible for them to teach it to the younger generation, yeah

[Paige, 20s, F, Noongar]

Amanda similarly talked about the possibility of the next generation being the ones to raise their kids to speak language as a first language:

I think it like it's gonna take a bit of time but, um, I'd like to think that by the time my kids have kids that they'll know the language enough to be able to teach it to their kids as a first, as, as Wajarri or Badimaya or Nhandu or Mulgana to be their first predominant language spoken at home, um yeah so being able to, I'd say that would be my aim.

[Amanda, 30s, F, Wajarri]

Conversely, Charmaine, while seeing the possibility of the next generation transmitting language as a first language to their own children, nevertheless also sees the responsibility falling primarily to the current generation to help that happen.

I think this next generation coming through uh have had some language experience, I can say with the ones that I've taught over the last 13, ooh, 13 or 14 years, they've all

remembered something in language and I reckon they would teach their kids but I think what they need to um, sort of have that constant contact or conversation, or conversations still happening, when I see them in the street I sing out in language you know, and they can say hello back to me and I think they're going to do it automatically if we just encourage them a little bit more.

[Charmaine, 40s, F, Noongar]

### 6.1.2 Personal, family, and grandparent/Elder responsibility

Overall, many speakers did express either a personal or familial sense of responsibility; and indeed, no one saw language transmission as the sole responsibility of schools. An important follow-up question, as suggested by Isabel Velázquez's (2014) research of caregiver agency for Spanish-language transmission in the US, is whether individual caregivers see themselves as *solely* responsible for language transmission in the family. In this study, this was not the case; rather, speakers highlighted that passing on language to children was a family and community responsibility, as shown in the range of responses below:

[it's] about talking, you know, talking to each other, stop hiding it you know [...] probably learning it to speak it but [...] **we** need to, keep doing it in language centre and then take it back home .

[Sylvia, 50s, F, Miriwoong] (emphasis added)

It's the mums, those up and coming future **mums and dads** that'll be the ones that teach their children, and it starts at home.

[Judy, 50s, F, Noongar] (emphasis added)

Interviewer: Whose job is it to teach kids language, is it the family or the school or...?

Rozanne: Nah it's family I reckon, family.

[Rozanne, 30s, F, Miriwoong]

Indeed, as Pamela, a Noongar woman, discussed, 'it's not an individual thing', and it would be culturally odd and ineffective in an Aboriginal family for one person to assume all responsibility:

It's a family thing, it's not, it's not an individual thing where mum's just gonna say 'oh I'm gonna teach these kids language', you know it's gotta be grandmother, it's gotta be aunty and uncle and nan and pop, everybody has got to be a part of that process, because if it's just one-on-one that's the only time you speak it, at least if you've got other people around you who are also speaking it [...] the onus isn't on the individual, it's a ... kind of Aboriginal setting anyway it's a family thing.

[Pamela, 40s, F, Noongar]

A challenge raised by assigning responsibility to the family for language transmission is the fact that not all family members have knowledge of the language. If it is culturally important that families rather than individuals take on the responsibility for language transmission, then this will need to be weighed against the possibility that individuals will delay engaging in language transmission activities until some perceived optimal time or level of commitment and agreement between family members.

Within the context of family responsibility, some speakers highlighted the particular responsibility of Elders and grandparents to teach language to children. David, a Miriwoong leader, expressed this perspective as follows:

Language often in Miriwoong come from grandparents not from mothers and fathers, fathers and mothers are only the [...] people that there to straighten things out for them, like if kids are not learning language too much, not understanding them when they're talking [...] you know what you go speak there with your granny or your *ngajang* or go, they'll teach you more, see they always put everything to the people above them, they won't teach it, only if they [ are] not so culturally affiliated, that they'll probably try and teach them with the English.

[David, M, 50s, Miriwoong]

The responsibility of grandparents may be a reflection on the status of the language in the community as well as a reflection of Elders' cultural authority, where the grandparents still have (or had, at least until recently), "enough" linguistic proficiency to teach language. Amanda, a Wajarri speaker, also offers a broader view of the role of grandparents in childrearing, as she discussed the situation of her brother, as the first born in the family, being sent to live with his grandparents when he was young. Again, this could be a pragmatic or practical consideration, where the grandparents were the ones at the time who lived "out in the bush" and had more cultural and/or linguistic knowledge that they could pass on, but Amanda perceives this as also being something that has always been done – suggesting an assigned responsibility to grandparents independent of their language knowledge.

Amanda: so he went and lived with our grandparents [...] because the grandparents their kids have all grown up and it's sort of to get the kids like he yeah, I'm not too sure but to me it seems like you know, get the kids back out there with their grandparents [...]

Interviewer: [...] do you know is it something that's been happening since before colonisation like that's just how it's always been or

Amanda: I think it is, I think it has always been like that.

[Amanda, 30s, F, Wajarri]

As Walker (1993, p. 53; cited in Lohoar, Butera, & Kennedy, 2014) explains with respect to the role of Elders in Australian Indigenous families:

The role of Elders is difficult for outsiders to understand. We rely strongly on them as key decision makers within families. They are the people we hold the greatest respect for because many of them went through so much, so that now we do not have to suffer the injustices they experienced. Their guidance is often illustrated through everyday life and their teachings are often done subconsciously; we follow, we observe and we go on to teach our own families. It is through our Elders that the spirit of Aboriginal people is kept alive.

### 6.1.3 Schools

As expected, many speakers also assigned at least part of the responsibility of language transmission to people outside of the home, namely to schools. This mirrors the findings of the 2014 NILS2 survey, in which 95% of respondents agreed that traditional language should be taught at school (Marmion et al., 2014a).

Speakers often assigned this responsibility to schools by reasoning that *since* language education is a part of the school curriculum, *then* schools should teach the local Aboriginal language rather than other LOTEs such as French, Indonesian, etc., as Maureeka, a Wangkatha speaker, expresses:

But I reckon they should have um, [Wangkatha] classes in the schools now, cause they have French classes.

[Maureeka, 40s, F, Wangkatha]

Speakers also perceived schools to have an important role in teaching language due to the perception – whether accurate or not – that children are there ‘most of the time’, and that children listen to their

teachers. For example Amanda, who also took on a lot of responsibility for teaching Wajarri to her children, nevertheless saw these as advantages of teaching language in schools:

I suppose when you do look at it, it probably is easier for them [the language teachers] because the kids are there predominantly you know, how much years out of their life [...] and I mean I always say to my kids when they used to get under my skin and, like we'd be sitting at home they don't listen to me sometimes and I was just like [...] how come you listen to that white person you don't even listen to me I've been telling you this all day?

[Amanda, 30s, F, Wajarri]

That speakers assigned so much responsibility to schools for teaching language to children I would suggest reflects the perspective or expectation that children are learning their heritage languages as second languages, which need at some level to be taught explicitly, rather than acquiring them as first languages. Schools were also assigned more responsibility on the basis that they have greater capabilities for teaching language, as discussed further in this chapter.

One speaker placed the responsibility of teaching language on schools not in terms of the potential language acquisition outcomes, but as part of the process of reconciliation and normalisation:

I think it needs to be taught in every school, not just some, because ... I think that will break down the whole reconciliation process as well, it'll just be a normal thing like it's, it'll become normal that people won't even question it.

[Jacqui, 40s, F, Wangkatha]

#### 6.1.4 The government

Finally, at an even broader level, one speaker identified that in terms of teaching languages to children in schools, the government had a responsibility to put in place state language policies that would ensure Aboriginal languages were part of the curriculum:

A state language policy, and look, a treaty, that's the big one, we need to be recognised as the first peoples of Australia, and from that will be that push to have Aboriginal languages within curriculum [...] language isn't important to Australia, Aboriginal languages aren't important at that policy level.

[Ada, 30s, F, Walmatjarri]

Rosalie, a Wajarri speaker, similarly sees the government and *walybala* (white people) in power as responsible for making sure that Aboriginal children learn their heritage languages, because they were the ones who disrupted language transmission:

Interviewer: we were talking about schools before, like, who do you think kinda has that role or that responsibility for the kids to teach the kids language, should it be schools or families or someone else community?

Rosalie: well I reckon it's the, it's the right of the *walybala* to give it back cause they the one who stopped it [...] back in the old ways when people, when you know, *walybala* when I say *walybala*, white man came you know and, took kids and put 'em in missions and whatever and told, told 'em not to speak their native tongue.

[Rosalie, 50s, F, Wajarri]

This focus on 'top-level' agents, such as the government, doesn't necessarily dilute responsibility assigned to individuals and families to transmit language to children, but rather broadens the picture of what language transmission, language revitalization, and indeed reconciliation need to look like, operating both in top-down and bottom-up ways. Further, what Ada and Rosalie point to here is the idea that language learning takes resources, including time and money, in order to prioritise language in the curriculum. This is an interesting question that I return to in the next section, concerning how speakers perceive their abilities to learn and transmit language to children in the face of a perceived lack of resources.

## 6.2 Responsibility and Ability

Having looked at the range of agents assigned responsibility for transmitting language to children, I look now at the factors that influence how responsibility is assigned. Indeed, a number of factors emerge in terms of why speakers assigned some people the particular job of language teaching, relating to what I will call 'linguistic responsibility' on the one hand, and 'ability' on the other. This difference recognises that individuals and organisations may be perceived to have the role of teaching language to children based on a cultural sense of how the world works; or based on their actual ability, language knowledge, access to resources, and so on.

### 6.2.1 Linguistic responsibility

The first factor, 'linguistic responsibility', is a general idea about who *should* pass on language, for the reason that it is right or natural that they should be responsible – it is a cultural idea, an ideology about how the world works – as raised by Kari Chew (2015), a speaker and activist of Chikashshanompa'

(spoken in Oklahoma, USA). Chew describes this linguistic responsibility as being felt by individuals for the intergenerational transmission of language and the revitalization of language generally:

At its core, language reclamation is driven by a deeply personal sense of responsibility, especially for those generations characterized as language learners. Though my spouse—who is Mohawk, with strong family ties to the Tuscarora Nation—and I do not yet have children, we often consider the role our heritage languages should and will play in our family. We have agreed that, as individuals, we must further develop proficiency in our own languages, and we must have knowledge of each other's language, before we start a family. My husband calls this the **linguistic responsibility** of parents. By studying our own languages, we become responsible for the transmission of our Indigenous languages to a new generation [...] (Chew, 2015, p. 161) (emphasis added)

We can see that this is a responsibility based on a perception of the way the world should work, because Chew advocates that she and her husband 'must' develop their language proficiency by studying their languages *before* starting a family. That is, responsibility *precedes* the ability to take on the role. As such, linguistic responsibility makes sense of the idea that some individuals may feel that they *should* learn and transmit language to children – for example, because of a perceived childrearing responsibility as discussed in 5.2 – whilst acknowledging that they cannot actually take personal responsibility for language transmission because of a lack of ability.

This seems in part to be the kind of responsibility assigned to Elders and grandparents by speakers in this study – they are responsible for transmitting language to children not just because they have the most knowledge, but because it is seen as right that they should do so. Similarly, it is 'right' that teachers are responsible for teaching language to children in schools, not just because teachers have the most language knowledge and proficiency, but because that is how languages are taught.

The idea of linguistic responsibility for passing on language also speaks to what Annick De Houwer (1999) refers to as 'impact belief', which I discussed in 1.2.2. In this case, having linguistic responsibility indicates a 'strong' impact belief, i.e. belief that how a caregiver uses language has an influence on the child's language acquisition; conversely, a 'weak' impact, or lack of impact belief, refers to a caregiver's belief that what they do has no influence on the child's language acquisition. As an example of low linguistic responsibility and impact belief, some speakers in this study believed that it was ultimately the child's individual differences in terms of their willingness and innate capacity for language learning that determined whether they were a successful language learner or not. If the learner does not have this ability then they cannot acquire the language, regardless of what the caregiver does. However, as I return to in chapter 8, other speakers felt that they *could* make a

difference to their children's language acquisition even where they perceived the child to show a lack of willingness or language learning capacity, demonstrating stronger impact belief and linguistic responsibility

### 6.2.2 Ability

Whereas 'linguistic responsibility' refers to beliefs about how language transmission should work, I use 'ability' here to refer to speakers' assessment of who is able to transmit language to children given their training, qualifications, access to resources, environment, and so on. I propose that linguistic responsibility and ability can be understood as separate factors because people can perceive that they themselves have one but not the other. This was suggested by Chris, a Wajarri speaker, who assigned responsibility to the family for teaching language to his children, but did not perceive that he had the ability to do so:

Interviewer: whose job do you think it is for them to learn it, like is it schools or language centre or, you know, families

Chris: ohh, probably should have been the family's really but, I can't teach them if I don't know it so

[Chris, 40s, M, Wajarri]

In this section I explore the particular factors by which speakers assessed their ability to learn and transmit language to children: namely, linguistic knowledge and proficiency, perceived learning and teaching ability, availability of resources, and general confidence. As mentioned in section 4.2.1 regarding the factors that speakers felt limited the possibility of passing on their heritage language as a first language to children, new speakers are characterised by limited linguistic knowledge, access to resources, and low confidence; in this section, I explore how these factors play into new speakers' own perception of their ability to assume responsibility for learning and transmitting their heritage language.

#### *Linguistic knowledge and proficiency*

In the context of very endangered languages, it is expected that some speakers felt that they didn't have enough language themselves to take on the role of transmitting language to their children. However, as discussed throughout this thesis, individual speakers' limited linguistic knowledge and competence constituted only part of what guided the roles and actions they reported taking in language transmission. What we see in fact is that some speakers who had relatively low linguistic proficiency nevertheless pursued transmitting language to their children. Amanda, for example, felt confident to pass on some language, reasoning that as you learn more you can progressively teach

more. Conversely, she suggests that some caregivers and teachers feel restricted by their limited linguistic knowledge because they feel ashamed to not know the language fully:

Interviewer: how much language do you feel like you need to know as a parent or as a grandparent so that you can teach your kids?

Amanda: well I think a couple of steps ahead of them, knowing a lot would be ideal but we don't live in an ideal world [...] at the school when I walked in there I was like, 'I don't know a lot of the language,' I said 'I know when I hear it, what it's like you know the sounds and all that,' I said 'but you kids probably know more than what I do,' I said 'but you know at the same time it's a learning curve for the whole lot of us,' I said, you know, 'and I might know something that youse don't know and I can help youse with that,' I said 'and I have, you know different resources and different things that I can use and utilise' [...] so yeah, I think it's like you know that's the first thing I normally say to everybody is like look, you know like I'm up front about, and I'm not ashamed of it like not knowing the language fully

[Amanda, 30s, F, Wajarri]

Other speakers also pursued transmitting language to children even when they had relatively low linguistic proficiency because their purposes for transmitting language could be achieved with relatively limited linguistic knowledge (such as teaching a few important key words in order to facilitate a connection with Country). Finally, speakers felt differentially limited in their ability to transmit language depending on their beliefs about code-mixing; those who did not feel limited by their linguistic knowledge were not worried that children would be confused by exposure to language mixed in with English (as I discuss further in chapter 7).

This discussion is not to 'place blame' on adult speakers and language learners who felt limited in their ability to transmit language as a function of their own limited proficiency, but rather to unpack the range of perspectives around the idea that "language can't be transmitted because speakers aren't fluent". This idea was discussed openly by Chris, quote previously, who examined in some detail his own belief that he couldn't teach his children language because he wasn't fluent. Initially he expressed that he didn't have the language knowledge to teach language to his children, or the time to learn. However, when asked about his cousin who recently 'got into' language, he talked about how his own lack of involvement might be more of an issue of 'commitment' rather than 'lack of knowledge':

Chris: yeah I wish I had the time to sit down and, probably learn a bit more got the books at home, still don't learn the language but

Interviewer: is it a time thing do you think, is that most of it?

Chris: yeah I'm pretty full-on sometimes I got my kids you know, lot on the weekends

Interviewer: I mean does he [your cousin] have the time, what does he do, what's

Chris: oh yeah he's actually, yeah he's pretty full-on he's got lots of little kids actually he's, I suppose he's more committed than I am [laughs]

[Chris, 40s, M, Wajarri]

### *Pedagogical knowledge*

A second factor that influenced speakers' perceived ability to learn and teach language to children was whether they felt that they knew how to learn and pass on language themselves. In terms of learning, one speaker expressed a strong desire to learn their own heritage language and talked about wanting to transmit language to their own future children – but said they “wouldn't have a clue” where to begin; and one of the reasons for not knowing how to learn a language is of course the reduced availability of speakers and language learning resources in general. In the absence of a regular language class, potential learners have to navigate self-directed learning strategies.<sup>24</sup>

As concerns knowing how to pass on language to children, speakers in this study were divided in their estimations of their own and other new speakers' abilities, depending on whether they saw language transmission as a first or second language activity. For example, Charmaine, a Noongar language teacher, and David, a Miriwoong leader, both discussed the idea that being able to teach language was an acquired skill. In Charmaine's case, she felt that in fact her own language teaching strategies, as developed through her LOTE qualification, weren't adequate for teaching children to have a conversation – rather, she developed the pedagogical knowledge for teaching conversational language through her experience in taking a Master Apprentice Program workshop that focused on conversational skills. Meanwhile, David expressed that other Miriwoong speakers that he knew didn't know how to teach effectively because they felt that they had to teach language to children in an 'English way', for which they didn't have the English language proficiency themselves. On the other hand, where speakers were considering more 'natural-like' language transmission as opposed to

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<sup>24</sup> The speaker who 'didn't have a clue' how to learn language did mention downloading an app on their phone, but although they enjoyed learning a few words through the app, they then lost their phone and they no longer remembered those words.

teaching a second language, pedagogical knowledge wasn't seen to be an issue that would affect their ability to transmit language; as Judy said regarding young families and caregivers,

if they know it [the language] they're going to start talking it to their chil[dren], babies at birth

[Judy, 50s, F, Noongar]

### *Lack of resources and other perceived barriers*

A third factor that speakers identified as a measure of their ability to take responsibility for reinstating intergenerational language transmission is the availability of resources, including pedagogical resources and time.

For example, Brodie, a young Noongar woman, suggested that the perceived cost of language lessons was prohibitive to people who wanted to learn the language.<sup>25</sup> This is particularly pertinent given the continued economic disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision), 2016).

The costs as well, I mean obviously that's I think, making it [lessons] free because um, I'm sure so many Noongars know about this place and we want them to be like 'oh yeah I want to go to the Noongar language centre' and you're like 'yeah um it's a hundred dollars' 'oh' oh okay um and then they go and look for somewhere else, so it's just, I think making it easier would be to make it free.

[Brodie, 20s, F, Noongar]

Speakers also raised the issue of the time needed to learn the language, which caregivers very often don't have, or don't perceive they have. As Maureeka, a Wangkatha speaker, puts it, learning a language is time consuming, and people

don't have the time or the patience to sit down and wait.

[Maureeka, 40s, F, Wangkatha]

Speakers also perceived that caregivers in particular have a lot of other responsibilities and priorities that make it difficult to engage in language learning and transmission, as expressed by Zoe. (I discussed speakers' perceptions of caregiving responsibilities in detail in 5.2)

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<sup>25</sup> Language centres often have a policy of not charging Indigenous learners for lessons.

Well, nowadays, your main priority is to make sure your child is healthy, he has all his, or she has all their check-ups and send them to school.

[Zoe, 20s, F, Wangkatha]

These factors prompted speakers to assign more ability and thus responsibility to schools, where children are perceived to spend a significant amount of time:

I suppose when you do look at it, it probably is easier for them [the schools] because the kids are there predominantly you know, how much years out of their life.

[Amanda, 30s, F, Wajarri]

### *Confidence*

What these factors – limited linguistic knowledge and proficiency, limited pedagogical knowledge, and lack of resources – add up to, is a lack of confidence in new speakers in their ability to reinstate intergenerational language transmission, undermining their responsibility in this role.

Ada, a Walmatjarri speaker, framed Indigenous people's ability to engage with language learning (let alone language transmission) as an issue of self-confidence, stemming from the weight of the disadvantages they face in life:

The positive change that you know the language centre being established and, that real push for language to be used in the Perth region, is slowly building, and it is giving people the confidence to want to learnt it, and I think that's a really big part you know, a lot of people lack confidence, so some people are so disadvantaged that it's just, it adds on to the weight of everything that's going on in their lives [...] to then try and learn something, relearn or you know, yeah.

[Ada, 30s, F, Walmatjarri]

Or, as Dallas, a Noongar language teacher, simply put it, one of the biggest barriers for caregivers being involved in language learning and transmission was a lack of self-esteem:

[...] need to build up their um, the parents' self-esteem and all that so they can install it into their children.

[Dallas, 40s, F, Noongar]

David, a Miriwoong leader, also talked about Miriwoong people not wanting to take on roles and responsibilities in teaching the Miriwoong language or to take leadership roles in other aspects of life, as a lack of confidence resulting particularly from their perceived limited proficiency in English:

So that's another disadvantage for us you know and, and the lack of, knowledge in English for other mob, you try and get them to go up there [to teach classes], you ask them just for, you know, you say [...] just ask them a simple question, if there's a [Miriwoong] board running would you be able to try and run for that role and they say nah, not me, I can't do that but it's I can tell you know it's a lack of English.

[David, 50s, M, Miriwoong]

As mentioned, confidence, or the lack thereof, permeates all the other factors mentioned – linguistic proficiency, teaching ability, and access to resources. For example, Charmaine, a Noongar language teacher, describes the inability of the teachers in the same Languages Other Than English teacher training programme, to use Noongar conversationally, not just in terms of limited linguistic proficiency, but ultimately in terms of the resulting lack of confidence to use the language:

I felt we got so caught up with the word order, with when we was doing our language lessons and teaching classes that we didn't realise that we could use it with our conversation but then we were so restricted that we I think we weren't confident enough to use it, if you know what I mean.

[Charmaine, 40s, F, Noongar]

This lack of confidence in linguistic proficiency was often associated with a fear of 'getting it wrong', as described by Nadine, a Wajarri language worker. This fear of getting it wrong extended to a fear of being judged by both Indigenous people, who are perceived to be language authorities, and by non-Indigenous people, in terms of the feelings of embarrassment of not knowing one's own language:

See a lot of parents probably embarrassed, they're probably my age group where they would've heard a lot of language but they're not as confident to speak it or say the words, and might think it's you know um they might think they gonna get it wrong.

[Nadine, 40s, F, Wajarri]

Compounding the fear of 'getting it wrong' was a lack of confidence by some speakers in the accuracy or correctness of the language being restored – without access to fluent, first language speakers, new speakers have to reclaim vocabulary and grammar from archival material, but as new information is uncovered, they may be uncertain about whether the language they are learning is correct:

That's another thing that makes language hard as well [...] is that it just keeps changing and you keep finding out new things [...] for example I grew up knowing *bindi bindi* to be butterfly, but apparently now it actually means moth [...] same with pronunciation, um, I grew up knowing 'one' was *kani* but now apparently it's *ken, kaini*, something like that.

[Brodie, 20s, F, Noongar]

As expected, speakers also identified that lack of confidence amongst community members to engage in language transmission, particularly amongst Elders, was strongly associated with their experiences of having the language 'belted out of them' when they were children, as Godfrey, a Wajarri language worker, noted that 'children had it literally beaten out of them with a stick by them lay missionaries, so-called people of the cloth, nuns and priests, they said it was the devil's tongue, it was, jabberwocky'. As Nancy Dorian (1998, p. 20) describes it,

it requires enormous social and psychological self-confidence for any small group to insist on the importance of ancestral-language retention ... Precisely that sort of self-confidence is hard to come by in communities which have suffered the penalties of an ideology of contempt over a long period.

As we will see in chapter 8, much has changed over the years with respect to the social, political, and economic context for Indigenous Australians, with many speakers in this study, particularly of the younger generations, expressing a great deal of self-confidence; nevertheless shame and the reluctance to learn and speak language still challenges many new speakers across communities.

### 6.3 Chapter discussion and summary

In this chapter we looked at who new speakers perceive to be responsible for transmitting language. This builds on the observation that having the *motives* for wanting children to learn language is not sufficient to reinstate intergenerational language transmission – if transmission is to be reinstated in

a 'natural-like' way by caregivers (or by anyone) they need to accept the role and responsibility of transmission.

I began this chapter with an overview of the range of individuals and organisations to whom new speakers in this study assign the role of learning and teaching language to children. Of most relevance to the thesis question is whether speakers assign the role to themselves as individuals/caregivers, or to schools, as we might predict would be the case in situations of extreme language shift. This is significant in language revitalization theory because while it might be tempting for new speakers to place responsibility on schools and language teachers, utilising the school's access to pedagogical knowledge and resources, nevertheless if reinstating language transmission is to tend towards home and community language use, "schools alone cannot reverse language shift" (Eisenclas & Schalley, 2017, p. 565). In fact, in this research no one assigned the role exclusively to schools in theory, although in practice the role may be almost entirely taken on by teachers and language workers. Rather in these contexts, speakers felt that they and their families 'should' have been responsible for language transmission, but weren't able to do so. This suggests differences in how roles are assigned and how we can think about the general idea of 'responsibility'. In this chapter I suggested two components of 'responsibility' – the first, linguistic responsibility, is assigned based on who people perceive to be the right people for the task given the way the world works – in this sense, speakers largely felt that families should be responsible for transmitting language to children. The second component is 'ability', wherein the role is assigned based on who has the procedural knowledge, linguistic knowledge, resources, and most of all, confidence. As concerns ability, speakers were more likely to assign responsibility to schools.

As Lantolf & Polenko (2001, p. 146) formulate, "it is agency that links motivation [...] to action and defines a myriad of paths taken by learners". As reflected by the speakers in this study, there are many new speakers in communities of endangered Indigenous languages across Western Australia who have a range of motives for wanting to learn more of their heritage language and transmit it to their children, as discussed in chapter 4. Speakers also believe that if language is to be transmitted, then individuals and families have an inherent responsibility to take on this role, as part of the way the world works. However, there are many barriers to speakers' taking on this responsibility themselves – or, in Lantolf and Polenko's terminology, barriers to assuming the agency that links motive to action – in terms of a limited ability to learn and teach language characterised by limited language proficiency, teaching ability, and resources. The overall result for many new speakers is a reduced confidence in their own ability to take on this responsibility or role.

If new speakers desire the reinstatement of intergenerational language transmission in the family, then the issue is not so much the perception of who is naturally responsible, but new speakers' feelings of confidence in their ability to take on the responsibility of learning and transmitting language to children. New speakers in Western Australian endangered language communities have not fully handed over the reins of language teaching to schools, even though they see schools as being in a natural position to teach language, particularly as a second language where the schools already teach other LOTEs. This was true for both the language workers and teachers interviewed, who are intimately involved in language revitalization, and for the new speakers who weren't already involved in language revitalization: the linguistic responsibility of language transmission is still predominantly held by families. In the next chapter, we look at the strategies and approaches utilised by new speakers who choose to take on the role of passing on language to children, regardless of the limits to their abilities.

# 7 How – Strategies and Approaches

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## 7.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter we saw that new speakers as caregivers perceived their own responsibility for language transmission in complex ways, feeling that they ‘should’ transmit language to their children, but often not feeling that they, or new speakers in general, had the linguistic proficiency, resources, and overall confidence to do so; and that responsibility was also assigned to a broader range of individuals and institutions, such as the learner, families, schools, and the government. However, despite not feeling confident to reinstate language transmission, nevertheless most speakers in this study reported passing on some language to children in some way, employing a range of strategies and approaches. In this chapter I look at speakers’ perspectives about how to transmit language, along four lines:

- 1) What language content do new speakers report transmitting to children?
- 2) How do new speakers transmit language to children?
- 3) How do new speakers normalise language use, including encouraging the use of ‘correct’ or ‘authentic’ language, through their interactions with children?
- 4) How do new speakers negotiate their own limited proficiency in the language?

Whilst some speakers in this study referred to a more ‘traditional’ or ‘old way’ of passing on language, the answers to these questions show that speakers draw on a broad range of language transmission and teaching techniques, approaching the transmission of an endangered language in creative ways, critiquing methods that didn’t work for them, and freely adapting more modern teaching strategies to meet their needs.

These questions also emerged from the interview data as critical to understanding the challenges that new speakers experience in reinstating the transmission of an endangered language, and are common to other new speakers engaging in such non-native bilingualism. For example, Daryl Baldwin (2013), in his account of learning and passing on the no-longer-spoken Myaamia to his children, met the challenges of being a non-fluent speaker of a language in a context where there were no norms to speak that language, in the following ways. To negotiate his own limited linguistic proficiency, Baldwin focused on learning Myaamia vocabulary for everyday items by taping word lists to walls and furniture at home, and carrying word lists with him. To further counter the fact that his fluency was still developing and would not allow for a fully immersive approach with his children, he used at least some

structured language teaching approaches, although notes that his approach to language transmission in the home had become less formal overtime, particularly 'since learn[ing] that teaching grammar and teaching to speak are not the same thing' (Baldwin, 2013, p. 6). Karen, Daryl's wife, similarly used a structured approach to language transmission to mitigate her own limited proficiency, particularly when the children were younger, by integrating the Myaamia language into her homeschooling activities through the development of explicit language learning materials such as games and storybooks. Daryl approached normalising language use with his children by using Myaamia for everyday activities at home, such as butchering chickens and food preparation. Focusing on using Myaamia in these routine, predictable activities has the dual benefit of allowing Baldwin to prepare and practice the language structures and vocabulary in advance, as well as introduce and reinforce the norm that Myaamia is spoken for those activities, creating multiple opportunities for the language to be used in these contexts. As a measure of success he says "now it's common to hear ringing out in the home around milking time, "*šaa<sup>y</sup>e aawiki nooninenc*" 'it's time to milk' or "*aašite kiila nooninaci*" 'it's your tum to milk'" (Baldwin, 2013, p. 10). Further strategies to normalise language use include repetition, providing a monetary reward for language use (e.g. a penny in a jar), explicitly requesting the children to use Myaamia, and modelling the sentence in Myaamia for the children to repeat. Döpke (1988) notes a similar range of strategies used by English-German bilingual families in Australia to encourage their children to use German rather than English, including modelling, rehearsing, elicitation, and word games. To this Lanza (2008) notes other strategies that caregivers use specifically when the child is code-mixing or otherwise not 'fully' using the preferred language; these include the 'minimal grasp strategy' (also discussed in Ochs 1988) wherein the caregiver pretends not to understand the child when they use the non-preferred language; repeating what the child has said in the preferred language; continuing the conversation without reference to the child's code-mixing; and code-switching as an adult to use the child's first language as a resource to support their comprehension.

The chapter is organised as follows. To set the stage for the discussion of language transmission strategies, I briefly review the range of language content that new speakers talked about passing on to children (7.1). Next, I explore what new speakers believe about children's language acquisition and the resulting language transmission strategies, focusing on new speakers' beliefs that a) children 'pick up' language, b) children need to be taught language in a child-centred way; and c) children specifically need speaking practice to acquire language (7.2). Rather than pointing to a single 'Indigenous' method of language transmission these perspectives and resultant strategies exemplify a range of theories regarding language acquisition and language teaching. Then I look at how new speakers attempt to normalise their children's use of the language that they have acquired, and their beliefs about why

children might not speak the language (7.3). Finally, I look at how new speakers negotiate their own limited proficiency when it comes to passing language on (7.4).

## 7.1 What: the content of intergenerational language transmission

Across each community speakers by and large talked about teaching children single words, short phrases, and songs. Some speakers with LOTE teacher training also talked about teaching grammar, sentence structure, and phrases that were useful for conversation.

### 7.1.1 'The main things': single words and short phrases

Single word vocabulary and short phrases constituted the majority of the linguistic content that speakers talked about transmitting to their children, outside of a school setting. This included vocabulary for labelling things; and language words that regularly appear in Aboriginal English (such as *koonyi* 'crazy' and *ana* 'isn't it?' appearing in Noongar Aboriginal English). Most of the single word vocabulary that people talked about teaching consisted of nouns – in particular, animals, body parts, elements (stars, moon, water etc.), some everyday objects (salt, other food items, shoes), and place names. Speakers talked about this language content in a way that suggests a shared concept of what counts as 'standard' or 'the main things' to teach children:

My son, he learns a little bit, teaching my one-year old daughter a bit of it, just like **the standard stuff** like the moon and everything [...] and the stars.

[Cheraze, 20s, F, Ngadju] (emphasis added)

Gee, I've always used words [with my kids] [...] like the main things, you know, your head shoulders yeah everything like that **the main things**, you know I'm going to get your *djina*, your foot.

[Nadine, 40s, F, Wajarri] (emphasis added)

'Standard' or 'main things' also included expressions like greetings and short phrases, as Brodie points out in the quote below regarding the Noongar question *windja noonook koorliny* ('Where are you going?') – 'that's the main one, we all say that':

I teach them, the main ones is sentences such as the *windja noonook koorliny* cause that's the main one, that's used in all of us, I mean we all say that.

[Brodie, 20s, F, Noongar]

As well as teaching children single words, some speakers talked about using disciplinary and instructional phrases with children, as illustrated by Barbara, a Miriwoong speaker:

Interviewer: What kind of things do you say to them?

Barbara: Mm, to make them hurry up I just say *barriyanygoo* 'go, go this way', even for food and, for bread and thing or for 'dip that biscuit' or 'dip that bread'.

[Barbara, 30s, F, Miriwoong]

According to Paugh (2012; as cited in Smith-Christmas & Armstrong, 2014), it is common for families to use their minority language for disciplining children, because the demands may be seen as more 'emotive'. This is evident in Pamela's discussion of the way her mother used Noongar when she (Pamela) was in trouble, a language practice that she now uses herself with her own children:

Interviewer: Do you speak Noongar to your kids as well, or some of the words?

Pamela: Yeah all of the time [...] especially when I'm angry, that's when they know I'm serious cause I can say I'm really serious with you but if I'm, if I, if I just say something to them that you know, in an Aboriginal context, they know I'm for real [...] mum used to do it to us so [...] you knew you were in trouble when she started talking like, you know, talking to us.

[Pamela, 40s, F, Noongar]

### 7.1.2 Songs

Many speakers also spoke of transmitting language songs to children – whether originally composed in the heritage language, or translations of English songs, such as 'Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes' or 'The Hokey Pokey'. The majority of the songs referred to by speakers in this study were children's songs, utilising similar vocabulary to that discussed above i.e. animals, body parts, and greetings.

Where new speakers may not have the linguistic proficiency to generate longer novel utterances or sustain conversations in language, teaching and singing songs presents a unique opportunity to stay in language longer, and to teach vocabulary incidentally (Pavia et al., 2019). However, as some speakers pointed out from their own experience of learning songs, they were not always able to understand and extract the language items and meanings from the songs in a way that enabled them to use that language later; nevertheless, they felt that they were able to participate more fully in some aspect of their culture, and so the songs retain their significance as a vehicle for transmitting values about language and culture, as Brodie, a Noongar speaker, illustrates:

The songs definitely make it easier, like when I went to [...] Djidi's [Djidi Djidi school's] twentieth anniversary, all those songs I had learned while we were there, and I still remembered them because, and it's I don't know what they mean, but you just know the

song, like 'Kaya', um, is it Kaya? Yeah I think it's Kaya, the Welcoming Song [...] I love that song, I don't know what any of it means, I know it's a welcome, but I can sing it.

[Brodie, 20s, F, Noongar]

### 7.1.3 Grammatical content and conversational turns

Transmitting grammatical content explicitly was only mentioned by a few speakers who were also language teachers, within the context of teaching language at schools – it was not talked about as an aspect of intergenerational language transmission at home. Jacqui, a Wangkatha language teacher in a primary school, observed that teaching grammatical structure explicitly was important so that children weren't only learning isolated words, and she felt that it improved students' understanding of English too:

[...] because once I started training to become a language teacher, then uh, you know I really recognised, you know like knew the grammatical structure [...] because otherwise the kids learn words by itself, you gotta teach that grammatical, and they learn a little bit more about English, you know like right through their primary schooling, they're learning about verbs and nouns.

[Jacqui, 40s, F, Wangkatha]

Conversely, while Charmaine, a Noongar language teacher, believed that learning grammatical structure was important, she felt that the focus on learning word order (for example) could take focus from practising and utilising that grammatical knowledge in conversation:

[...] and I felt we got so caught up with the word order, with when we was doing our language lessons and teaching classes that we didn't realise that we could use it with our conversation.

[Charmaine, 40s, F, Noongar]

Thus, transmitting language content that is more complex than vocabulary and phrases/songs would seem to be primarily the domain of schools, but is limited amongst non-teachers at home by their linguistic proficiency.

## 7.2 How do new speakers transmit language to children?

How do new speakers report passing on language content to children? The methods reported by new speakers for transmitting language – such as speaking language around children, pointing to and labelling objects, testing vocabulary, reading books together, and using language learning apps – are not remarkable in themselves. Rather, they are significant in that they exemplify a range of established

approaches to language teaching and transmission, highlighting that while some speakers expressed that there is an 'Aboriginal', 'Indigenous', or 'authentic' way of teaching language, this 'way' is very broad. Any sense of an Indigenous way of teaching language must encompass something that is creative, adaptive, current, and diverse. The strategies that speakers report using also reflect their beliefs and perspectives about how children acquire language and how language should be taught, which are not universally the same across cultures. Indeed, that a distinction between 'acquisition' and 'learning/teaching' is readily available to speakers in this study is significant in itself. Niedzielski and Preston's (Niedzielski & Preston, 2000) study of caregiver perspectives or 'folk' beliefs about child language acquisition have suggested that in non-endangered or monolingual language contexts, caregivers are not at all interested in whether language is innate or a learned behaviour, or how children acquire language generally except to say that they 'pick up' language. By contrast, new speakers in a language revitalization context can much more readily discuss beliefs and perspectives about language acquisition, including but certainly not limited to the belief that children 'pick up' language.

In this section I discuss three main perspectives that emerged regarding language transmission and child language acquisition, and the teaching/transmission strategies that fall out from them. Perspectives one, that children 'pick up' language from listening to language speakers, and two, that children need to be exposed to language in a way that is child-centred (Döpke, 1992), concern the kind of input that children require to learn language. The first perspective guides caregivers simply to use language around children with minimal modification (7.2.1), while the second sees caregivers modifying their input in some way, particularly by using English or Kriol to explain language, and by transmitting language through increasingly engaging activities that are deemed interesting and appropriate for children (7.2.2). The third perspective concerns children's output, namely that children specifically need speaking and conversation practice in order to develop their language skills (7.2.3). I discuss these perspectives here as distinct, but of course speakers may and do hold multiple perspectives.

### 7.2.1 Children pick up language by looking, listening, and learning

Speakers across each community articulated that under the right conditions, children would 'pick up' language and they can thus learn some (if not all) language simply by listening to language speakers and teachers, and in their own time, attempting to speak.

When they [adults] speak language the kids pick it up and they learn and that's how it gets passed down, and they never want it to fade.

[Marna, 40s, F, Wangkatha]

I think that's where kids get their knowledge from too is sitting around and listening to the stories and all the yarns being told and then you know picking up on a bit of the language as well.

[Judy, 50s, W, Noongar]

Yeah, but little ones they pick it up quick you know like [...] I got a grandson I look after, he's three and sometimes I'll walk around saying stuff in Wajarri like, 'the plate' or the something you know, and he's following me he's following what I'm doing and copying what I'm saying, if I swear he'll say that [laughs].

[Rosalie, 50s, F, Wajarri]

One particular method by which children are believed to pick up language was referred to across the communities in this study as 'looking, listening, and learning', or the 'three Ls', as David, a Miriwoong speaker, described it:<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> 'Look listen learn' or the 'three Ls', while a conventional expression in general, has notably been used by Aboriginal people in other parts of Australia to describe the learning process. For example, Gibson et al. (2020, p. 196) note this same wording in the context of older Aboriginal adults on Wiradjuri Country (in New South Wales) talking about how to pass on cultural knowledge to the younger generations: "Many members identified that an important aspect of culture was to "look, listen and learn". For Aboriginal people, this means to be still; observe environments, including cultural connection; listen to people, Country, ancestors, and spirituality; and finally reflect on what one can see and hear and then learn."

Well what we do is, you have to look, listen, and learn, so white men got the three Rs, we got the three Ls [...] basic thing for language learning in the Miriwoong world is, you look learn and listen, not ask question, see.

[David, 50s, M, Miriwoong]

'Look listen learn' was presented by speakers as being the most authentic or traditional way of teaching language. Indeed, while caregivers across many cultures hold the belief that children 'pick up' language (Niedzielski & Preston, 2000), there seems to be a particularly strong belief in Australian Indigenous cultures that the mechanism by which this happens involves looking and learning; as Edith Bavin (1993, p. 87) observes about Warlpiri families in central Australia, the "child learns through direct observation and real-life experience, the responsibility for learning being on the child." (I further discuss the belief that children are responsible for language learning in 4.2.4.) In this study, 'looking, listening, and learning' was often associated with other activities that are also considered to be more traditional, such as listening to Elders telling stories, and learning outside or on-Country as part of doing traditional activities. In that regard, 'look listen learn' as a traditional approach mirrors something of the philosophy of 'the natural approach' to language teaching (Krashen & Terrell, 1983) in that speakers identify and align it with approaches to language learning outside of the classroom, without reference to grammatical instruction etc.. Note that 'traditional' doesn't necessarily mean 'no longer current', but that speakers themselves characterised these activities as 'the old way':

The old way is outside not in the building, yeah, and see outside, is fresh air and, too people just listen to the sounds [...] you listen and learn from it, yeah, and see inside, lot of things inside, you can't think inside like the um, pots and pans and things, people talking inside yeah outside you just yeah get out, just listen and learn yeah, learn something.

[David, 40s, M, Noongar]

Further characterising this as a traditional approach, one speaker also linked the idea of 'look, listen, learn' to the way that she believed at least some of her language had originated, where people listened and heard the names of everything:

[...] and so it's the same with everything else they named back then, it was all based on observing and listening, and then giving them the name.

[Judy, 50s, F, Noongar]

Not asking questions, as suggested by David (quoted on the previous page), is an important component of children picking up language, as also expressed by Charmaine, a Noongar language teacher. (Note however that Charmaine does not believe in 'looking, listening, and learning' as a sufficient mechanism for language acquisition, as discussed further in the following sections).

I feel that like, in my experience through teaching is that kids, they don't question so like they'll just learn it, and just think this is what you have to do so I guess it'd be a lot easier to learn it but then, an adult with the different perspectives in their head they're like oh, how do you know this is not made up, like they need evidence to know what it is [...] if you get so caught up in why it works, your mind's not open to what's being said to you cause you're quickly trying to analyse everything and translate all the time [...] you gotta take off your thinking hat outside and just walk in like you're a baby, baby's don't ask why, they need water or milk or anything they just say they want it, and give it to them, tell them what it's called and they say it.

[Charmaine, 40s, F, Noongar]

Some speakers also perceived that children's ability to pick up language is positively influenced by whether they already know another Aboriginal language – that is, knowing one Indigenous language helps the learner to pick up a second.<sup>27</sup> Pamela, a Noongar speaker, made this observation about her own grandson and others:

So some of the guys were from up north, so they, English was probably a second language, um, so they picked it up very easily, um, others you know, English was their

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<sup>27</sup> The perceived benefit of having learnt one additional language on learning another additional language only applied if the languages were similar; as discussed regarding new speaker beliefs about multilingualism (4.2.2), learning a language like French, for example, was perceived to negatively affect speakers' ability to retain a language like Noongar.

first but they had maintained an Aboriginal language at home, so they were able to pick it up quite easily.

[Pamela, 40s, F, Noongar]

At a more biological or innate level, one speaker suggested that Indigenous children can pick up language because they are hardwired specifically for their heritage language, and that the process of learning or acquiring language is thus akin to something being ‘woken’ in them – almost an innatist, Chomskyan perspective, except that the hardwiring is of knowledge specific to the traditional language, not languages in general:

It doesn’t happen when I speak English to them, only when I speak Wajarri language, it just wakes something up in them and they just, as if they’ve been here before they know that language, they really wanna converse back [...] I think it’s a wired, it’s wired in their DNA, it’s like something lying dormant [...] it’s like those frogs out in the desert that bury themselves in the sand and wait, lie dormant for years until the rain comes.

[Godfrey, 40s, M, Wajarri]<sup>28</sup>

This perspective is similar in tone to what Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998, p. 84) refer to as the ‘genetic fallacy’, ‘the assumption that the ancestral or heritage language will be easier for a person of the same ethnic background [...] Therefore, the student does not study, and does not succeed’. Boynton (2015, p. 98) describes a similar innatist perspective amongst some speakers in the Wangkatha community, writing that speakers “often believe that Aboriginal children are genetically predisposed to learning the language”. She argues that because of this belief, speakers “do not demonstrate a sense of urgency about the potential loss of their language, at least among the very young” (Boynton, 2015, p. 98). This is logical – if children are genetically predisposed to learn language, then it will not be difficult for them when the time comes to learn. However, in my own data I did not see this perspective one way or another amongst the Wangkatha/Western Desert participants; and further, diverging from the ‘genetic fallacy’, Godfrey (as cited above) still has a sense of urgency about language *teaching*, as do most speakers who expressed that children should learn language when they

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<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, Godfrey’s belief that Indigenous children are hard wired to learn an Indigenous language didn’t preclude him from also using explicit language teaching methods with children within the school context.

are as young as possible. The belief itself that there is an inherent capacity to acquire one's native language does not need to preclude teaching the language.

As such, this approach to language transmission most resembles what we would typically think of as occurring in a first language acquisition context, in that 'looking, listening, and learning' requires the least conscious modification of the language by the caregiver, and given a sufficiently immersive language environment, it should lead to fluency in the language. It is also, as mentioned, characterised by speakers as being traditional or 'the old way', the method of language acquisition before colonisation and language shift. However, speakers are of course aware that without an immersive environment, this approach does not result in children acquiring the language as a first language, but rather they are 'picking up on a bit of the language' as an additional language. In a non-immersive environment, new speakers did not expect children to pick up language fully, as Maureeka identified here – children could only pick up language if they were 'around it at all times':

You get some kids out there that just picks it up just like that, not all of them but maybe thirty percent of them [...] some of the kids are around it at all times, some kids are not.

[Maureeka, 40s, F, Wangkatha]

The interesting point of course is not that speakers believe that children pick up language in an immersive environment. Rather, what is interesting is how speakers assess their own language environment in terms of the richness of language, and thus what level of linguistic modification children would need accordingly in order to acquire language in that environment – not all speakers perceive their linguistic environment in the same way, as suggested by speakers who are surprised by how much their heritage language has shifted (Lee, 2009). In this section I have presented a range of speaker perspectives that suggest children can still learn language at least some just by being around speakers and that looking, listening, and learning is the desired method of language acquisition, but as we will see in the following sections, this was not the case across the board.

### 7.2.2 Children need to be taught language in a child-centred way

The second perspective on child language acquisition expressed by new speakers is that while 'picking up' language may be good for some level of language acquisition in some environments, children need to be taught language in a child-centred way (Döpke, 1992). This includes reading books and playing games in the heritage language. In this section, I focus on the child-centred strategies of using English or other L1 to explain and translate the heritage language, and using 'hands on' activities. Speakers attributed the need for a child-centred approach to their observations that children need to think consciously about the language they are learning, and have a more 'engaged' or active role in their

language acquisition. For example, Ingrid, a Miriwoong language worker, hypothesised that when Miriwoong caregivers speak Miriwoong with their children, the children are thinking consciously about it, questioning it, and require intentional learning strategies – such as writing down what is said – to acquire the language. According to Ingrid, being around language speakers and looking, listening, and learning are not sufficient for children to acquire the language:

I think they [the caregivers] speak to them but, some of the parts they might be thinking about what they're saying you know [...] oh must be they say, 'what you say, what that mean?', you know, mm, I was first like that to my eldest mum, she speak language to me and I ask a question 'what that mean?' and she tell me in English, I write it down.

[Ingrid, 40s, F, Miriwoong]

To that end, Ingrid was in favour of using English as part of her transmission strategy, as she talked about explaining the language words or phrases in English:

I speak in language and I explain to them in English.

[Ingrid, 40s F, Miriwoong]

Whilst this study pertains to intergenerational language transmission in the home, it is worth exploring the range of new speaker perspectives regarding the use of English or other first language in more formal learning contexts as an indication of speakers' perspectives regarding this strategy. For example, Jacqui, a Wangkatha speaker and teacher, espoused making comparisons to English as a way of teaching Wangkatha, in a classroom context. This did not mirror her own experience of learning Pitjantjatjara when she was younger, which she acquired through immersion, but she felt that given the time restraints and subsequent lack of immersive environment in the classroom, students would learn Wangkatha more quickly by being given explicit explanations and translations in English, rather than acquiring the language by inference over time:

It's different in a classroom setting cause in a classroom setting you only have a couple of hours a week, when you're totally immersed in a language, then you just pick it up, you know like it has to happen [...] when I teach it I make sure I teach the comparisons to English to kids, kids pick it up, a lot um, a lot quicker.

[Jacqui, 40s, F, Wangkatha]

Utilising English, Aboriginal English, or Kriol to teach and learn language is how the speakers in this study often talked about learning language themselves as adults. Indeed, many adult language learners found the concept of learning language without using their L1 challenging to put into practice.

For example, some of the Miriwoong speakers in this study had taken part in a Master Apprentice Programme, which was designed to bring an Apprentice learner together with a fluent Master or Elder to conduct activities in language without reverting to English. As Leanne Hinton (2001, p. 183) advocates for the Programme:

Language lessons should be “immersion” style, where the target language is used solely, without English translation. Still, the learners must be able to understand, at least partly, what is being said, through contextual clues. Thus the teacher must use gestures, miming, actions, pictures, and so on, to make himself or herself understood.

In the full description and report on the outcomes of the Miriwoong iteration of this programme, Olawsky (2013) notes that apprentices found it difficult to stay immersed in the Miriwoong language. This was also apparent in the way the speakers in this study talked about their programme experience, referring to activities such as suggesting a word or phrase in English/Kriol to their Master, who would translate it for them into Miriwoong.

The literature about the use of the learners’ L1 in the classroom suggests that while target language immersion is the most lauded approach to language teaching (e.g. Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Swain & Lapkin, 2013), there are certain benefits to using the L1 in the classroom, such as providing learners with “additional cognitive support that allows them to analyse language and work at a higher level than would be possible were they restricted to sole use of their L2” (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003, p. 760). It should be noted that these benefits usually pertain to higher level language tasks, such as discussing the subtle difference between two adjectives, rather than more simple tasks such as learning the language for common animals, body parts, and colours.

However, not all speakers preferred switching to English when immersion was not possible. Some speakers who used this strategy talked about only employing it only after they were sure the child hadn’t understood the language from context:

She [my daughter] just goes ‘huh’ and then I’ll say it again, and then, if she goes ‘huh’ again I’ll tell her in English, and then I’ll repeat it in Wajarri, so she’s hearing it.

[Nadine, 40s, F, Wajarri]

David, a Miriwoong speaker, likewise discussed this issue of language learners using English, asking questions, and wanting language translated, which he presented as a ‘double edged sword’. On the one hand, he observed that because Miriwoong parents didn’t have fluent Miriwoong, they would need to translate language for their children rather than the preferable alternatives of relying on ‘look listen learn’ or transmitting language through immersion; but the parents (and teachers) didn’t have

the 'English' proficiency – specifically, didn't have the meta-linguistic language, whether in English or Kriol – to be able to do so. As noted in chapter 3, Miriwoong verbal morphology, which David refers to in this quote, is particularly complex, containing both coverbs and inflecting verbs, and is notably challenging to explain even in one's first language.

If they know that Miriwoong then they have to know English how to really translate to their kids about it [...] here you get bombarded with question 'oh what, what's this about?', this is where the problem come in for the language teachers, see [...] and uh translation of that in English, is where the problem lies with our people, they can't explain it in a way to your satisfaction [...] the best way for us is to learn it by listening, the word, how it's put in practice you know like, *berra, berraya, berra-nging*<sup>29</sup>, but I mean, talk the talk, and you learn from that, that's the basic Miriwoong way, but you know but not this like, you know like 'she is, I know, we standing, he standing', that gets more difficult cause that kind of thing gets more English structure now you trying to do it, that will make it hard for them to try and realise what you're doing.

[David, 50s, M, Miriwoong]

Having observed some language lessons, I would suggest that while some speakers advocate for not using English in the classroom, there is still a fair amount of English being used – the process is not entirely immersive. Instead, teachers use as much of the heritage language as possible, such as for commands and feedback, and use English elsewhere. But in fact this is beside the point. It is significant in itself that some speakers hold the perspective that language should be taught or transmitted without reverting to English. This suggests they are open to swinging the balance towards even more language and less English, while other speakers – indeed, other language learners – may be adamant that they need to use English in order to teach and learn another language.

Whereas 'picking up' language and 'the three Ls' (as discussed in the previous section) were seen as traditional approaches to language teaching and learning, the perspective that children need their language input to be child-centred and might benefit from translations or explanations in English would seem to better take into account the degree of language shift where the environment is no longer immersive. More child-centred approaches to language learning were also seen by speakers as capitalising on differences they perceived in how Aboriginal children learn language, and in how children learn in general, as illustrated by these comments.

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<sup>29</sup> Referring to future tense forms of the GO/COME verb paradigm

Pamela, a Noongar speaker, observed that in terms of Aboriginal learning styles, Aboriginal kids needed more hands-on, 'doing' activities – the language transmission strategy she describes here being in effect a Total Physical Response approach (Asher, 1966), based on the observation that students retain their memory of language items when they were asked to follow instructions in the target language:

I found particularly with Aboriginal kids, and Aboriginal learning styles is that it's, that more doing than getting out a book to read [laughs], you're better off, you know, like if, just learning the word 'hop' and hopping, do it, show me how you hop, show me what hopping is and then tell me you're hopping, so that they can see the words and they can do it, so doing is really important.

[Pamela, 40s, F, Noongar]

Amanda, a Wajarri speaker, similarly explained the perspective that children learn through hands-on activities because (all) children need more stimulation and novelty than adults:

So kids really want like when I spoke to my kids I asked what sort of things capture their imagination and the little fella he said, like, flashing lights and apps, more hands-on sort of things as opposed to just listening to it [...] you don't really wanna do something that's already been done over and over again, but if you do want to do something you wanna make sure that it's a bit more modernised as well, mm, because kids yeah, they tend to pick on, pick up that stuff a lot easier.

[Amanda, 30s, F, Wajarri]

As Amanda suggests, this 'hands-on' approach may include the use of apps and mobile technology, tapping into decades of computer assisted language learning (CALL) approaches to language teaching and learning (Higgins, 1983) in adaptive ways. Whilst also valuing 'traditional' activities such as learning language through trips on-Country, Amanda did not see any tension with taking these more modern measures for language transmission, suggesting again that for many new speakers, and for children especially, language transmission requires adaptive and creative methods.

### 7.2.3 Children need to practice speaking to learn language

The third approach to language transmission that speakers in this study reported taking is the cluster of beliefs and strategies that are concerned with children having opportunities to speak as an integral part of language acquisition. As suggested by Charmaine (quoted further below), given the range of strategies for language transmission discussed in this chapter, the importance of speaking practice

and communicative approaches to language teaching came as a minor epiphany for some speakers. Julie, a Miriwoong language worker, summarises the importance of learning to speak as follows:

If you here working at language centre, you go out there you gotta teach them language too, you know, not English all the time, they **gotta learn to learn how to talk back in language, you talk to them and they gotta learn how to talk back**, but I know our kids they listen and sometime they talk back, sometimes they talk in English.

[Julie, 50s, F, Miriwoong] (emphasis added)

Charmaine, a language teacher in Bunbury, critiqued her own methods of teaching language to children as not focusing enough on speaking. After attending a Master and Apprentice Program training workshop in Kununurra (discussed further in 8.7), she realised that her classroom teaching up to that point had focused almost exclusively on reading and writing, without the support to engage in conversations respond in language. While Charmaine also observed that children in general ‘pick up’ language (as discussed in 7.2.1), she comments that her students weren’t picking up language through simple exposure in the classroom, and that she needed to take a more communicative, output-based approach to language teaching. This involved practising rehearsed speech, learning everyday vocabulary that could be used in a range of situations, and enabling the student to give an automatic response as a conversational strategy, all key features of the Master Apprentice Program (e.g. Hinton, 1997):

They [the students] was relying on the gestures rather than the language, yeah, and I thought they was picking it up but they were, but they, I didn’t give them strategies to respond back to me, they needed more vocab in their conversation to respond back, and vocab that they would use every day, not specifically for a particular task or a particular theme that we’re looking at for that time or for that school setting, the way it was, they needed to learn how to just off the cuff you know just [...] ask a question in language without thinking too much about it [...] and we had to start off with really rehearsed speech because they, we couldn’t have started otherwise, and then it slowly started to happen.

[Charmaine, 40s, F, Noongar]

Merrill Swain’s (1993) ‘Output Hypothesis’ highlights this importance of speaking (and writing) for language acquisition. Particularly relevant to Charmaine’s observations is Swain’s suggestion that speaking gives learners the opportunity to move from semantic processing (e.g. ‘relying on gestures’) to syntactic processing, where learners are forced to notice and confront the gaps in their knowledge

(e.g. that they need more vocabulary for everyday conversation) – albeit in this case, this level of ‘noticing’ and ‘consciousness’ (Schmidt, 1990) regarding gaps in knowledge was on the part of Charmaine as the language teacher. Learning ‘rehearsed speech’ is also similar to other communicative approaches to language acquisition, such as the ‘Formulaic Approach’ developed by Rob Amery for Kaurna, a language in and around Adelaide without any remaining fluent Elder speakers. Amery (2009b, p. 93) advocates that “[r]ather than teaching grammar or attempting language immersion, the language is introduced bit by bit in the form of well-formed chunks”. This has the benefit of ensuring that whatever is spoken in the language *is* well-formed, so that new speakers aren’t habitualising ‘mistakes’. It also aids fluency in the sense of supporting the learner to speak fully formed phrases.

Another strategy given by new speakers for supporting children’s verbal expression was encouraging children to repeat exactly what the caregiver had said. Rozanne, a Miriwoong language worker, talked about encouraging her own children to speak in exactly this way:

If they go in the shop oh I tell them go get this, in language, they know what I’m talking about see, but they don’t reply back, that’s the thing I keep learning them to, repeat, repeat back words to me.

[Rozanne, 30s, F, Miriwoong]

Glennis, a Miriwoong language worker, suggested that learning to speak by repeating *was* a traditional way of language acquisition – almost identical to ‘look, listen, learn’ (as discussed in 7.2.1), but with the critical addition of ‘repeating’ – that is, ‘listen, repeat, remember’ – taking a behaviourist approach to language acquisition:

Interviewer: How did all those kids you know like you and your parents and your grandparents, how did they learn to speak such a complex language?

Glennis: Mm, from our ancestor, just as we, as they were growing up, same like as we were growing up we learnt to speak our language just by listening, listening and repeating, and, listening repeating and remembering.

[Glennis, 40s, F, Miriwoong]

There are some features of this behaviouristic ‘repeat after me’ approach that are worth noting (Myles & Mitchell, 2004; Skinner, 1957). First, the child is asked to repeat language that is contextualised and useful to the activity at hand. The expectation is also created that the child can and will use language with the caregiver in everyday life. In the previous quote, Rozanne also talks about offering an

opportunity for the child to practice articulating the word, which is important for verbal fluency (De Jong & Perfetti, 2011; Lambert et al., 2017), and echoed by speakers across other communities as an important part of language acquisition:

They do say you know even learning English a child needs to learn a word twenty times over before it becomes a part of their, um, not only hear it but they need to use it before it becomes a part of their vocabulary.

[Jacqui, 40s, F, Wangkatha]

Valma, a Ngadju speaker, similarly lauded the use of repetition in learning to speak, suggesting that children need to repeat words three times, as she observed in a dance class when some children were encouraging other children to learn the language:

The kids will say [to the other kids] ‘oh this is *kalun* [“cheeky goanna”], so you gonna be dancing like a *kalun* walking on the ground’, so the kids make ‘em repeat it three times, oh we just do that, don’t know why but we just do that, seems to be like three times, always, seems to sink in a bit more.

[Valma, 50s, F, Ngadju]

As an approach to language transmission and acquisition, then, providing children with speaking opportunities lies at the other end of the spectrum an approach such as ‘look, listen, learn’ (and yet, as Glennis suggests, almost comes back ‘full circle’). Speakers utilise speaking practice with children as an attempt to normalise speaking in the heritage language (a topic I return to in the next section), whilst giving children opportunities to develop their fluency through practising articulation, using a range of methods from behaviouristic strategies such as ‘repeat after me’, to communicative strategies such as focusing on conversational language.

### 7.3 How do new speakers normalise use of an endangered language?

Given that one of the most challenging aspects of transmitting a non-dominant language to children is that they respond in English or another dominant language (Naessan et al., 2010), supporting children to respond in their heritage language – that is, making it a norm to use the language – is arguably one of the most critical aspects of supporting children to become language *speakers*. In a report of Indigenous families’ language use in South Australia, a majority of participants said that when they speak to their children in language, children respond in English some or all of the time (Naessan et al., 2010). Participants in that study largely explained children’s preference to responding in English in terms of the child’s limited knowledge of their heritage language and their general willingness, or lack thereof, to speak it. Some participants further specified that children responded in English

because it was easier, or the child was accommodating to the parent's own limited language knowledge. Supporting children to respond in their heritage language is a question of changing the established norms of language use in the family home, which Hond (2013, p. 100) describes as "one of the most difficult conditions of language revitalisation to fulfil". How then do caregivers specifically 'establish new norms for the use of a threatened language' (Armstrong, 2012, p. 145) such that children become language *speakers*? Muller (2016) notes six critical success factors identified by Māori second language speakers who are raising their children as first language speakers of Māori within their *whanau* (families): critical awareness, or understanding amongst families of the significance of transmitting language; family language policy, including families choice of schools for their children; Poureo, or 'key drivers', those language champions in the family who will advocate for the language in the family and support and motivate other family members; support from other families who are also attempting Māori language transmission; access to child-friendly Māori language resources; and increasing parental language skills. In this section I focus on how new speakers in this study report shaping and normalising their children's use of language through their specific interactions, noting first of all that speakers offered a range of perspectives on why children *don't* respond in language, before discussing the specific strategies that caregivers reported using; and then in the next chapter I look at the broader influences on how new speakers approach this challenge of language transmission.

Across the communities in this study, some speakers believed that children didn't respond in language – i.e., that it wasn't normal for them to use the traditional language – because they were too young to develop comprehension of the language. Paige, a Noongar speaker, explained her younger sister's lack of response in terms of a lack of understanding, because at three years old her sister was 'too young':

I did um show my [three-year-old] sister a few songs and stuff about it but um, yeah she, she doesn't understand, she's too, too young to understand at this stage.

[Paige, 20s, F, Noongar]

Speakers also talked about their children being rebellious or choosing not to listen, and as being more obedient in responding to teachers rather than to their parents. These perspectives were often given as reasons for not pursuing language transmission with children. For example, Cheraze felt that although her children *did* understand language, they chose not to listen as an act of rebellion. Similarly, Amanda commented that her children listen to 'that white person' (their school teacher) but not to her.

Interviewer: Do they know words like jumping, sitting, kinda like action words as well?

Cheraze: Yeah, when they choose to listen [...] it's like a never-ending argument with kids when you're trying to get them to listen and trying to teach them, they just listen in their time [...] they just look at me and laugh and run away.

[Cheraze, 20s, F, Ngadju]

[...] and I mean I always say to my kids when they used to get under my skin and, like we'd be sitting at home they don't listen to me sometimes and I was just like [...] how come you listen to that white person you don't even listen to me I've been telling you this all day.

[Amanda, 30s, F, Wajarri]

These comments again raise the question about whether speakers believe that children have their own will that is not 'shapeable' by caregivers, or whether caregivers do in fact have an influence on their children's behaviour – whether they have 'impact belief', i.e. the belief that caregivers "can exercise some sort of control over their children's linguistic functioning" (De Houwer, 1999, p. 83). Without impact belief, it seems unlikely that caregivers will pursue using language with their children and attempt to shape their children's language norms. By contrast, some caregivers who had impact belief talked about pursuing language transmission even when children didn't respond. For example, Julie (Miriwoong) wasn't worried about her children responding in English, because she believed that a) learning to respond was something that needed to be taught, and b) she was confident the children were listening anyway:

You go out there you gotta teach them language too you know, not English all the time, they gotta learn to learn how to talk back in language, you talk to them and they gotta learn how to talk back, **but I know our kids they listen** and sometime they talk back sometimes they talk in English.

[Julie, 50s, F, Miriwoong] (emphasis added)

Nadine, a Wajarri speaker, also felt encouraged to continue using language with her children even when they didn't respond, because she believed that they were developing passive knowledge of Wajarri that would be helpful to them later on:

I always try and talk a lot of language with the kids and they're like "Oh I don't know what you're saying", but I used to say that myself, "I don't know what you're saying mum" [...] it's just hearing the language and hearing it being said properly, you know, and I think

that'll help em later when they go, when the light switches on so "oh gosh I need to know my language", yeah it will help them.

[Nadine, 40s, F, Wajarri]

A strong example of having impact belief as a teacher, Judy noted having a policy of not speaking English to the students in her class after the first lesson, to set the expectation that they needed to speak to her in Noongar. She attempted to carry this expectation out of the classroom as much as possible, to counter the ideology that Noongar was only a classroom subject – such as when she meets students at the local shops:

I'll go and say hello and they'll go, *kaya mamyok* ["hi Aunty"], and I'll say *kaya*, you know so, that way they get to learn even when you're in the community and they see ya, no to English, don't talk English to me cause I'm expecting you to talk Noongar to me so that's, that's how, that's my style of teaching.

[Judy, 50s, F, Noongar]

As mentioned previously with respect to tailoring language to be child-centred, Nadine also talked about the technique of repeating a phrase in Wajarri with the expectation that her daughter will respond or at least understand, rather than reverting straight back into English:

When we're in the shops and stuff [...] I'll tell her to get down, or stop climbing, she just goes 'huh' and then I'll say it again, and if she goes 'huh' again I'll tell her in English, and then I'll repeat it in Wajarri, so she's hearing it.

[Nadine, 40s, F, Wajarri]

Using a similar strategy to Daryl Baldwin (2013) as described in the introduction to this chapter, Rozanne, a Miriwoong language worker, spoke about the importance of planning to use words and sentences that you could 'say all the time' for everyday activities, and thus establish the norm that those activities will be carried out using (some of) the heritage language:

I reckon good thing is that even at home if you wanna ask for tea, say it in language, or "cook me something" in Miriwoong, you know all them little sentence [...] you keep saying it all the time.

[Rozanne, 30s, F, Miriwoong]

Finally, Charmaine talked about giving children opportunities to practice speaking not just as a method of language acquisition (as discussed in the previous section), but also as an opportunity to develop

and support the norm that language could be used in conversation, as she reflects here on her experience at the Master and Apprentice Programme workshop:

We [realised that we] can understand what was being said but we didn't have enough vocab and conversation to be able to respond back, and that's when we started realising that we became passive listeners, we were passive language speakers where we just heard it and we just did the action, rather than learning the vocab to ask 'how do you say this in language?' or 'what is this called?' 'how do I say 'I want to go downtown'?' or 'how do I say 'I want to go out hunting in the bush'?' you know or having that general conversation that we have in the street, everyday language, and that wasn't happening, cause we were so focused around school, very structured school setting, and the problem with that was the language didn't go outside the school, it stayed in the school compound, and children started to use the language at school, when they left the classroom they switched into Aboriginal English or just English [...] and they thought it was a school based program, they didn't realise that was the language of their people or their culture.

[Charmaine, 40s, F, Noongar]

Here Charmaine identifies that a large part of the problem of normalising language is that children aren't being taught the kind of language they can use for normal, everyday conversations, but rather were learning language as an abstract, school subject. I comment again on this distinction between schools' focus on teaching language as a subject, and the ideology of transmitting language for communication, in the next chapter.

### 7.3.1 Shaping norms regarding 'correct' language use

Norms of language use also include what is considered normal with respect to linguistic forms, not only when and where it is considered normal to use the language. This was a big issue for speakers in this study, who discussed whether and how caregivers should enforce what they perceive to be correct use of language. Across the communities, there were at least three different facets to linguistic purism: an attitude of respect to past language speakers, often as gleaned and analysed from written records; a mix of attitudes towards current language change and use of 'slang'; and a belief that language learning in general required as a matter of course a certain degree of correctness. These attitudes pertained more so to pronunciation and word choice than to syntax, or issues of code-mixing, which as discussed some speakers saw as problematic from a language transmission and acquisition point of view, but not as concerns the perceived correctness of language.

Certainly in linguistic environments where there are few or no current fluent speakers, it has been documented that there is a desire to recreate something authentic from the past, to return the language situation to where it once was in order to regain something that had been lost, coupled with a respect for the authority of past speakers who *were* fluent (Hornsby, 2015; Jaffe, 2015; Wong, 1999). An attitude expressed by some speakers in this study is that if you're not going to speak authentically, what are you really reviving?

If someone can't read the words and know the sounds, the phonics of that, those words then it's just making their own language up really.

[Nadine, 40s, F, Wajarri]

As O'Rourke and Pujolar (2013, p. 54) note, this requirement for correctness may be a 'defense mechanism [...] against the possible absorption and disappearance of the language altogether'. However, the difficulty in communities where there are few or no fluent speakers is that what counts as 'authentic' or 'traditional' is often challenging to pinpoint, as language workers and linguists attempt to reconstruct the language from written records. Unlike other language revitalization contexts where the difference between fluent speakers and archival records may embody a difference between community-internal and linguist-external expertise (Couzens et al., 2020), the challenge of utilising written records as discussed by speakers in this study remained a community internal affair, where archival work is conducted by members of the language community – as for example Brodie discusses here, with respect to the archival work done by the Noongar linguists and language workers at the Noongar-led language centre:

That's another thing that makes language hard as well [...] is that it just keeps changing and you keep finding out new things [...] for example I grew up knowing *bindi bindi* to be butterfly, but apparently now it actually means moth [...] same with pronunciation, um, I grew up knowing 'one' was *kani* but now apparently it's *ken, kaini*, something like that.

[Brodie, 20s, F, Noongar]

The second aspect of 'correct' language use was an attitude amongst speakers – both younger and older – that 'slang' was not appropriate. Speakers in this study define 'slang' as any language that isn't 'real' or 'authentic', as elaborated on by Denise with her reference to 'real Noongar':

I have seen some [young people] on social media where they come up with these words and you wonder where these words come from, are they real words or, are they just made-up words, you know, and people, and because they repeat it a lot because it gets

stuck in their head because they got this little rhyme they think 'oh that's real Noongar', but it's not.

[Denise, 50s, F, Noongar]

Third, as some speakers put it: as a matter of course, if you're going to learn a language you should try and sound as close to a native speaker as possible – an interesting observation in communities without 'full' native speakers, indicating that new speakers may still have a memory, perhaps a recording, or at least a concept of what a native speaker sounds like:

You know, like even if you learn someone else's language, like even when you do English, you still, they teach you to say it properly don't they?

[Rosalie, 50s, F, Wajarri]

In terms of how these norms regarding correct language use were transmitted to children, some speakers talked about supporting the need for employing teachers in classrooms who had the linguistic proficiency to ensure that children will learn to pronounce language 'correctly':

Someone has to be there to actually pronounce it properly and make them listen to how you're saying it, cause it, they say, well all our old people say don't say, don't talk Ngadju unless you know how to pronounce it properly.

[Valma, 50s, F, Ngadju]

Judy, a Noongar language teacher, talked about employing strategies to enforce correct pronunciation with her students, where incorrect pronunciation prohibited the student from progressing in a game:

We'd be listening to see if it was said correctly, pronounced correctly, if it was not they had to go to the back of the line.

[Judy, 50s, F, Noongar]

Godfrey reflected on his own experience of being physically chastised as a measure for enforcing correct language use, which also provides the interesting perspective that the imperative for linguistic purism was related to the imperative to follow certain rules in a harsh country:

Some Elders would slap us, some would really tell us off, 'You don't say it like that! You going to talk Wajarri you talk properly you listen to what I'm saying' [...] um in today's day and age it might sound um, sound like child abuse [laughs] [... but] it's in Aboriginal culture

where that harsh tr-, you live in a harsh country you need to have a harsh teacher and have a harsh punishment.

[Godfrey, 40s, M, Wajarri]

However, not all speakers felt that this particular norm needed to be enforced with children. Denise, a Noongar linguist, who felt that slang was not appropriate, nevertheless expressed sympathy for language learners who were told by others that they were ‘saying it wrong’, implying that this presented a barrier. (She did not attribute this attitude to Elder speakers, for whom she also expressed great respect):

I think that’s one of the biggest dilemmas is someone saying that you’re saying it wrong you’re saying the words wrong nah you’re saying it wrong, [...] so first of all they put people down and they lose the confidence of saying something [...] and I don’t like that kind of behaviour because we’re all learning.

[Denise, 50s, F, Noongar]

Moreover, at least in the classroom context, some speakers suggested that if children pronounced words ‘incorrectly’, that was the responsibility of the teacher rather than the student – as long as the teacher says language the right way, then children will pick it up:

[...] but then some people I don’t know, oh my way of thinking some people don’t say it right you know [...] the teacher got to learn them the right way to say the word, you know and the kids will pick it up.

[Rosalie, F, 50s, Wajarri]

In terms of the processes of intergenerational language transmission, then, many new speakers of languages of revitalization seem to take on the unenviable role of being the guardians of what is considered to be the ‘correct’ language, as far as can actually be determined from historical documentation, as well as normalising the idea that children will use language at all.

#### 7.4 How do new speakers negotiate their limited proficiency?

As indicated in chapter 6, feeling that you don’t have enough language knowledge, or enough confidence in your language ability, to teach language to children emerged as one of the biggest barriers to new speakers taking on the role of language transmission. In this section I look at new speakers’ attitudes to language transmission when they themselves are not fluent, including how new speakers report learning more language in order to pass the language on to their children.

Some speakers felt that the kind of language output that would result from new speakers not being fluent in the language would be problematic, and believed that adults needed to be relatively fluent, or have access to fluent speakers, in order to start teaching language:

I think you have to be at least fluent or at least have, at least a good, a firm grasp, grasp of the language, I mean at least be able to string a sentence together, basic sentence.

[Godfrey, 40s, M, Wajarri]

This relates to speakers' perspectives about childhood multilingualism, as discussed in chapter 4, particularly with respect to the belief that code-mixing and code-switching would be confusing for the child. For a speaker like Pamela, it was okay to start teaching with limited proficiency but in such a case it was best to also have a fluent language speaker available:

Like if I, look, like took somebody like me, then, like say with my grandson, is that I would have a fluent language speaker, who would reinforce whatever I taught.

[Pamela, 40s, F, Noongar]

However, many speakers felt comfortable with the idea of teaching language to children when they only knew 'bits and pieces' or a few words. In part this reflected what the speakers saw as being the place of language in the community – as an emblematic marker of identity, but not as a language of communication. Latoya, a young Wajarri person, expressed this in terms of only needing to know the 'main things' to start using language with children:

[...] don't really need to know full language just like, you know a couple of things, main things you know like [...] just like little bits and pieces of little languages you know, yeah.

[Latoya, 20s, F, Wajarri]

David, a dance teacher and Noongar speaker, also talked about teaching the students in his class the 'bits' of language that he already knew, such as the names of animals, without needing to speak Noongar fluently:

I teach them all the language like the animals and things and they ask me for more, I teach them, I said well, I said I'll teach you a little bit, little bit by little bit.

[David, 40s, M, Noongar]

Such an approach to language teaching is advised by other language revivalists as a practical way of dealing with the enormity of the language learning process. Geoff Anderson, a Wiradjuri man, advises

a similar approach to teaching the Wiradjuri language at a Parkes school in New South Wales: rather than waiting to become more fluent, he suggests speakers should

[k]eep listening to your heart and at the same time keep learning your language – just a few words to start with – then work those words into a small phrase. You will make mistakes. Learn from them – but have a go and don't worry (Anderson, 2010, p. 70).

This philosophy of teaching language to children is again similar to the Formulaic Method (Amery, 2016), where in this case the gradual introduction of well-formed, grammatical phrases into English sentences benefits the non-fluent caregiver as well as being an approach to support the child to develop well-formed, fluent phrases. The method involves starting with functional one-word utterances (one-word questions, greetings, exclamations, swear words, and so on). However, the Formulaic Method, which was developed to be used in situations where there are no fluent speakers to facilitate other methods like Language Nests or the Master Apprentice Program, is a more structured approach to introducing words and phrases gradually, so as to produce something more like code-switching between phrases rather than code-mixing within phrases; whereas the language content referred to by the speakers in this study, in slowly introducing any single word vocabulary, would produce something more like code-switching within sentences.<sup>30</sup> Boynton (2015, p. 101) notes a similar approach to language transmission amongst Wangkatha language speakers regarding the slow, 'bit by bit' introduction of Wangkatha to children's language repertoire:<sup>31</sup>

[C]hildren inevitably start with English and then, they hope, gradually mix more and more Wangkatha words in until they're speaking Wangkatha [...] This approach also sees Wangkatha language as a collection of words and phrases to be adopted into the matrix language – while the meanings of those words and phrases will be passed on in correct cultural context, the syntactic context is apparently of little importance.

Boynton points out that this strategy could be observed to work quite well in historically multi-lingual contexts where neighbouring languages had similar syntax, into which vocabulary from one language could indeed be 'slotted' into the other matrix language. However, this strategy would seem to be less successful for creating fluent speakers of a heritage Indigenous language when the matrix language is English or Aboriginal English, as is the case for the majority of children in at least the Noongar, Wajarri,

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<sup>30</sup> Here we can note that the effect of code-mixing between English or Aboriginal English and another Indigenous language, could be considered different to that of code-mixing, say, English and Italian: teaching and learning certain Indigenous language words slowly, matched some speakers' descriptions of their recognisable and valued language variant – Aboriginal English – as compared to something like 'Italian English'.

<sup>31</sup> The Wangkatha speakers in Boynton's study represent quite a different subset to the Wangkatha speakers in this study, who tended to be more 'urban', younger, and less proficient in Wangkatha

and Wangkatha communities in this study – nevertheless it is a strategy that for some may have a strong ideological and historical rationale.

Finally, new speakers referred to a range of strategies that they used themselves with varying success for learning more language, from the use of apps to attending workshops to LOTE teacher training. Notably, apart from language teachers who learn more language in order to teach language at schools, it was new speakers of Miriwoong in particular who articulated learning more language at the language centre as a strategy to be able to transmit language to their children at home. Sylvia, for example, clearly connected the ideas of writing down what she learnt at the language centre in order to take that language out to her home and community:

I like to, write 'em down you know so I can talk to my kids, talk to anybody you know when I'm walking around or sit down in someone else home you know, and I talk to that person in Miriwoong.

[Sylvia, 50s, F, Miriwoong]

Similarly, Rozanne saw the language centre as a way for parents to learn more language to pass on to their children:

You start off from language here, all the resources here [...] and it's good for them [the parents] to learn here and then take it back home or whatever they gonna do if they, if they keep learning more than they get from their home they can teach their children then pass it on.

[Rozanne, 30s, F, Miriwoong]

These speakers highlighted the ways that community language centres can have a central role in language revitalization, not just in terms of running language classes for adult speakers and language learners, but to offer targeted language classes that provide caregivers with the language skills and transmission strategies to pass on language and normalise language use with their own children.

## 7.5 Summary

In this chapter we looked in detail at the question of reinstating intergenerational language transmission in terms of how new speakers perceived it could be done at the level of language transmission approaches and strategies. This question is particularly pertinent given the range of speaker beliefs about how children acquire language, and the challenge of transmitting language that isn't spoken in the community, as non-fluent speakers.

This range of new speaker beliefs about how children acquire language guides a range of approaches to language transmission strategies. Whilst some new speakers believe that children can ‘pick up’ at least some language if it is spoken around them using the more traditional approach of looking, listening, and learning, other speakers view their current language situation as requiring child-centred approaches that are more modern and adaptive, such as explaining what is being said in English, and providing activities that keep the child engaged, such as hands-on activities and language apps. Finally, some speakers felt that children need specific practice with speaking in order to learn to speak the language. This range of beliefs and approaches suggests that speakers see the status of the language differently in their community, particularly with respect to viewing the language as a second- or additional- language that needs to be taught rather than transmitted ‘naturally’. This has obvious implications for the aspirational model of reinstating ‘natural-like’ language transmission in the home, as I discuss further in chapter 9.

Finally, speakers referred to a range of interactional strategies to support children to respond in the heritage language and to use the language ‘correctly’, such as continuing to use the language with children in order to develop their passive knowledge; not speaking English around children to set the expectation of using the heritage language; repeating the phrase in language first before switching to English; integrating language into everyday activities; and specifically teaching children words and phrases to use in conversational turns. Caregivers are critical in providing these norms of language use, and as such the disruption of intergenerational language transmission in the family results in a disruption of language norms – in particular, the norm that the language is used as the primary code of conversation. Further, in whichever way families subsequently use language with their children becomes the new norm. Steven Chrisp (2005), in a report regarding the intergenerational transmission of Maori, refers to this process as the ‘normalising function of intergenerational transmission’: that as well as contributing to children’s linguistic abilities, language use in the home also helps them to see language (and by extension in this context, language learning) as part of everyday life. As concerns ‘correct’ language use in particular, new speakers – particularly when they are also language workers – may take up the role of being the gatekeepers of what is considered authentic language.

Chrisp also suggests the normalising function of intergenerational transmission may help families to counter some of the attitudes towards English/Westernisation. This is exactly what we see in speakers’ motives (as discussed in 5.2.1) of wanting to teach children language in the home such that they know who they are and where they come from, in order to support children’s pride and counter feelings of shame around Indigeneity. Further, according to Chrisp, the explicit *awareness* of these functions of intergenerational transmission is important for language revitalization and use, as not all families may have considered this potential benefit of language transmission. The awareness of an ongoing process

of normalisation itself could potentially motivate caregivers to continue using and teaching language regardless of their child's response in the short term.

That new speakers report using these strategies seems to be dependent on how they interpret children's lack of response in the language and their belief in their own ability to influence children's language acquisition. This poses an interesting question of why adult speakers interpret their children's language use differently, and apply different language transmission techniques – the topic of the next chapter.

# 8 Shaping and Reshaping Perspectives

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## 8.0 Introduction

Thus far in this thesis we have looked at new speakers' perspectives regarding the possibility of reinstating intergenerational transmission of endangered Indigenous languages in general (chapter 4); and have discussed why caregivers pass on language to children (chapter 5); who has the role and responsibility for transmitting language (chapter 6); and the language content and techniques that caregivers use to transmit language (chapter 7). However, in the quest for ideological clarification, what we wish to know is not only who, why, what, and how new speakers learn and transmit language to children, but how these perspectives that form new speakers' responses to the idea of reinstating intergenerational language transmission are developed, influenced, and established.

Such questions speak to a central idea of this thesis, namely that these perspectives that guide language transmission are not static, but rather dynamic; although some speakers consider that they were born with certain values, by and large speakers themselves talked about learning and developing their perspectives as they grew older. Answering these questions provides insight into why speakers approach intergenerational language transmission and language revitalization differently; and in practical terms, understanding how speakers' beliefs are shaped also presents an opportunity for people working on language revitalization efforts to provide the type of input and support that caregivers may be most receptive to. This is, essentially, a question of how people are socialised to become new speakers, where socialisation is,

broadly defined, the process through which a child or other novice acquires the knowledge, orientations, and practices that enable him or her to participate effectively and appropriately in the social life of a particular community (Garrett & Baquedano-López, 2002, p. 339).

To 'participate effectively' in the social process of language revitalization and intergenerational language transmission of these communities, new speakers are socialised, by many influences, into what it means to be a language speaker, and more specifically what it means to be a language *teacher* of an endangered language. As Daryl Baldwin (2003, p. 19) notes, "In order to prepare for the future, we are literally training young children not only to speak, but we are also teaching them how to teach the language." I note here that as well as the specific interactional techniques that new speakers use to attempt to normalise children's language use (as discussed in 7.3), the range of influences on adult new speakers discussed in this chapter are equally a part of children's language socialisation process.

Studies of caregivers' linguistic practices around the world point to a wide range of influences that we can look for on caregivers' perspectives about language transmission and how caregivers use language, from the influence of large-scale societal language ideologies (Fogle & King, 2013, p. 3), to the influence of the caregiver's own family members (King & Fogle, 2006), to caregivers' perception of the status of their language. I briefly discuss this range of influences here, providing a broader context to understanding the development of new speaker perspectives in the particular context of this study, namely Indigenous caregivers in rural and urban locations in Australia.

That idea that overarching societal ideologies and discourses might influence new speakers' perspectives about language transmission is as expected, in so much as language is part of a broader ecological system, which includes the 'complex and dynamic sets of historical, social, cultural and ideological circumstances that are specific to the contexts in which they exist' (Berardi-Wiltshire, 2017, p. 331) and new speakers are part of that ecological system. Curdt-Christiansen (2009), for example, evidences the influence of socio-political and economic factors, including the status of French in Québec and the status of English globally, on Chinese parents' decision to promote Chinese, French, and English trilingualism in their children in Québec, which they consider 'necessary for socio-economical advancement' (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009, p. 371). Educational policies and practices may also influence families' and caregivers' use of language with children in terms of whether families feel confident about the possibility of maintaining a foreign language, whereby schools may encourage students to lose their fluency in their heritage languages (Portes & Hao, 1998) (As noted in chapter 4, it was the experience of learning French at school that Brodie perceived as being the cause of her loss of Noongar, because languages were not taught at school in such a way that she felt able to retain both as second languages.) Such larger societal ideologies and practices characterise a 'top down' influence on individuals' development of their perspectives about language transmission.

However, caregivers and families are not merely receptacles, or 'scaled down' copies, of the societal values at large. Individuals are influenced by a range of other 'bottom up' factors, and filter societal ideologies in their own ways. González-Riaño and Huguet (2004, as cited in González-Riaño, Fernández-Costales, Lapresta-Rey, & Huguet, 2017) note the influence of individual's social groups, including family and friends, by creating a need for social cohesion and approval that individuals may develop their perspectives to be in alignment with. As an example of the influence of social groups and information, King and Fogle (2006) looked at the sources of information and influence for 24 families in the US who were raising their children to be bilingual in English and Spanish. What they found in relation to parents' approach to language transmission, was that parents were as reliant on the experiences of other family members who were raising children bilingually, and on their own personal experiences of language learning, regarding the possibility and processes of learning another

language, as they were on expert advice and parenting literature. In this example, the parents' attitudes towards English/Spanish bilingualism are already at odds with the much broader societal expectation and ideology in the United States to be monolingual. In particular, it was the caregivers' own positive experience with bilingualism and with learning another language that motivated them to try to raise their children to be bilingual; and caregivers attributed their language teaching methods to their own experience as well. Tuominen (1999) also looked at caregivers' decision-making factors in 18 multilingual families in the United States concerning the transmission of Russian, the parents' first language, to their children. She found that of even more significance than their education and socio-economic status, caregivers' language practices were influenced by the children themselves, to the point that 'one could say that the *children usually decided the home language in the families*' (Tuominen, 1999, p. 68 - italics in original). Tuominen suggests that children gain the power to decide the family language when the family immigrates, because the children have more access to English at school and to (in this case) 'American cultural habits and values' (Tuominen, 1999, p. 72), which the adults in the family felt they needed to succeed. This speaks back to the ways that new speakers in this study reported attempting to normalise their children's use of language. The influence of children is a point that I return to again in 8.8. Finally, individuals are also influenced in their language choices by their personal needs, filtered through the perceived benefits associated with particular actions; the information they have access to, through education, media, travel; and the individual's place of birth and age (González-Riaño et al., 2017).

The examples given above refer to families in which the caregivers are fluent language speakers of the language they are considering passing on to their children. Within the specific context of languages of revitalization, speakers' perception of language shift itself may be the impetus for the development of new speakers' perspectives. For example, Chew theorises (through her critical reading of Daryl Baldwin and Tiffany S. Lee's autobiographies in Hinton's (2013) 'Bringing Our Languages Home') that people's sense of wanting to do something about language transmission is prompted by becoming "increasingly aware of language shift and intersections with identity" (Chew, 2015, p. 162). Lee (2009), in her study of Navajo and Pueblo youth, also suggests that people develop agency as they become more aware of language shift, in contrast to denying the loss of language – almost as if 'the first step is admitting there is a problem', or that the language has to shift to the point where it affects the caregiver personally. Conversely when speakers aren't aware of language shift or don't regard it as a problem then the status of the language has no influence on their perspectives and behaviour.

New speakers of endangered languages across the communities in this study point to many similar influences on their language perspectives and transmission practices, most notably in terms of the general influence of sociocultural context, school, and social groups and family. Notably, there were

also many factors unique to the specific situation of being non-fluent speakers of an endangered Aboriginal language in Australia, including the particularities of the changes in sociocultural context, and the effect of language revitalization and documentation practices.

In particular, I am concerned with the development of new speakers' perspectives concerning their language and childrearing ideologies, which inform their motives (as discussed in chapter 5); with the development of their confidence as new speakers, as further insight into why some speakers assume personal responsibility for language transmission (as discussed in chapter 6); and with speakers' approaches to and techniques for transmitting language (chapter 7). I begin with a discussion of a speaker who felt that the importance of language was gifted to them at birth (section 8.1) before looking at broader influences on new speakers, including the influence of their childhood experiences of their family using language (section 8.2), their relationships and peers (8.3), and the influence of school-based language education (8.4). Zooming out even further, speakers pointed to the influence of time, relating to both age and socio-political change (8.5), including changes in community ideologies, broader (non-Indigenous) ideologies, and the use of language in the public space (8.6). Other influences that speakers identified on their perspectives include their access to language learning and revitalization workshops and historical documentation practices (8.7). Finally, speakers also pointed to the influence of their own observations of children (8.8).

## 8.1 Something Innate

Starting with a contradiction to the idea that language ideologies are 'not innate, but learnt' (González-Riaño et al., 2017, p. 756) is the perspective held by at least one speaker in this study that you can be born with the innate recognition of the value of language for your identity (as discussed in 5.1.1); and born with an innate ability or receptivity to acquire your heritage language (as discussed in 4.2.4). In this study, Godfrey, a Wajarri speaker, strongly identifies himself as being here to bring back Wajarri – his identity *is* to be a language revivalist, and he was born with this purpose:

I'm a great believer in we're all here for a reason. I strongly believe that I was put here on this planet for this sole reason, to bring back Wajarri, to keep it going.

[Godfrey, 40s, M, Wajarri]

Godfrey sees this identity as differentiating him from other people:

While other kids were out playing hide and go seek, chasey, whatever kids played whatever we played in those days, while they were out there doing that being kids I was I was being a little nosy parker, not that I realised at the time I was being a nosy parker

but I, I wouldn't leave my grandparents I wouldn't leave the Elders when they were talking.

[Godfrey, 40s, M, Wajarri]

He also sees himself as someone who is fascinated by language and words and by working out patterns and analysing things, and gives evidence of this from his early school days:

Even with the English language, I was six years old [...] I could still remember the look on [my teacher's] face I was a six year old and I was telling her this [...] I go 'Miss, Miss, I know what, I know why they call the W in the alphabet 'double u'' [...] and then I know I guess this shows my fascination with language and words, and I just said, she said why I said 'double u miss, double u, it's two Us isn't it'' [...] but this is how my mind works.

[Godfrey, 40s, M, Wajarri]

Nancy Dorian refers to such language people as having an "inordinately inquisitive and gregarious personality" (Dorian, 1981, p. 109), and cites them as one of the factors for why semi-speakers of minority languages persist in the face of a dominant community language; for example, in the context of understanding the persistence of Gaelic speakers in English-speaking Ireland, Dorian (1981, p. 109) describes a Gaelic-speaking woman, who would seem to share many traits with Godfrey, as:

[...] outgoing and curious as a child, she insisted on being part of all linguistic interactions in her environment, Gaelic or English. [...] she demanded that [her parents and grandmother] use Gaelic to her too, so that she could learn both languages. Her goal was access to any verbal communication.

Whilst Godfrey sees himself as having an innate disposition towards language and language revitalization, most other speakers in this study commented on their interest in language developing over time, sometimes as a result of childhood experiences but often not fully realized until their adulthood, recognizing that perspectives on language are dynamic, as I discuss in the following sections.

## 8.2 Childhood experiences of family language use

Speakers cited childhood experiences of their family's language practice as providing a strong basis for the development of their adult language ideologies and use. Here I discuss the influence that family is perceived to have had on speakers' strategies for teaching language to children, and speakers' confidence to learn and speak language. Concerning both the development of strategies and confidence to use language, Amanda, a Wajarri speaker, recalled her grandparents testing her on

language in car rides when she was a child. Her grandfather in particular was a well-respected Wajarri speaker and part of his process of teaching her language, at a time when English was the dominant language of the community, involved explicit language lessons:

Even when I was little [...] on a lot of the road trips like our grandfather, [he] used to teach us like we'll be sitting in the back seat of the car and we'd get bored easily being kids so, you know we'd do lessons like he'd be saying 'okay say this'.

[Amanda, 30s, F, Wajarri]

Amanda's childhood experience of language within the family and community seems to be the first point of influence on her specific beliefs and strategies regarding how to transmit language to her own children, giving her the confidence to learn language and to teach her kids – which she reports doing in a similar way to her grandfather through explicit instruction, such as through the use of flashcards. This was something of which many speakers were consciously aware, as they explicitly linked the ways that they use language with their children and grandchildren, to the ways they remember their own parents and grandparents using language with them.

Valma, a Ngadju speaker and teacher, talked about teaching her children language by pointing and labelling objects in Ngadju, without using English. Indeed, for Valma, being a good language teacher now means not using English, or at least limiting the use of English in the classroom. Significantly, she also identified these strategies as 'a learned behaviour', something she saw her Nana do with her own kids and that her mum did with her:

Interviewer: How did you learn to point out the dog to kids but just say the name of the dog and not, like say *juju* and not say the English name, where did you get, where did you learn how to do it in that way?

Valma: Oh it just, well it's a learned behaviour because Nana done that to her kids, mum done it to us and plus because me and my older brother, we grew up with nanas and pops so, that's all they spoke there was no English, it was just what they spoke.

[Valma, 50s, F, Ngadju]

Similarly, Pamela, a Noongar speaker and former teacher, talked about tending to use Noongar when she disciplined her children, which is a practice she attributes to her own mother. Pamela doesn't *only* value Noongar as a language of discipline, but it is part of her conception of the language:

Interviewer: Do you speak Noongar to your kids as well, or some of the words?

Pamela: Yeah all of the time [...] especially when I'm angry, that's when they know I'm serious, cause I can say 'I'm really serious with you' but if I'm, if I, if I just say something to them that you know, in an Aboriginal context, they know I'm for real [...] mum used to do it, hmm.

Interviewer: Oh yeah like 'now I'm really in trouble', yeah, like, a conscious decision to do that with your kids or something you just naturally...?

Pamela: Mum used to do it to us, so.

[Pamela, 40s, F, Noongar]

Growing up in a family network that speaks some language was also identified as positively influencing children's feelings of pride in their identity and interest in language. Amanda attributed her children's interest in language learning to their experience of being in a 'language' family:

Yeah I think the kids they're like 'Mum we wanna do language as well', so yeah cause I think they've seen like you know a lot of the stuff that [my brother does].

[Amanda, F, 30s, Wajarri]

Similarly, Nadine (Wajarri) pointed to the importance of hearing language at home for developing children's pride and confidence in language learning:

When I teach at a school, you see the ones that are just so proud, like the Indigenous kids they're very proud, because I have to say those little kids would've had a taste of that at home with parents, but then you see the other ones that are playing up and being shame, because they possibly won't have someone to teach that.

[Nadine, F, 40s, Wajarri]

By contrast, many speakers identified that not having exposure to language as children in the family – coupled with experiences of being told not to use language – had served to 'de-normalise' their own language use, such that they didn't have confidence to learn or speak language. Delys, for example, spoke about growing up on a mission run by German nuns:

I think that if it's not probably installed into you when you're a younger age, you're not, you won't have that confidence, cause I remember, cause the nuns told us not to use our,

and I got, I was too scared to use you know, that word *moorditj* [“strong, great”], I was too scared to use that.

[Delys, 40s, F, Noongar]

Similarly, other speakers who aren’t as strongly involved in language learning often referred back to what they saw their own family do, again suggesting a link between family norms and their own. For example, Terri-Lee, a young Wajarri woman, talked about seeing her parents wanting to know language but not being involved, or not knowing how to be involved, in language learning:

I mean like my mum and dad, they’re the same like me too like they, they just sit there and listen to people talk language and stuff or lingo or whatever and they’re like oh, wish we knew that you know, but um [...]

[Terri-Lee, 20s, F, Wajarri]

In sum, what we see here is that new speakers perceived that to some extent their families socialised them into particular language ideologies and norms, by the way their families instructed them in language (for example, testing them on vocabulary, or pointing and labeling), and the ways they used language for communication (for example, using the heritage language predominantly for discipline). These experiences of language use in the family help new speakers develop their perspectives regarding transmission strategies, and their overall confidence, or lack of confidence, to use language.

### 8.3 Relationships and Peers

As well as speakers’ childhood experiences of family language use, many speakers in this study spoke of the influence of their current peers on the development of their language perspectives, whether other Indigenous family members and friends, or non-Indigenous peers. The influence of these peers pertained to speakers’ attitudes towards wanting to learn or speak language, and whether using language was normalised for them, and this cut both ways.

For example, Chris, a Wajarri man, talked about not seeing the Wajarri language as being necessarily worth learning because it lacked communicative value (as discussed further in 5.1.3); observing his cousin learn and use more language didn’t ultimately influence him to engage in more language activities, but nevertheless triggered him to reflect on the importance of language in his own life, leading to the development and articulation of the perspective that language has value on the one hand, but on the other hand does not need to be learnt:

Suppose in the younger years when I would have remembered more should have been the time of learning it but never really looked at it as an important thing until you know

you get older and you realise [...] I never thought about it til I seen [my cousin] up doing [euologies in Wajarri] you know I think oh, it'd be good if I could do that but [...] yeah I don't know if it's, if it's worth even worrying about cause I don't know if it'll even be [...] of any use, got no-one to talk the language with.

[Chris, 30s, M, Wajarri]

In a similar vein, the observation that peers – i.e. 'other people' – spoke language reinforced the norm for some speakers that learning and speaking language was something 'other people' did, but not something they did, as Latoya reflects about young people who live in more remote communities:

I guarantee you go to the community, all the communities and all the young people even people my age they'll be speaking the lingo straight like, just like twenty, twenty minutes just speaking it, yeah like, yeah I know a couple of people like from the community that talks like that, and I just spin out.

[Latoya, 20s, F, Noongar]

On the other hand, some speakers' observations of people speaking languages-other-than-English fluently, whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous, had the opposite effect, as they developed a stronger attachment to language as part of their own identity, such that this attachment became a motivating factor to want to learn more language, as Brodie mentions here with respect to observing Chinese people speaking Chinese at the nail salon:

[...] and it really upsets me when um, you go get your nails done the Chinese people are really talking their language quite strong and like I wish I could do that, for sure most Noongars wish they could do that.

[Brodie, 20s, F, Noongar]

#### 8.4 School based language education

Speakers flagged school as another major influence on their ideologies, for better or worse. The majority of younger speakers in this study (that is, those who attended primary school in the 1990s and onwards) have had the experience of learning a language at school – either a foreign Language Other Than English (such as French, Japanese, Italian), or their Indigenous heritage language – for example, Noongar at the Djidi Djidi school in Bunbury, or Wangkatha lessons at Kalgoorlie primary schools. Language education in schools has been an oft-critiqued method of language revitalization, and as expected speakers in this study point to both the positive and negative influences of school-based language education. Speakers expressed that teaching and learning language in schools could

strongly influence children's sense of what language *is*, in a negative way – e.g. that language is a school subject, rather than a code of communication – but they also valued the qualification and expertise of language teachers, and valued the prestige placed on heritage languages by their inclusion as a curriculum subject.

Charmaine (Noongar language teacher) makes the observation that the way Noongar was being taught at schools served to 'denormalise' the use of language as a language of everyday communication:

We were so focused around school, very structured school setting, and the problem with that was the language didn't go outside the school, it stayed in the school compound, and children started to use the language at school, when they left the classroom they switched into Aboriginal English or just English.

[Charmaine, 40s, F, Noongar]

As Smith-Christmas (2017) affirms, teaching endangered languages in schools can create or enforce the ideology that the language is a school subject, rather than a code of everyday communication. Further, children may associate the heritage language with authority, through the authority that schools have as a domain, and 'rebel' against it rather than see it as having a communicative or indeed enjoyable function. Indeed school-based teaching of endangered languages can also be critiqued on the grounds that it has promoted a particular understanding of the nature of language – that is, that 'language is understood as a coherent structure, as a collection of rules or a set of competencies [...] as a collection of words organised by grammar' (Armstrong, 2012, p. 146); whereas it does not follow that those who are *able* to use language by virtue of learning the structure, will necessarily become language *speakers*. Austin (2014) makes a similar claim with respect to the Australian Indigenous languages Gamilaraay and Yuwaalaraay:

Schools were seen as essential loci for language revitalization, and the focus of teaching at this stage was vocabulary [...], reflecting the widespread view of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people that languages are collections of words (Austin, 2014, p. 115).

However, as Austin also points out, teaching Gamilaraay and Yuwaalaraay in schools elevates their status to that of Japanese or French. Many new speakers in this study also saw their school language learning experiences as having a positive influence on their language ideologies. For example, by comparing their situation to that of older generations who were forcibly banned from speaking their language, some younger speakers agreed that the teaching of language in school today was

nevertheless a positive in terms of making it acceptable to use language, removing the fear and stigma of language use, as Brodie points out:

I mean they don't really want to bring it up but it's sad because they were told not to speak their language, and that's I think one of the main reasons for the older people is what makes it hard [...] whereas I got to learn it in school.

[Brodie, 20s, F, Noongar]

Pamela (Noongar) also suggested that schools could be a very positive place, or a safe space, for children to develop confidence in their Aboriginal identity and language, even through very 'superficial' performances of culture:

[...] so we just did the normal, the damper you know, widgetty grubs, kangaroo stew, you know that type of thing so, very superficial, [...] yeah and nice to celebrate you know, in a safe environment.

[Pamela, F, 40s, Noongar]

In a sense these performances of culture, while superficial, are also a way of marking the environment, as Landry and Bourhis (1997) discuss with respect to signage in a linguistic landscape. They argue that such markings of the environment are not intended primarily to convey the *semantic* information on the sign, but to marking and delineating the geographical territory of the language community. This indicates to the community members that 'this language can be used here', which is what makes it a safe space. I discuss the use of signage and changing linguistic landscapes further in 8.6.

Further, while some speakers were cognisant of the challenges of teaching language at school in terms of reinforcing the ideology that language is a school subject, or that the norm is to speak language only on school grounds, it is also the case that many speakers do value teaching and learning the language as a second language in schools, seeing it as a good method of language revitalization:

Interviewer: What do you think would make it easier for people to learn language, or to speak language?

Brodie: Get it more out in the schools, because learning it at a young age made it definitely easier for me [...] start it in the schools, start them off young that's basically all I can think of.

[Brodie, 20s, F, Noongar]

In the first instance speakers recognise that the language must be taught in some way, and, as discussed in chapter 6 regarding the assignment of responsibility, language teachers were perceived to have the most opportunity to transmit language to children in terms of the amount of time they spend with children each day. Additionally, some speakers expressed an overall perspective that teaching Indigenous languages at school is normal and appropriate, not something to be questioned. Indeed, if French and Japanese can be taught in schools, then Wajarri and Noongar should be taught in schools as well.

As with childhood experiences of family language use, school-based language education also provided a strong basis for speakers' perspectives on how language should be transmitted. However, such experiences of learning language in school did not always result in speakers wanting to use the same strategies – sometimes the effect was that speakers decided they wanted to do things differently, as for example Ada reflected regarding the way she was taught Indonesian in school sitting at a desk, compared to the way she had learnt language when she was growing up:

It was so ingrained in me you learn language through doing, you know just from people [so] sitting down and learning languages or learning how to write the language just wasn't a part of my, the way the concept the way I could you know process it.

[Ada, 30s, F, Walmatjarri]

Indeed, many speakers were very clear that Aboriginal languages should not be taught or learnt in the same ways as they are taught at schools. In this sense, school-based language education provides almost a foil for speakers to develop their perspectives against.

## 8.5 As a function of age, stage of life, and social change

While family and school experiences represent the childhood influences on speakers' ideologies, the influence of peers points to the fact that new speaker perspectives are always subject to development and change. In fact, as some speakers expressed, their current perspectives did not develop until they were adults. From their own experience, they recognised that they had not always valued language as

part of their identity. Rather, it had become more important to them to explore language and culture as a part of their Indigenous identity as they got older, as a result of maturing and of entering new stages in their life. Some speakers also identified that younger adults of the current generation were becoming more interested in language, as a result of broader politico-social changes. I discuss the influence of age and social change on new speakers' perspectives about language in this section.

For example, Nadine, a Wajarri teacher, expressed that language had become more important to her as she 'grew up' and started to think about 'those important things', whereas she saw young people as being 'naïve':<sup>32</sup>

[...] and you know you sort of grow up, eventually, and you start thinking of the things that are very important to you as a person, so language and culture is very important to me as a person so, yeah you sort of have to grow up eventually cause when you're young and naïve you really don't think of those important things.

[Nadine, 40s, F, Wajarri]

As alluded to in chapter 5 with respect to new speakers' perspectives on childrearing responsibilities, such developments in speakers' ideological perspectives and the motives that stemmed from these were seen as being linked to their stage of life, with new speakers becoming more motivated to learn language in response to having children or grandchildren, as Charmaine comments:

I think when parents become grandparents they sort of think 'Oh gee it's a bit more important now'.

[Charmaine, 40s, F, Noongar]

Some speakers felt that 'kids these days' weren't interested in language not just because they were young (and therefore would 'grow out of it'), but because of the undue recent influence of shifting from an Indigenous to a Western society. For example, Denise, a Noongar linguist, suggested wanting to explore aspects of identity through language was particular to older adults, whereas younger generations had the distraction of the 'Western' world:

We have a lot of language classes and a lot of LOTE teachers now, but do the young fellas come back and use it, no, because it's all about the Western world today, and it's all about

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<sup>32</sup> This is not to say that developing positive language ideologies is seen as a sign of maturity by all community members, or that younger teenagers and adults who do not have positive language ideologies will or should 'grow out of it' as an immature stage in their development.

Americanised [...] I don't know if they are at a place in their life where they wanna find themselves and wanna find their language.

[Denise, 50s, F, Noongar]

Similarly, David, a Miriwoong leader, also saw younger generations as being distracted from language by modern (Western) media etc.:

[...] but when these kids grow up now they got telephone and, you know they yeah talking on the telephone with other kids, they speak in English, a lot of distraction and TV coming in at the same time.

[David, 50s, M, Miriwoong]

However, Jacqui, a Wangkatha speaker in Kalgoorlie, felt that teenagers in Kalgoorlie today were already using language as a marker of identity, suggesting a generational change.

Jacqui: They [teenagers] like it, cause it gives them a sense of identity, even non-Indigenous teenagers, they like it cause it gives them a sense of identity to Kalgoorlie, it's a uniqueness about them they don't have to be, you know like they say 'oh everyone wants this, everyone wants to be the same', but kids like their own identity as well.

Interviewer: That's what I was thinking cause everyone's like oh you know everyone wants to speak English, but, if everyone speaks English maybe some people want to –

Jacqui: You lose your uniqueness, and teenagers have this sense that they want to be unique, it's just a natural thing for them, so.

[Jacqui, 40s, F, Wankgatha]

Kickett-Tucker's (2009) interviews with 155 Indigenous children and youth in Perth (the capital city of Western Australia, situated in the Noongar nation) reiterated a similar note, showing that language – including use of Aboriginal English and 'Indigenous' voices/accents – was important to all children as part of their own racial identity, but in fact was more important to the older group (age 13-17). This seems to confirm the suggestions that a) language becomes more important to people over time, but also that b) some parts of language (use of Aboriginal English, 'Indigenous' voices/accent) are indeed important to younger people's identity.

Further, many speakers expressed the perspective that language, culture, and Indigenous identities generally were becoming a stronger source of pride in young people in both urban and rural areas, not a source of shame. That is, there has been a change to the socio-cultural context (Spolsky, 2003),

such that some members of the younger generations had more positive ideologies than those of the older generations and language had attained a greater symbolic and cultural value: As Charmaine put it,

[...] but now, kids are less shame to say that they're Noongar, cause it was a disgraceful thing back then to say you're a Noongar.

[Charmaine, 40s, F, Noongar]

Brodie, a young Noongar woman, also talked about how Indigenous identities were becoming “cooler” generally, referencing the success of Kuku Yalanji singer Jessica Mauboy and Gunditjmarra/Yorta Yorta singer Isaiah Firebrace on the popular talent show ‘The X Factor’, and other television shows such as ABC’s ‘Black Comedy’:

Everyone loves it now, it's definitely changed from when I was younger, [...] like when I play netball I'll speak it [...] and one girl next to me she's like 'oh wow that's interesting so what's that, Aboriginal?' I was like yeah that's Noongar language and she was like 'oh that's cool!' People are obviously fascinated, but what makes me want to speak it more is how recognizable Aboriginal people are, like Jessica Mauboy, the first Indigenous person to win X-factor.

[Brodie, 20s, F Noongar]

Pamela, a Noongar woman in her forties, also confirmed the positive valuing of Indigenous identities – she felt that the reason people weren't using language was only because they didn't have time, not because they felt shame:

I don't think in this day and age now that it's a shame thing to speak language, it's actually, you're actually special if you do, so I just think people are too busy or their priorities are, uh, different.

[Pamela, 40s, F, Noongar]

The changes that speakers perceived in the ‘acceptability’ of Aboriginal identities and language were situated in observations about overall social changes; for example, with increased engagement in higher education and career paths:

[Young people] got high expectations these days which is good, we were just like, couldn't wait to get out just any old job but these guys are looking for careers now. I think that's a big change, and I think our families and grandparents are starting to say “you need to

get careers, something you wanna do, don't waste your time doing anything, if you wanna go for it go for it" so slowly changing.

[Charmaine, 40s, F, Noongar]

We can situate these speaker observations about positive ideological changes and the increased acceptability of and respect afforded to expressions of Indigenous identity, including language, in a number of political and social changes that have happened since the early 1990s in Australia – around the time when the youngest speakers in this study were born – as summarised by Peter Austin (2014):

- “the passing in September 1991 of the *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act* by the Australian Federal parliament, that established a ‘formal process of reconciliation between Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians’ [...]
- the 1992 Mabo decision of the High Court of Australia recognizing Aboriginal prior occupation and ownership of unalienated Crown land [and]
- the Redfern Park speech on 10 December 1992 by Prime Minister Keating that included an admission of culpability on the part of non-Aboriginal settlers and boosted Reconciliation” (Austin, 2014, pp. 113–114).

Another significant development since the 1990s was the Rudd Government's Apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008 – although this, as with other political acts, was not seen as a ‘quick fix’ by speakers, as they expressed feeling that they *should* feel grateful for it and indeed they were grateful for it but that it was long overdue. Further, it is important to note that speakers also acknowledge that on many counts, Indigenous health and wellbeing was getting worse:

[...] and, and that's another thing, our life expectancy of Aboriginal people is 17 years difference between non-Indigenous people and so that's all those practices from back then were broken down and so of course all those things break down, all our health starts to deteriorate, stress comes in, anxiety, mental illness, big in Noongar Aboriginal communities, high risk of suicide, self-harm, alcoholism, drugs, substance abuse, verbal abuse, violence, all that cycle because they're not being careful they're not looking after themselves [...] and all that language teaches all those thing.

[Charmaine, 40s, Noongar]

To summarise, it seems that for the older generation of speakers (30-plus years old, with children), learning and using language has become more important to their identity as they got older – specifically, in the more ‘traditional’ sense of wanting to learn the orthography/phonology, grammar, and so on; whereas some younger speakers are already using aspects of language – more often ‘slang’

and vocabulary that they had naturally ‘picked up’ – to mark their Indigenous identity as teenagers and young adults in a community that is making slow shifts towards acceptance. Overall, new speakers pointed to positive changes with respect to being Indigenous in the politico-social landscape of Australia, with the considerable caveat that many things had not improved; but that this had seen a significant shift in language use and perspectives. A particular feature of this changing political and social landscape is a change in the linguistic landscape of Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, which I address now.

## 8.6 Changing linguistic landscapes

‘Linguistic landscapes’ (Landry & Bourhis, 1997) in the four communities of study are an interesting aspect of broader society-level changes, including language items such as street signs, shop names, language in the media and other public spaces, and the presence of language centres. These language items can act as a reflection of the changes in language attitudes, by “serv[ing] important informational and symbolic functions as a marker of the relative power and status of the linguistic communities inhabiting the territory” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 23). Further, linguistic landscapes may act as a mechanism of influence by which language ideologies become language policy and practice, as Shohamy (2006, p. 110) argues,

the presence (or absence) of specific language items, displayed in specific languages, in a specific manner, sends direct and indirect messages with regard to the centrality versus the marginality of certain languages in society.

This argument was supported by Jacqui, a Wangkatha speaker, who suggested that seeing and hearing language in more public spaces and media would help with the reconciliation process, presumably as a function of increasing the visibility of Aboriginal languages and cultures until it becomes ‘normal’ to use language in those ways:

Interviewer: What needs to happen next to get um, like, kids using language more outside of school?

Jacqui: Signage, town signage, I think radio talk as well [...] I also believe you know like television you know in New Zealand, like in New Zealand you watch TV there and they say *kia ora* before they, you know like, so I think it needs to be taught in every school, not just some, because it um, and I think that will break down the whole reconciliation process as well, it’ll just be a normal thing like it’s, it’ll become normal that people won’t

even question it, so it's just what we do, yeah so, and then that needs to happen a lot more.

[Jacqui, 40s, F, Wangkatha]

New speakers also saw language centres as a part of the linguistic landscape that had a role in shaping particular language perspectives. One of the most pertinent roles that the language centres inhabit, as identified by speakers in this study, is to be a visible face of the language and the language community in the broader community. This is seen as promoting the message that it's okay to speak language, and to be Aboriginal – in stark contrast to the messages promoted in the past.

[...] and so now we've gotta say it's okay, you can speak your language, and I think people still need that permission to say 'it's alright, your kids not going to be taken away if you speak language' you know, cause that was the fear, don't talk that language cause the mission man will come and take us kids away, you know, you gotta learn English, gotta act like white people, and that's that fear, so now that fear's still in some of the Elders but now um I think the Elders are starting to embrace it so now with the language centre it's sort of like a beacon to say it's alright, you can speak it, you know, we made a statement saying it's okay, say *kaya* as much as you can, you know, say *boorda* for 'later', yeah as much as you can there's no shame in that anymore, and to be proud of being Aboriginal.

[Charmaine, 40s, F, Noongar]

A secondary role that language centres may play in influencing community ideologies is the role of revitalizing and reviving language 'correctly', through processes of comparing and analysing historical documents, making assessments about speaker reliability, selecting which variations to include in publications, etc. This has certainly had an effect on speakers' beliefs regarding what is 'correct' language, and the importance of waiting to get it right before learning it, as Brodie puts it:

That's another thing that makes language hard as well [...] is that it just keeps changing and you keep finding out new things [...] for example I grew up knowing *bindi bindi* to be

butterfly, but apparently now it actually means moth [...] same with pronunciation, um, I grew up knowing 'one' was *kani* but now apparently it's *ken*, *kaini*, something like that.

[Brodie, 20s, F, Noongar]

This seems to have an influence on speakers' ideologies about the nature of language – the ideology that there is a correct, historically-accurate form to aspire to, for example – and we can see how this may also influence people to wait until they start transmitting language to their children.

## 8.7 Language revitalization and documentation practices

A significant feature of the language communities in this study, due to the selection of communities that have a language and cultural centre, is that many of the caregivers who use language with their children also take part in language documentation and revitalization efforts in a more formal capacity, as teachers, linguists, and language workers. This means that caregivers have more opportunities to attend workshops and to receive other formal education as part of their employment, and they identified these opportunities as an influence on shaping their beliefs and perspectives. For example, Amanda, a Wajarri teacher, credits workshops with influencing her to focus on the pronunciation of words rather than reading them by sight, something she now enforces with her own children:

One of the things, like I'd noticed and one of the other ladies pointed out as well, is that with the dictionary the Wajarri one, like you know we know the word but when you see it at first sight like, the understanding or being able to read the word, it was a lot more complex than just looking at it and going oh yep nup and then I know that word, but then to see it like the sight um, yeah, it just threw us off, but yeah trying to break it all down so like there's different parts and then another bit that was quite good and I always tell my kids I said, it's always where your tongue is in your mouth like, and, we didn't really think about it at the time.

[Amanda, 30s, F, Wajarri]

In particular, speakers reported that the strategies taught in community workshops have given them the opportunity to critique the effectiveness or appropriateness of school-based education training for the purposes of teaching an Indigenous/endangered language to children.

For example, Charmaine, a Noongar language teacher, attended the Master Apprentice Programme (MAP – as described in 3.4) training workshop in Kununurra in 2012, facilitated by Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival. As discussed in the last chapter regarding the strategies that new speakers use for passing language on, Charmaine credited the MAP training workshop as a major influence on the development of her beliefs about focusing on speaking, listening, and conversational

activities with children; where previously she had focused on reading and writing by using books and charts, now she feels them to be inadequate for the task of learning to speak the language, and had become critical of the way school-based language education for Noongar has focused on reading and writing, and on teaching vocabulary for specific topics, rather than conversational skills and vocabulary that can be used every day. She notes this response, almost of sadness and frustration, was also felt by the Native American language speakers who had similarly attended the MAP workshop and had realised what they had been 'missing out on':

I wish we would have had that [learning how to speak] in the beginning but then we didn't have those strategies back then [...] I think that when we got to Kununurra, the realis[ation] that, that we were having full on fluent conversations, it only started to hit um, to hit me when I got there that this is what we were missing out on, I thought we was quite okay but until someone makes you aware of what you don't know or what's not happening we weren't aware of it and we thought oh yeah we're going great guns, we're awesome, making all these resources, books and charts and things like that, singing songs in language and, and then we realised we're not really having a conversation, and the Native American speakers that were there, they were saying the same thing they were speaking for twenty years, teaching for twenty years in school settings, community classes, all this and they realised that they were relying on text, they weren't actually um prompting the Elders to speak to them in conversation they were just getting snippets of this here and there and then they realised that [they] weren't responding back, and that's when the elders weren't responding, and so the language started to decrease because [they] were reliant on English, yeah.

[Charmaine, 40s, F, Noongar]

Olawsky (2013) also reported a positive influence on the experience of Miriwoong new speakers who had taken part in the MAP itself, and who were also the group in this study who talked most specifically about learning Miriwoong at the language centre and 'taking it home' to teach their children – that is, specifically linking the two processes of learning and teaching. The further benefit of language revitalization workshops such as the MAP is their specific focus on supporting people to use the language for everyday communication, which speakers in this study did not feel was a focus of language teacher training in Western Australia. This is important because, as Charmaine illustrates, the difference between 'language for communication' and 'language in education' can be vastly different, but people are often not aware of that difference. This is not to say that there is a right or wrong way to transmit language to children. However, it seems that workshops such as the MAP

training workshop may support speakers to expand their goals for language transmission to include conversation and communication; whereas LOTE education may influence speakers to transmit language to children according to different principles – to transmit knowledge about language.

Finally, as a point of speculation only, in terms of the influence of language documentation practices, a particular feature of endangered language communities that new speakers of these languages have to contend with is that in the absence of fluent, native speakers, the bulk of language learning resources rely on what is available in past language documentation. This in turn is heavily determined by what the person documenting the language felt was important to elicit at the time, which typically has focused on adult language rather than language used with children (Hellwig & Jung, 2020). As Amery (2009a, p. 91) says in relation to Kurna, an Indigenous language spoken around Adelaide,

Recorded Kurna sentences, almost without exception, emerged from contexts of men addressing men (often the missionaries themselves). There are certainly no recorded utterances such as ‘Let me change your nappy’ or ‘Have you got wind?’

I hypothesise here that the wordlists that were generated in older documentation practices have had an influence on the way speakers refer to body parts, animals and so on as ‘the main things’ in language to teach children, as discussed in 7.1.1, because this is the language that is readily available to them.

## 8.8 Observation of and feedback from children

Finally, speakers identified that their observations of children, and the feedback they got from how children responded to language use and instruction, influenced their beliefs about and practices of language teaching. In this section I briefly explore how speakers’ own perspectives are influenced by children.

For example, Judy, a Noongar language teacher, developed her own teaching style through observing how her grandchildren engaged in language learning in a natural setting, which she contrasted with the more structured way she had learnt to teach:

I thought, ‘No, I have to change something here, I gotta do it the way I’d do it myself’, and then I thought about when I’m walking with my grandchildren, you know most kids

will ask ‘What’s that what’s this what’, and they do, so they’ll go *natj* [‘what?’] [...] so I thought no we have to do it this way because they learn better.

[Judy, 50s, F, Noongar]

Similarly, speakers’ beliefs about how old children are when they start to learn language, and the idea that children ‘pick up’ language, are largely attributed to direct observations of children – often paired with observations about other aspects of child development, such as the observation that children learn to talk when they start walking, or with reference to how tall the child is. However, it is worth considering that while speakers’ observations of children inform their beliefs, their beliefs are also the lens through which they observe children. For example, a speaker may observe that when they use language with a child, the child responds in English or Kriol, or walks away; but how the speaker *interprets* this observation is based on the speaker’s understanding about what is happening in this situation – for example, that their child is walking away because they are rebellious, or that their child doesn’t yet have the linguistic proficiency or capacity to understand.

## 8.9 Summary

New speakers’ perspectives regarding language and the possibility of reinstating intergenerational language transmission are dynamic, subject to change over time and in response to their own experiences. Thus, ideological clarification is also not static, but is a series of snapshots of how speakers feel about language revitalization across time. In this chapter I have looked at a range of influences that have shaped and re-shaped speakers’ perspectives regarding language and language transmission, including the belief that one’s relationship with language is innate; that it develops through speakers’ childhood experiences of the ways their family used language, and is further influenced by their current relationships and peers, and the influence of school and language education, changes in age, stage of life, and socio-political landscapes, as well as the influence of more formal processes that are targeted towards language maintenance and revitalization, namely language revitalization workshops and language documentation practices.

Some of these influences, such as childhood experiences, are relevant to all new speakers, language learners, and general community members; some, such as the influence of school and workshops, are pertinent to a subsection of the language community that have access to these resources.

Language shift and loss can be described in terms of a disruption of ideologies and norms of language use, such that language is no longer valued or appropriate to use in certain domains and certain ways. If new speakers and caregivers are to reinstate intergenerational language transmission, then, they would seem to need to (re-)establish language ideologies and norms of language use, such that

caregivers value the language and have the confidence to use it with their children, who then also come to see it as normal. The very same factors that influence speakers' perspectives and that are the source of information and beliefs regarding language learning and teaching, are also relevant to the shaping and re-shaping of children's language perspectives and norms.

What might these influences mean for intergenerational language transmission specifically? If indeed some younger speakers are valuing and using language more as a marker of their identity, either as a function of 'growing up' or in response to a change in broader societal attitudes towards Aboriginal identities, what is the significance of this for reinstating intergenerational language transmission? Does it necessarily entail that, as predicted by some speakers, each future generation will become more and more fluent in language, as a function of positive social changes? If nothing else, it does at least suggest some mechanism by which this might occur.

The observation by the speakers in this study that people *acquire* motives with age, would seem to be in contrast with the more usual models of language shift – for example Karan's suggestion that inter- or cross-generationally, speakers' motives for language use tends to simplify, and the younger generation has (only) a subset of the motives that the older generation has (Karan, 2000). If new speakers' motives for using language with children increase within the same generation, this would suggest, perhaps, a reversal of language shift. Of course, this study can only point to the perspectives of speakers at this moment in time, meaning that the potential for increasing motives may be a cohort effect rather than a generational affect.

By understanding the ways that new speakers perceive that their own language perspectives have been shaped, language revitalization efforts – for example, as led by Indigenous, community-led language and cultural centres – can meet speakers 'where they are at'. It is important to recognise that speakers' may come to language revitalization with a range of influences on their perspectives. For example, while some speakers have strong, positive experiences of learning language as a child, others may not have ever considered language to be important, or still feel shame and lack of confidence around learning and using language. Indeed, it is important to recognise the pressure some people may feel to be seen to value language, when in fact language is not a priority in their lives. Even amongst those speakers who already value language for identity, their range of childhood, school, and other learning experiences will radically shape their approach to language learning and teaching.

Further, new speakers across Western Australian communities of Indigenous languages have a wealth of knowledge about how to shape the next generation's language perspectives and norms concerning their endangered heritage languages. They highlight the need for children to develop feelings of pride and confidence in language, and to perceive language as normal and useful – or at least useable –

outside of the classroom. Some of this relationship with language may indeed develop as an innate part of the children's identity, and people working on language revitalization efforts should recognise this belief. To shape these ideologies and norms, speakers suggest the importance of being exposed to language in the family as a first step, which also suggests that caregivers may benefit from an increased understanding and awareness of the potential benefit of supporting the development of children's passive language knowledge. Schools and classrooms should also be set up to be visually supportive of Indigenous identities. Broader social changes can be encouraged that normalise and valorise Indigenous identities and language use.

# 9 Discussion

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## 9.0 Introduction

In this chapter I return to the overall intention of the thesis, namely, to interrogate the reinstatement of intergenerational language transmission as a method of language revitalization from the perspectives of new speakers of endangered Indigenous languages across Western Australia. As a process of ideological clarification (Fishman, 1991), I suggested a number of sub-questions to look at this range of perspectives:

1. Is the reinstatement of intergenerational language transmission a desired method of language revitalization for these communities?
2. If intergenerational language transmission is desired – or indeed currently in operation – how do new speakers view the processes involved? In particular,
  - a. Why reinstate intergenerational language transmission?
  - b. Who is responsible for intergenerational language transmission?
  - c. What language content should be, or is, transmitted to children?
  - d. How should languages be transmitted intergenerationally?
3. Given this potential variety and range of perspectives, how do new speakers perceive that their perspectives regarding language transmission have developed and change?

I summarise the findings to these subquestions as presented in this thesis in section 9.1. Further, throughout this thesis I have held up an aspirational ideal of intergenerational language transmission as a point of comparison. This model is drawn from theories of language shift, in particular the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (Fishman, 1991) and the UNESCO (2003) language vitality assessment, and involves:

- a) the re-instatement of ‘naturalistic’ or ‘native-like’ strategies of transmission in the home, from older to younger contiguous generations, with
- b) the intention of creating a new generation of ‘native’, i.e. first- or fluent- language speakers.

In section 9.2 I re-evaluate this aspirational model of language transmission in light of new speakers’ perspectives about these features, examining our understanding of ‘native-like’ language transmission and focusing in particular on the issues raised with the valorisation of the native speaker as a goal for language revitalization; and I discuss the problem of extracting measures of success from theoretical scales of language shift and attrition. In line with Meek (2012), I argue that such a rhetoric of success defined in these terms not only obscures the desires and actual successes of new speakers of

endangered Aboriginal languages, but may act to undermine them as well. Whilst these communities and the efforts of individual new speakers do indeed result in ‘emergent vitalities’ (Perley, 2012) and an alternative model of language transmission that ought to be celebrated as success, nevertheless new speakers could enjoy greater degrees of success through having access to different kinds of information with which they are able to make more informed choices, as I discuss in section 9.3.

## 9.1 A range of perspectives

### 9.1.1 Desirability and possibility

Regarding the desirability of reinstating intergenerational language transmission as a method of language revitalization, most speakers in this study desired the reinstatement of *some kind of* language transmission. However, the aspirational model we have posited of intergenerational language transmission, in the sense of contiguous older- to younger-generation transmission, was seen as just one option for language revitalization. Other options for transmitting language included sharing language within and between generations – from grandchildren to parents and grandparents, and rippling from all learners outwards, such as between peers and at school.

To that end, no speaker in this study talked about approaching the question of language transmission with the ‘aspirational’ mindset of people such as Myaamia linguist and language revivalist Daryl Baldwin, Wampanoag linguist jessie little doe baird; or indeed, closer to home, as Kurna linguist Jack Buckskin, who talks about learning Kurna from the archives and passing it on to his children with the goal of them becoming the first new generation to speak Kurna as a first language. Speakers in this study did not express such an aspirational goal, not because they were against it – although some new speakers were ambivalent about it – but because they considered that it would not be feasible for they themselves to raise a new generation of first language speakers. The reasons this was not considered feasible were given firstly in terms of how fluent new speakers felt they could become, with some speakers feeling restricted by a range of external and personal barriers, such as limited resources, time, uncertainty about the correctness of the language, feelings of shame, and lack of confidence. Secondly, where speakers felt that language transmission required particular teaching methods, they felt limited in raising children to be fluent language speakers by their own teaching ability – as for example David, a Miriwoong leader, suggested the limitations that caregivers face in teaching rather than transmitting Miriwoong, in that “they have to know English, how to really translate [Miriwoong] to their kids [...] and translation of that in English is where the problem lies with our people, they can’t explain it in a way to your satisfaction”. Thirdly, some speakers did not see the possibility of raising children to be fluent in an endangered language because they perceived that English had too strong a hold in the community, with no room for other languages to be spoken to a

similar degree – Aboriginal languages could not achieve the same status as English. Finally, where speakers perceived that children would have to learn the language as an additional language, rather than acquire it as a first, some speakers felt that children were limited by their language learning capacity, including their willingness to learn, and specific language learning abilities.

Having noted these challenges, many speakers saw the possibility of *future* generations of children being raised to speak their native language as a first language. They expressed the idea that each subsequent generation would build on the language knowledge and proficiency acquired by the previous generation.

### 9.1.2 Processes of intergenerational language transmission

While new speakers generally did not see the possibility of learning and transmitting language to their children to the point of their own children becoming the first new generation of fluent speakers, nevertheless speakers did see some kind of intergenerational language transmission as desirable and feasible. That is to say, the aspirational goal may be ‘out’, but there remains a broad spectrum of goals and possibilities for reinstating intergenerational language transmission.

What would an alternative model of intergenerational language transmission look like (if desired), or indeed what *does* intergenerational language transmission look like, to new speakers of endangered Indigenous languages in Western Australia? This model can be described in terms of a) why speakers might want to reinstate language transmission, b) who is responsible for transmitting language to children, c) what language content should be transmitted, and d) how it should be done.

Speakers’ purposes for reinstating intergenerational language transmission were intimately tied to their ideologies regarding language and regarding the responsibilities of childrearing. Ideologies of language that motivate language transmission were that language is important to keep strong for its own sake, because of its connection to culture, Country, and identity, connecting speakers to the past and where they come from; and that language plays an important role in promoting health and wellbeing. To that end, as expected, many speakers perceived that language should be revitalized in order to maintain these positive values. These values also inform and overlap with caregivers’ ideologies about the responsibilities of childrearing, namely, that children should be raised to be healthy and have good wellbeing, which includes the development of identity and self-esteem, knowledge of Country, and respect for Elders. Further, speakers felt that children should be given opportunities that the previous generation did not have. New speakers perceived that these responsibilities *can* be fulfilled (at least in part) by the transmission of language to children, but also pointed to other ways that these responsibilities can be met – often in ways that may take priority

over language transmission, such as ensuring children are healthy by keeping their health checks up to date, and not seeing the value of language for health and wellbeing.

In terms then of who should teach language to children (or, at least, to make sure that children learn language), new speakers pointed to a range of individuals and organisations – from the responsibility of the learner themselves, to the speaker, the family, Elders, schools, and the government. Speakers felt strongly that it was more the responsibility of the family rather than the individual to transmit language, if possible; and no speaker assigned responsibility only to schools. This assignment of responsibility was predicated both on who *should* transmit language to children in an ideal world (that is, who had linguistic responsibility), and who *could* transmit language to children based on linguistic knowledge and perceived teaching ability. We saw that responsibility and ability did not always line up, as with new speakers who felt that they ‘should’ have taught their children language, but did not feel they were able to.

The language content that new speakers talked about passing on to children included ‘the main things’, i.e. single words to do with animals, body parts, etc., and short phrases; as well as songs; and new speakers with teacher training also talked about passing on some grammatical content, as well as words and phrases that would enable to children to have a conversation. New speakers expressed a very broad range of perspectives when it came to how this language content should be taught to children. These strategies reflected speakers’ beliefs about child language acquisition, including that children can pick up language by looking, listening, and learning; children need active engagement and child-centred input; and children specifically need to practice speaking to acquire language. These strategies respectively were characterised as being more ‘traditional’ to more ‘modern’. New speakers in this study also pointed to specific strategies for normalising the idea that their children respond in the heritage language, including minimising the use of English to set the expectation that they will respond in the language, repeating what has been said in language rather than switching immediately to English when children appear not to understand, and integrating key language words and phrases into everyday activities. Speakers also talked about the importance of supporting children to speak language ‘correctly’ and authentically – with reference to remaining Elder speakers and reclaimed archival materials – particularly with respect to what they perceived to be correct pronunciation, but noted that it was important in these efforts not to be discouraging.

### 9.1.3 Shaping and re-shaping perspectives

Finally, in response to the question of how this variety of speaker perspectives developed and changed, speakers pointed to a wide range of factors that influenced their confidence to use language and their perspectives about language transmission, in particular about what it means to be a teacher

of an endangered language. This included the factors that every speaker was exposed to, i.e. their childhood experiences of language use (or lack of language use) in the family, their observations of their peers, and their experience of growing up and observing (whether consciously or subconsciously) social and political changes that have a bearing on Aboriginal languages in Australia. It also included the factors that the majority of speakers were exposed to, such as the experience of learning a language other than English at school; and the factors that only a few new speakers in each community had accessed, such as language revitalization workshops.

This range of influences and the fact that new speakers' perspectives do develop and change over their lifetime is significant for a couple of reasons. Firstly, recognising this change is important because while wanting to be critical of the ideology that all Indigenous people are enthusiastic about language revitalization, nevertheless people's involvement with and attitudes towards language revitalization may change and indeed become more 'positive' over their lifetime, and we would like to understand the processes by which this occurs. It is also important because, as stated in the Introduction chapter, while new speakers' perspectives are not 'right' or 'wrong', they may nevertheless be 'better informed' or 'less informed' – or, more conducive or less conducive to the tasks of language transmission – so there is certainly room for people to develop perspectives that are more enabling to their language transmission goals. I discuss this issue of enabling speakers to make informed choices in 9.3.

#### 9.1.4 New speaker characteristics

Thus, we have a range of features that characterise new speakers within endangered language communities in Western Australia. These clusters of characteristics are apparent across all communities in this study.

Some new speakers in these communities are interested in language, language revitalization, and language transmission specifically as a method of language revitalization. Often due to a combination of childhood experience and adult qualifications, they have a reasonable degree of confidence in both their linguistic proficiency – or at least in their ability to learn more of their heritage language – and in their ability to use that language with their children. They can articulate one or more strategies when using language with children to encourage and support the child's language acquisition.

Some new speakers are interested in language and language revitalization, but without having the relevant childhood or school experience or adult education opportunities (such as workshops), they are unsure how to proceed. It seems their current barrier to being involved in passing language on to children is the momentum required to learn more of the language, or to find out how to learn. I would hypothesise that these new speakers would benefit the most from having very structured

opportunities to learn language, as for example one speaker who mentioned valuing a daily language session organised by and embedded into the routine at the language and culture centre where they worked.

Finally, there are those new speakers who are not interested in language as young adults, or at least not interested in making targeted efforts to learn and pass on language. They may (or may not) become more interested at different stages of their life, perhaps as a reflection on other aspects of their linguistic and cultural identity.

In terms of those speakers who are interested in learning and passing on their heritage language to children, there are those who are happy to pass on the 'bits and pieces' that they know already, compared to those who would prefer to start teaching language when they are more proficient. There are also those new speakers who practice language transmission through more incidental learning (such as pointing and labelling), and those who transmit language through targeted teaching (such as through translating and explaining language, or the use of apps and pedagogical books). These approaches do not in themselves characterise language transmission as either first- or second-language transmission, but those new speakers who perceived language transmission as being a process of second language teaching were less likely to feel confident that they would be able to transmit the language to their children.

What this range of characteristics shows above all is that the choices that new speakers make about language transmission are not entirely dependent on or predictable with their linguistic proficiency – new speakers who know the same amount of language, if that can be quantified, use and transmit language to children in very different ways based on their perspectives. For example, Amanda (a Wajarri speaker in Geraldton) and Delys (a Noongar speaker in the south-west), both language teachers, both at the level of being able to confidently speak a few words and phrases but not conversationally fluent, nevertheless approach the question of how much language they need to know in order to transmit language to children in very different ways. Whereas Delys reported not using the Noongar she had learnt with her own children before the end of her LOTE teacher training, Amanda spoke of being open to learning alongside the students in her class – she was much more confident to start using the language that she did know, early on. We can likely attribute this difference to differences in childhood experience – whereas Delys was raised by nuns who discouraged her from using Noongar, Amanda's grandparents tested her on Wajarri vocabulary during car rides. These differences in perspective would seem to make all the difference in how new speakers use language with children, and are also attributable in part to the difference in the speakers' age and experiences of their communities – as discussed in chapter 3, the Wajarri community had a semi-nomadic lifestyle

until much more recently than the Noongar community, with fewer forced removals to schools and missions.

Secondly, this range of new speaker characteristics shows that whilst new speakers are neither fluent or native language speakers, they are effectively transforming the possibilities of language transmission in new and liberating ways, offering “an inherently more hopeful reading [...] an upward movement away from language shift and loss rather than an inevitable downward slope” (Jaffe, 2015, p. 23). New speakers do not necessarily feel they have to be fluent in their heritage language to transmit what they know to their children, and they are open to a range of techniques and technologies to do so. New speakers also embrace a range of community-level approaches to language transmission, such as language camps and playgroups, and see opportunities for language to be revitalized through the sharing and ‘rippling’ of language intergenerationally (as discussed in 4.3). So long as new speakers perceive language to have ideological value, they are not prevented by their own limitations from engaging in language transmission, but rather create opportunities for language transmission success in a range of forms.

## 9.2 An alternative model of language revitalization

In sum, although many new speakers desire the reinstatement of some kind of intergenerational language transmission, and would like to see a new generation of children learning the language as a first language, there is much variation in new speakers’ perspectives about how and indeed whether this should be done, often in ways that diverge from the aspirational model presented at the beginning of this thesis. This aspirational model was based on essentially a language revitalization narrative of restoring something that was lost – not just the language as a form of communication, something to be heard on the streets in casual conversation, but restoring the very processes by which that language is maintained and transmitted through generations, and the restoration of a generation of first-language speakers. The features of this narrative are theorised in and, moreover, have emerged as prominent features from scales of language shift or attrition – in this case, the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale, and the UNESCO language vitality assessment. In this section I discuss these specific features of the aspirational model in light of new speakers’ perspectives, highlighting where speakers align with a ‘restoration’ narrative of language revitalization and where they diverge, and then comment on why it isn’t appropriate in this context to posit an aspirational model of language *revitalization* that is based on and limited to measures of success derived from scales of language *shift* and revitalization of non-Indigenous languages. Finally, I comment on what this means for ideas about success.

### 9.2.1 Reinstating ‘naturalistic’ language transmission

As concerns the goal of reinstating ‘naturalistic’ or ‘native-like’ language transmission – conducted in the home, from older- to younger- contiguous generations – while many valued the idea of caregivers in the home being the primary teachers of language, speakers pointed to the role and responsibilities of outside teachers, for a range of practical and ideological reasons. Further, while some speakers advocated for children acquiring language through the most ‘native-like’ means possible (such as ‘looking, listening, and learning’), other speakers presented a variety of adaptive and creative teaching and transmission strategies. For example, some speakers did indeed explicitly reference and value what they saw as older, more traditional ways of transmitting language, such as Judy, a Noongar language teacher, who reflected on changing her practice to include how ‘the old people’ would have taught language through pointing and labelling things ‘in the bush’ – albeit mixed with more modern ‘pedagogical’ methods of language teaching. Similarly, an older Miriwoong speaker like David felt that the new ‘English’ ways of teaching were inappropriate. On the other hand, some new speakers, such as Amanda, a Wajarri speaker in her thirties, talked about teaching and transmitting language through flashcards and apps, and felt no tension regarding the development and use of these more modern strategies. The difference here is of course likely due to difference in age, personal values, inclinations, and the relative linguistic environment in which each speaker grew up, but the point remains that not all new speakers hold up an ideal of ‘native-like’ teaching strategies in the pursuit of intergenerational language transmission. Leonard (2011, p. 137), a *myaamia* language activist, critiques the measure of intergenerational language transmission, for exactly these reasons:

[...] the legitimacy, goals, and practices associated with indigenous language efforts are unquestioningly framed in terms of norms for major world languages. An especially prevalent notion—one that is highly problematic for languages that have had a period of total dormancy—is that “genuine” language transmission is only that which occurs in the home unconsciously and completely, as with the common (though not universal) experience of children acquiring English in the United States.

By and large, new speakers don’t conceive of reinstating intergenerational language transmission as a shift back to older, ‘naturalistic’ ways of transmitting language, but rather they allow for language transmission to involve different processes and to move forward in different ways, according to their assessment of the status of the language in their environment and what children require to learn it.

### 9.2.2 Creating new speakers

If the goal of reinstating ‘native-like’ intergenerational language transmission does not align with new speakers’ perspectives, desires, and behaviours, what of the outcome of this aspirational model,

namely the creation of a new generation of native language speakers? To what extent are new speakers' visions for children's heritage language acquisition also adaptive and creative, and where do they refer back to the idea of restoring the first or native language speaker? Again, the goal of creating a new generation of first language speaking children can be seen as part of the narrative that language revitalization is about restoring something that is lost: before language shift, people were first language speakers of the language; language revitalization ought then to restore a generation of first language speakers. The UNESCO (2003) language vitality assessment includes that children speak the language as their 'first language' and 'mother tongue' as part of its definition of vitality, although as discussed in the Introduction chapter, does not intend to set up any single factor as sufficient for assessing a language's vitality – but in one sense, of course, why *not* aim to raise children to speak the language easily and efficiently as a mother tongue, not effortfully and perhaps incompletely as an additional language?

The 'issue' in this restoration narrative of language revitalization is not with the child's linguistic proficiency per se, but rather with the valorisation of native speaker status as the goal of language revitalization. 'Native speakers', according to O'Rourke and Pujolar (2013), are often ideologically compared to new speakers on the grounds of their perceived legitimacy, authority, and authenticity as those who have an unbroken connection to some social and territorial roots. Such a definition of the concept of native speaker has been problematised in the field of linguistics generally, where it is recognised that the spread of English globally has resulted in English no longer having a well-defined community (Ushioda, 2011); but the issue with the concept of course is not just its definition but its application.

Firstly, in the European context, the 'native speaker' rhetoric plays a role in the conflation of language and (national) identity, such that language revitalization movements seek to re-legitimise a minority community by re-establishing its native speaker population. In doing so "unwittingly [reproduce] many of the ideals which had led to their [language communities'] minoritization and demise in the first place" (O'Rourke & Pujolar, 2013, p. 49) – i.e. a kind of 19<sup>th</sup> century ethnonationalism by which communities of speakers are equated with national identities and boundaries. In this respect we can draw immediate parallels between minority/regional European languages and Aboriginal languages in Australia: all these languages have become minoritised within the context of a dominant national language, e.g. Welsh in the context of English; Catalan in the context of Spanish; and Indigenous language speakers in Australia who have likewise been 'shifted' in the context of English-speaking 'nation-state nationalism'. The issue, as seen in this thesis and well-reported elsewhere (for example Rumsey, 2018; Singer & Harris, 2016), is that not all members of an Indigenous community assert their membership to that community or language by virtue of their proficiency in that language. When

community identity is defined in terms of language proficiency, which appeals to the native speaker as its measure, then it has the potential to exclude many members who either feel shame that they don't speak the language, or those who – as is the case in Australia – may 'own' the language by affiliation with social group rather than 'know' the language by condition of their linguistic proficiency per se (Evans, 2001). Appealing to the native speaker also doesn't recognise those members who identify with the community regardless of their proficiency or even interest in the language.

A second issue with the native speaker rhetoric is the way that the native speaker can become the arbiter of authenticity for the language, in a way that "exoticize[s] and romanticise[s] local people, locking them in time and space" (Bernadette O'Rourke & Pujolar, 2013, p. 52). If the theoretical, aspirational goal of language revitalization is the creation/restoration of a new generation of native language speakers, do new speakers become locked into ways of using language that are unattainable (because there is not enough documentation or native speakers to acquire an 'authentic' language from), and unrealistic (because all languages change anyway)? And is this, in new speakers' perspectives, a problem? As a matter of fact, this is an area where new speakers do seem generally to try to 'undo' or reverse language obsolescence, as suggested by King (2001), by attempting to return the language code itself to the way speakers – that is, native speakers – are perceived to have used the language before contact. Many of the new speakers in this study take on the task of perpetuating the native speaker, through their concern with the authenticity and standardization of children's language use, where language innovation and change – i.e. slang, and idiosyncratic language use – are seen as a sign of a lack of authenticity. Some new speakers also reported feeling limited in their own language learning and use by this focus on authenticity, for example where they felt that the goalposts for 'correct' language use were changing all the time as new evidence emerged from historical documentation.

However, despite issues that arise from rubbing up against the need for 'native speaker authenticity', what we also see in the communities in this study is a desire by new speakers to acknowledge the new ways that language is being used by children, even where they are limited in proficiency and diverge, as they must, from the ideal of the native speaker. It is not that new speakers *don't* aspire to see a new generation of children speaking their traditional language fluently. Rather, beyond this feeling of loss and the disappointment of not being able to attain native speaker status, new speakers also displayed enthusiasm at small language gains, as described by Judy, who talked about the children in her classroom experimenting with language and putting Noongar words together out on the playground to call their teacher *koomba mooly* ("big nose"). Instead of framing her observation in the negative, where the students are 'only' able to speak short phrases and thus fall short of native-

speaker status, Judy talked about this event with obvious delight in the creativity of her students attempt to own and use Noongar for themselves.

Further, while some young speakers felt that language was becoming increasingly irrelevant for their (Indigenous) identity, other speakers expressed feeling more empowered to use language words to express their identity, such as Brodie, who talked about using Noongar words when she plays netball. Again, this is only a few words of language thrown in to "re-lexify" English<sup>33</sup> – but for Brodie, even though it doesn't represent a shift or true reversal to native speaker proficiency, it nevertheless represents a genuine shift towards language vitality.

### 9.2.3 Scales of language shift are not scales for language revitalization

If we take as our measures of success the restoration of those critical elements derived from the standard language vitality scales – particularly if we set up our narrative of success as one of reversing back through the language vitality scales from 'death' to 'life', including the reinstatement of native-like intergenerational language transmission and the creation of a new generation of first language speakers – then arguably, as we have seen, we set new speakers up for failure, miss the successes that new speakers do have, and 'run the risk of dismissing the value of the journey' (Romaine, 2006, p. 465). With a focus on 'language maintenance' as our agenda rather than the desires of new speakers themselves, we also miss the fact that efforts to revitalize languages often don't follow the scales in reverse; and we potentially demoralise new speakers, as I discuss below.

The variations and divergence that new speakers presented on the aspirational model for language revitalization reflects the fact that firstly, language revitalization follows a different path to language loss and attrition – the path of language revitalization is not simply the reversal of the UNESCO language vitality assessment. Kendall King (2001, p. 196), regarding Quechua language revitalization in Saraguro, observes that "in some respects, the shifts accompanying revitalization differ fundamentally from those of language obsolescence", in part due to the planned nature of language revitalization compared to the less planned nature of language obsolescence, such that language revitalization efforts are not simply a matter of "undoing' the process of language loss'; or, as Romaine (2006, p. 444) says, "it is obvious that we cannot go back in time". For example, as Hinton (2011) notes with respect to Hawaiian and Māori, language revitalization at school – stages 4 and 5 on the GIDS –

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<sup>33</sup> Stebbins et al. (2013) use the term 're-lexification' to differentiate between the deliberate process of language learners inserting target language words into an English framework, from the process of 'code-switching' by which they mean the spontaneous switching between languages by full bilinguals. The difference in intentionality is certainly very interesting but I do not use the idea of 're-lexification' further in this thesis as it is not a distinction made by speakers in this study so it does not illuminate their perspectives further.

often precedes language revitalization at home – stage 6; and of course this is what we have seen regarding the indigenous languages in this study as well (discussed in 4.4.3), that children are learning language at school and bringing it home to their families, inspiring language revitalization in that order.

Further, the aspirational model of reinstating intergenerational language transmission as abstracted from the GIDS does not neatly apply because the GIDS is based on the revitalization of languages such as Yiddish, Gaelic and Catalan, and not on what happens in language revitalization in ‘minority indigenous non-literate societies’ (Hinton, 2011, p. 294). While the GIDS may be intended to be used as part of a ‘theoretically grounded thrust’ (Fishman, 2001, p. xiii) to revitalize languages in a way that does not ‘amount to little more than biding time’ (Fishman, 1991, p. 399), it is indeed theoretical and somewhat prescriptive rather than a description of what actually happens in the context of specific languages of revitalization. For example, Romaine (2006) critically examines the ‘ideological underpinnings and utility’ of the ‘Fishmanian’ model of reversing language shift, arguing that its focus on reinstating intergenerational language transmission privileges the creation a ‘stable diglossia’ where the language is reintroduced into the home first and the family must become native-speakers of the language – not a situation that commonly occurs in language revival contexts, as we shall see. Romaine asks instead what language revitalization can look like without intergenerational transmission and the creation of native-speakers, along with O’Rourke et al. (2015), who suggest that the model for reversing language shift needs to be rethought in situations where non-native speakers of the language have emerged and may play a role. The revitalization of a language *may* indeed, as desired by some new speakers, include the reinstatement of naturalistic language transmission and the creation of new speakers; but this is not because these are suggested by a language vitality scale developed with majority, non-Indigenous languages in mind. Rather than remaining attached to theories and norms of major world languages, Indigenous and minority language revitalization practices and practitioners have the potential to expand these concepts. As Stebbins et al. (2017, p. 65) observe regarding the way language revitalization in Australia ‘pushes at the limits of linguistics theory and methods’, this is *because* they are driven by Aboriginal communities and Indigenous perspective.<sup>34</sup> We have seen what such an expanded concept of language transmission can look like, through the perspectives of new speakers in this study. I turn now to explore an expanded concept of success.

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<sup>34</sup> Stebbins et al. (2017) note that the field of language revitalization has a particular opportunity to expand linguistic theory and practice compared to, say, more traditional language documentation practices which have historically been the purview of universities; I do not discuss the issue of universities any further here.

#### 9.2.4 Emergent vitalities

Bernard Perley, an anthropologist and member of Tobique First Nation of Canada whose heritage language is Maliseet, raises the concern that measuring language vitality and success by numbers, such as number of speakers or number of words – another theoretical measure that is included in the UNESCO assessment – is only part of the story and it does not take into account the full trauma of language loss from a human perspective (Perley, 2012). Significantly, in the face of this immeasurable loss, what Perley sees in his community are ‘emergent vitalities’, a term he uses to refer to not only the creation of new language resources, such as a range of media projects and the translation of books into Maliseet, but also the growing sense of connection between community members in their attempts to revitalize the language – it was “not just the language, but a sense of community that was awakened” (Perley, 2012, p. 45). Arguably if we look at the situation of revitalizing languages more holistically, whether or not we fall short of ideals or deviate from the milestones set up by theories of language shift, we also see signs of a shift towards vitality.

These emergent vitalities are apparent throughout the communities in this study, as evidenced by the establishment of language centres and the new opportunities for employment created therein; the design and implementation of language classes, books, posters, and other resources; the push to normalise language use, even if just a greeting or two, between individuals; and the changing attitudes that speakers identified towards language and towards Aboriginal identities in Australia. The quantifiable aspects of these activities may and do indeed signal many losses compared to previous generations, and it is important to acknowledge the weight of this loss and how it is felt and experienced by Aboriginal communities today – but the meaning of these activities may signal something else to the communities involved. To quote Joshua Fishman (1996, p. 174):

And what we have to ask ourselves, ‘Is reversing language shift a lost cause?’ Well, perhaps it is. But all of life is a lost cause. [...] We all know the road leads only downward into the grave. There is no other way it will go. Those that have hope at least share the benefits of hope, and one of those benefits is community. Reversing language shift efforts on behalf of the intergenerational mother-tongue transmission is community building, that is what is essentially required, in and through the beloved language.

The gains reported by new speakers in this study, including the fact of the existence of new speakers themselves, should not be obscured just because they don’t align with theoretical scales of language vitality (Meek, 2012). However, there is another reason for focusing on these emergent vitalities, simply in terms of how we talk about success and failure, as I discuss next.

#### *Motivating new speakers*

How we talk about language revitalization is also important from the point of view of speakers' optimism and perceived possibilities for success. One area of psychological research shows that whether information is framed in terms of 'gain' or 'loss' makes a difference to people's behaviour and responses (Nelson et al., 1997). For example, a news headline about a government managing a 90% employment rate is considered to be framed positively, and people are more likely to respond favourably to this framing – whereas a headline about the same government managing a 10% unemployment rate is considered to be framed negatively, and people are more likely to respond unfavourably. Further, once something has been framed in the negative, it is harder to move people from a negative frame to a positive frame than from a positive frame to a negative frame – the negative framing is said to be 'sticky' (Ledgerwood & Boydston, 2014). Our perspectives are influenced by how information is framed, and the application to language revitalization discourse is clearly suggested – discourse that focuses on the ways that new speakers meet, or fail to meet, theoretical goals of language revitalization represent a 'loss frame', while discourse that focuses on the various successes of new speakers represents a 'gain frame'. Meek suggests this with respect to new speakers' use of code-switching and use of American Indian Indigenous language words in an English framework, writing that "More changes may be desired, but the point is that **such recalibrations work to interrupt the expectation of failure**, an expectation that too frequently gets imposed and sets the backdrop to any Native American accomplishments" (Meek, 2011, p. 56- emphasis added). We would predict that people are more likely to engage in language activities that are framed in terms of success rather than loss.

The field of positive psychology raises a similar suggestion regarding language rhetoric: having a sense of optimism is important for achieving outcomes, because optimistic people are more likely to be successful simply because they are more likely to search for and take opportunities and persevere in the face of adversity. According to Forgeard and Seligman (Forgeard & Seligman, 2012), optimism is associated with greater subjective well-being, health, and success. This itself might shed some light on the ideologies discussed in 5.1 that learning and revitalizing language is important for people's wellbeing and health – perhaps the specific link between the two is the optimism required, and generated, by engaging in language revitalization tasks.

### 9.3 Informed choice and commitment

New speakers' perspectives on reinstating intergenerational language transmission suggest that success isn't a matter of reversing language shift to the point that new speakers both speak and transmit the language in the same way native speakers would have pre-colonisation, but rather one of emergent vitalities. Within this broader definition of success, I turn now to the issue of informed choice. This is not a question of whether new speakers' perspectives about language learning and

teaching are 'correct' or 'incorrect' per se, but of whether the information that speakers have access to, and that influences their perspectives, is optimal; whether it provides them with the best opportunity to a) confidently and effectively pursue the language revitalization goals they already have, b) to consider a broader or more 'challenging' set of goals; and c) to be sustained and motivated – that is, to have *commitment*, one of the central difficulties of the potentially lifelong journey of language revitalization.

In discussing the issue of informed choice, I raise the following challenge: while it is imperative to respect new speakers' wishes regarding whether they want to learn and transmit language to children, whether they want to prioritise language learning and teaching, or whether they are even interested in language revitalization at all, it is short sighted to simply accept that someone "doesn't want to do language revitalization" if all they have been presented with is a picture of how difficult language learning is. Further, it seems limited to accept speakers' focus on symbolic goals of language – such as passing on a few words for the names of animals and plants – when they don't have the awareness of strategies for language teaching that might better lead to increases in communicational goals around speaking, listening, conversation, and fluency.

Many such examples arose in this study that illustrate the effect that access to better information has on new speakers' language learning and teaching activities. As a case in point, I refer again to Charmaine, a Noongar language teacher, as she talked about teaching language in schools for years using the strategies she had been taught as a language teacher, and then coming to the epiphanic realisation that the language strategies she was using weren't effective in teaching the students to have conversations. Once she gained this insight and learnt the strategies for teaching speaking and listening skills at the Master Apprentice Programme workshop in Kununurra, she felt much more confident about teaching children language and pursuing the goal of supporting children to have conversations in Noongar. Access to the kind of information presented in the workshop changed her language teaching approach to include communicative goals, and energised her in the process.

Another example of the importance of access to better information is whether new speakers are aware that children may develop passive language knowledge through continued exposure to the language (Basham & Fathman, 2008), even when they don't respond in the language, that can aid them later in language learning as adults. Being aware of such passive knowledge might encourage a caregiver to continue speaking language around the child, as was suggested by Nadine, a Wajarri mother and teacher who reflected on her own experience of language learning and as a result persevered to instill her children with a passive knowledge of Wajarri, where she might have otherwise given up.

By contrast, we also see new speakers who believe that children need to acquire language ‘bit by bit’, which does not make the most use of younger children’s capacity to learn language more rapidly – the result being, arguably, that caregivers do not gain as much satisfaction as possible in their child’s progress. Further, there are new speakers across the communities in this study who feel limited by their lack of knowledge about how to even begin learning another language themselves, and who find the process of language learning more arduous than necessary – often as a result of a negative experience of learning a language in school, as described in chapter 8, where limited classroom hours and the presentation of language as a subject to be learnt *about*, don’t result in language learning success. For example, Sophia, a young Noongar woman, talked about knowing in general that she wanted to be a fluent Noongar and Wajarri speaker, but she had no examples of positive language learning in her family or school experience, and said that she had no idea how to start learning these languages, let alone pass them on to children. Arguably part of the process of learning *how* to learn and transmit languages is learning how to define and approach the task of language learning – again, an issue of providing useful information so that new speakers can make informed choices in order to clarify goals, and break down larger goals (such as ‘become fluent’) into smaller goals.

Again, the intention here is not to undermine caregivers’ perspectives or the actions they take to achieving their goals. Rather, in the context of interrogating the possibility of reinstating intergenerational language transmission to create a new generation of language *speakers*, I suggest that if caregivers were equipped with more effective strategies for teaching children to use language conversationally (such as through formulaic phrases (Amery, 2009b), or the Master Apprentice Program (Hinton, 1997b)), they would have more success in this area; and further, by seeing new possibilities, may in the process expand their cited goals for their children from more symbolic goals to more communicative goals – from knowing about language, to being able to speak it.

This of course raises some issues regarding the imposition of goals and strategies on new speakers from the ‘outside’, which I illustrate through reflection on my own experience as an outsider linguist observing language classes and resource development at language centres in the course of this study. I, like everyone else, have my own beliefs and perspectives about best practice methods for language teaching, and have felt frustration in cases where I thought that a structured language course focused too much on spelling/orthography and not enough on functional language for communication and speaking practice, which is my own preference as a language learner. However, and critically, what we can see in the perspectives presented in this thesis is even where some speakers characterise their own language transmission strategies as ‘traditional’ (such as ‘looking, listening, learning’), there really isn’t an ‘Indigenous’ or ‘insider’ method common to these communities for language transmission, but rather a full range of language transmission approaches and techniques. As just one example,

focusing on language for communication *is* an ‘insider’ technique, as expressed by Charmaine with respect to learning this technique at the Master Apprentice Programme workshops run by Indigenous language consultants. The issue of informed choice, I believe, comes down to balance and to relationships between new speakers, language workers, teachers, and linguists within communities, and with people outside the communities who have potential expertise and support to offer. It is imperative that new speakers’ perspectives are treated with care and respect; also desirable that better information about language teaching and transmission strategies be promoted in communities where language revitalization is an option; and that the balance between these two probably works best where relationships of equality between caregivers/language learners and language centres/linguists are already established, and the dissemination of information and strategies is community led, as seen in the influence of Indigenous-led language revitalization workshops.

Further, informed choice is not just a matter making informed decisions about language transmission strategies. I argue that having access to good information about these issues also affects speakers’ own motivation and commitment to the task of language learning and teaching, where ‘commitment’ is one of the key challenges for those who want to revitalize languages. Framing the difficulty of language revitalization in terms of ‘commitment’ is suggested by Thohtharátye (also known as Joe Brant), an Indigenous learner of the minority American language Kanyen’kéha, who writes about the ‘continuum of commitment’ that he moved through in his own efforts to revitalize his language, which “included wishing, hoping, intending, and promising until I finally arrive at “doing”” (Brant, 2016, p. 15). That is, he frames the critical factor in language revitalization outcomes as one of people committing to *doing* language revitalization activities. Similarly, Tsunoda (2006, p. 192) identifies ‘commitment’ as the key issue of language revitalization, which he defines in terms of people being “determined, committed and dedicated to the cause and prepared to make a sacrifice, if necessary”.

What Thohtharátye and Tsunoda refer to as ‘commitment’ might otherwise be described as having the drive to engage in language revitalization activities – that is, the ‘motivation’, which is identified in second language acquisition research as one of the key factors that influences language learning success.<sup>35</sup> By ‘motivation’ I mean more than simply ‘motives’ or ‘reasons’, as were discussed in chapter 5; rather, following Gardner (2006), I mean the force by which we try to achieve our goals, which includes having motives, but also includes characteristics such as expending effort, demonstrating self-

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<sup>35</sup> To be clear, speakers in this study never used the word ‘motivation’. They talked about what can be understood as different aspects of motivation, and of something like the general concept of motivation itself, but they did not use the word ‘motivation’. This is a word I am applying from the top-down to pull together a range of themes that emerged from the data; and the use of this word also allows this study to be linked to similar, more general research on motivation.

confidence, and being attentive and persistent. Within the field of second language acquisition research, motivation has historically been researched as an individual difference between language learners, and has emerged as one of the key variables that influences the language learner's outcomes, as a factor that guides and sustains people's behaviour (Dörnyei, 2009a). With this in mind, a useful definition of motivation for the purposes of this discussion is 'a complex construct used to define or account for the purposeful acts of behaviour' (Klyczek & Gordon, 1988, p. 315); or simply, in the context of reinstating language transmission, what makes some speakers start, continue, finish, or discontinue learning and teaching/transmitting languages to children? What makes someone actively involved in learning and teaching language to children as an act of language revitalization? What does that motivation look like?

In terms of the 'motives' factor of the motivation equation, new speakers have a wide range of motives or goals for wanting children to acquire language, informed by their linguistic and childrearing ideologies, as discussed in chapter 5. Depending on how much the speaker wants to achieve a goal (such as ensuring language remains strong in the community to support links to Country), the motive may indeed by itself be motivating, i.e. it may move the speaker to action – or, it may not. When we consider intergenerational language transmission from new speakers' perspectives, we see that for motives to be motivating to the individual, the individual needs to feel that they have the responsibility and ability to take the necessary actions – thus motivation extends beyond the 'why' to include questions of 'who', as discussed in chapter 6. The job of transmitting language to children is assigned to a wide range of individuals and agencies, including themselves as individuals, families, Elders, teachers, schools generally, and the government. Speakers assigned responsibility to these people based on beliefs about who had the cultural and linguistic responsibility to do; what speakers perceived to be possible based on their beliefs about how child language acquisition worked generally; and their sense of who had the right abilities in terms of procedural knowledge, linguistic knowledge and proficiency, and the confidence and ability to overcome external barriers. Where does this procedural knowledge, linguistic knowledge and proficiency, and most importantly confidence come from? I would argue, from access to better information, such that all new speakers can develop the kinds of perspectives that guide the language learning and transmission strategies that have the greatest chance of success. Drawing on speakers' observations in this study, perspectives that guide ineffective or unactionable language learning and transmission goals and strategies, or not knowing where to begin, lead to reduced ability and confidence, and unsatisfying language acquisition outcomes in children, creating a negative feedback loop. The positive side of this is that having access to good information about language learning and transmission strategies, as for example we saw with Charmaine, increases speakers' expressed ability and confidence to learn and pass on language to

children, in such a way that also has the greatest chance of having a positive impact on the children's language acquisition, creating a positive feedback loop.

## 9.4 Summary

New speakers bring a wide range of perspectives to the question of reinstating intergenerational language transmission as a method of language revitalization for endangered Aboriginal languages in Australia. Indeed, for some new speakers, whilst valuing language at an ideological level, the question of how to reinstate a language that they are not fluent in and that is not the spoken language of their community is a moot point, or one that they do not feel confident to approach in terms of their own linguistic proficiency or their ability to learn and transmit language. However, new speakers show that language transmission is not an 'all or nothing' process. Many new speakers across Western Australia engage in a continuum of involvement with language and language transmission, valuing and utilising a range of transmission techniques to create emergent vitalities in the language, such as language camps and language education in schools at the community-level, to pointing and labelling objects and reading language books with their children at the family level.

The aspirational model of intergenerational language transmission set up for interrogation in this thesis, with a focus on reversing language shift in terms of reinstating 'native-like' transmission to create a new generation of first or 'native' language speakers, would seem to be largely untenable at this stage. In part this reflects the practicalities and desires raised by new speakers across these communities – resources are low, and caregivers and families have other priorities. However, in this chapter I have also hoped to show that such a model is problematic on other grounds, in terms of its use of models or scales of language shift rather than of language revitalization, and the way it valorises 'native speakers' and fluency at the expense of recognising the emergent vitalities of language transmission efforts that are completely appropriate to the contexts of the communities.

Is it possible at a theoretical level to reverse language shift in this aspirational way? In the absence of domains that require the heritage language to be acquired and used, probably not. However, as identified by speakers in this study, Aboriginal languages in these communities maintain a symbolic status and are highly valuable for imparting knowledge of culture and Country. New speakers employ a range of language transmission practices and approaches that ought to be valued in themselves as meeting these purposes.

# 10 Conclusion

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New speakers of endangered Indigenous languages in Western Australia have a broad range of perspectives regarding the possibility and desirability of reinstating intergenerational language transmission.

This study makes a particular contribution in its focus on new speakers of Australian Indigenous languages who live in urban and rural areas, expanding our understanding of language learning, transmission, and revitalization practices beyond Indigenous speakers living in more isolated communities who may still maintain more ‘traditional’ lifestyles, or lifestyles subject to less urbanisation. Further, this thesis is focused on new speakers who are already engaged in language revitalization activities, providing a particularly in-depth look at the perspectives of those speakers who are already in the seemingly best position to reinstate intergenerational language transmission in their communities. In a way, we might suggest that these speakers and the language activities they undertake as guided by their perspectives, represent the ‘best possible’ outcome for language revitalization in these communities. These new speakers’ perspectives are balanced by a few new speakers who are not engaged in language revitalization at all, showing the full range of possibilities.

Whilst there were no speakers in this study who reported approaching the possibility of intergenerational transmission with the intention of raising their children to be the first new generation of fluent speakers, nevertheless new speakers highlighted a continuum of options between the total reinstatement of intergenerational language transmission as a language revitalization strategy, and nothing. In doing so, new speakers’ perspectives, gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 31 speakers across four communities in Western Australia, offer a conception of language transmission and language revitalization that is not embedded in native speaker competence, but rather suggests a hopeful trajectory of emergent vitalities with each new generation, expanding our understanding of what language transmission and language revitalization can mean for new speakers and their communities, in their own words.

New speakers varied in their motives for wanting children to learn their endangered heritage language based on a range of ideologies about the value of language and the responsibilities of childrearing, with some speakers not being actively interested in language or language transmission at all in their daily lives. This variation is captured in a typology of motives for language transmission that acknowledges the relationship between caregiver and child, moving beyond models of language learning motives that focus on the language learner as an individual. New speakers’ range of perspectives also illuminates the gap felt by many new speakers of endangered languages between

the roles and responsibilities they feel they should have to transmit language to their children, and the limits of their own abilities. This thesis highlights the creativity of new speakers' approaches to language transmission: regardless of perceived levels of ability, most new speakers engaged in some level of language transmission to children, discussing a range of approaches and strategies to language transmission from those that were more 'traditional' (i.e. children need to 'look, listen, learn') to those that were more child-centred, and approaches that focused specifically on speaking practice that presented language as a means of conversation and communication. In this range, speakers demonstrate that there is not a 'typical' or 'typically Indigenous' way of transmitting language to children. Finally, new speakers referred to a range of influences on their perspectives regarding language and intergenerational language transmission, from a sense of an innate connection to language, to the powerful influence of language revitalization and documentation activities, showing that new speakers' perspectives are not static, but subject to change over their lifetime.

The perspectives of the new speakers in this study provide some particular points for further research and development. One of the central challenges of language revitalization raised by speakers in this study is supporting new speakers who are caregivers to have the confidence to use the language they have learnt with their children and grandchildren, and to support language learners to view language as something that *can* be spoken, transmitted, and shared if desired – it is not only a 'private' or 'personal' endeavour. Some new speakers also pointed to the fact that they weren't sure *how* to approach learning and transmitting language to children. In fact, none of the language revitalization activities discussed in chapter 3 are designed to support families to use language at home, representing a 'big gap' in language revitalization programmes (Hinton, 2011, p. 304).

New speakers in this study also highlighted the need to create and support new domains of language use if language transmission and language revitalization activities are to take hold. I mention here such newly created domains of language use for the Noongar language, through the creation of world-class performances of *Hecate* (2020), a fully-Noongar version of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and the Noongar language dub of the Bruce Lee film, *Fist of Fury Noongar Daa* (2021). Moriarty (2011, p. 448) cautions that

[w]hen those involved in endangered language planning focus only on traditional domains for language revitalization, such as the educational system, and do not promote the use of such languages in domains that are often more relevant for young people, such as media, the process of language decline is more likely to continue.

By contrast, such unique, modern productions as *Hecate* and *Fist of Fury Noongar Daa* have created new, brave spaces for adult new speakers of Noongar to learn and speak language (Bracknell, 2021).

It would be a worthwhile area of study to see what effect these new domains of Noongar language use might have on the perspectives of other new speakers of Noongar and for language transmission, whether intergenerationally or amongst community members of the same generation. To that end, as discussed in the Introduction chapter, this thesis has also had a particular focus on new speakers' perspectives rather than observations etc., but further research of course could examine the potential difference between speakers' expressed perspectives and their observed behaviours, taking a more 'applied' research approach to the question of the reinstatement of intergenerational language transmission in these communities.

The purpose of all such research, as this thesis ultimately argues, should be to create space for and centre the perspectives of the speakers, learners, and owners of the Indigenous languages themselves, with the support of language activists, linguists, and others as required; and in doing so, to fully realise the goals and aspirations of the community, acknowledging where necessary that language revitalization activities are not desired by all, but that those who are interested in language revitalization (whether or not it include reinstating language transmission as new speakers) have a wealth of creativity and adaptivity to expand the use, value, and meaning of their languages.

# 11 Appendix

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## 11.1 Interview Example

[excerpt from interview with Rosie, F, 30s, Miriwoong]

A – how many kids you got?

R – I got five but I'm looking after my, my sister's children another two, so all together I got six, my oldest one is nineteen but my, the other one just turn sixteen, seventeen this year so I got one, two, five in my care today, but I got five of my own, the two is out of my care and I got the other five, my own three and my sister's two, but that's a handful

A – I was gonna say that's a lot

R – mm

A – do you teach them Miriwoong?

R – I don't you know what, mainly my two little niece, they, Leanne she's five turning six, Tenaia's one uh, Tenaia's four turning five, I got them books in there, the language nest, get the animals, uh the animals and the what was the other one the animals and, body, body parts, but I sat with them every, not every night but every time that I'm feeling good you know I grab them two kids "come on let's go in the room and, I learn you about Miriwoong" so they come in the room, I explain, I just tell them to repeat the word maybe three or two, three or two time, and then I cover the book up and I tell them what that, what that, what that say what that word in Miriwoong and they know how to say

A – they know it

R – or even when they come they ask me [for] a little bit Miriwoong, "you gotta get me that Miriwoong book", they they run straight in there they ask me, when I got a chance, when I'm feeling good you know, not when I'm crook

A – oh right I see yeah yeah

R – so I just normally sit down and just teach that to the kid

A – oh, so you teach the littlies

R – they too young, too little

A – have you got, oh photos

R – I'll show you the two young one, that Leanne she really really good she know, Tenaia, they know all the animals that thing, they just from me teaching them at home

## 11.3 Interview Questions

### FAMILY/LANGUAGE BACKGROUND:

- Where did you grow up?
- Can you tell me about your family growing up?
- What languages did you hear your family speak?
- What languages did you speak as a kid?

### FAMILY/LANGUAGE PRESENT:

- What do you do now?
- Can you tell me about your family now?
- What languages do your [partner, kids] speak?
- What languages do you speak to your kids?

### LANGUAGE LEARNING: experiences, perceptions

- How did you learn [language]?
- What makes you want to learn more language?
- Experience learning other languages (e.g. French)
- Do you know anything about traditional ways of learning language? How does that compare to how you learnt language now?
- How long do you think it takes to learn a language?
- What does it mean to you to know a language? To be a speaker of the language?

### LANGUAGE SPEAKING

- How does learning/speaking language make you feel?
- Could you have a conversation in language? Words and phrases?
- What do you think would help you to become more fluent?
- What do you think makes it difficult for people to learn/SPEAK language? (?shame)
  - What would make it easier?

## LANGUAGE TRANSMISSION

- How do you see kids using language these days?
  - Who teaches them? What words do they know? Which dialect? What's important for them to know? Do they get it wrong? Does it help them in other ways? Difference between home and school?
- How do kids learn language?
  - Do kids learn language differently to adults?
  - When should kids start learning language?
- Who takes on the role of passing on language to kids: the school, the family, the community?
- Do you feel like you have/had an influence on your child's language? What do you feel is the family's role in your child's language acquisition?
- Can parents help their kids to learn language? How? What kind of resources would they use?
- If families learn more language (e.g. at classes), will that be enough for children to learn language/for them to pass language on to children? What else would they need?
- What would help parents give language to their kids? What might stop them?
- How do you reckon you can keep language strong, what do we need to do?
- Do you think it's possible to get to a stage where parents are teaching their kids language as a first language? What would need to happen to bring back language as a first language?

## 11.4 Participation Information Form

John Henderson  
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35 Stirling Highway, Crawley WA 6009  
Tel: 6488 2870  
Email: john.henderson@uwa.edu.au

### **Learning Language for Use with Children Participant Information Form (Interviews)**

Name of Researcher: Amy Budrikis

**Supervisors:** John Henderson, Marie-Eve Ritz

#### **Invitation:**

You are invited to take part in an interview about how children and adults learn languages. I am a PhD student at the University of Western Australia. This interview is part of a project to look at ways of supporting adults to learn and pass on traditional languages in their families.

#### **What does the interview involve?**

Before the interview, I will discuss the topic with you and answer any questions you have. The interview itself will take between 30 and 60 minutes. This depends on how much time you have and how much you want to say. There are some questions that I will ask everyone. Some of the interview will be more like a regular conversation. The interview can take place at your home, at the language centre, or another place that suits you.

The interview will be audio recorded.

After the interview, I will write down what you've said, and I will use this information in the project. I won't mention your name unless you want. I will use this information in my PhD thesis, and in talks and other publications.

I will give you a copy of the interview recording and written form if you want. You can contact me if you want to add or change anything afterwards.

#### **Choosing to participate in the project.**

You can be interviewed if you want, but you don't have to. It's your choice. You can stop the interview at any time. You don't need to give a reason. If you do stop the interview, this will not be held against you. After the interview, you can tell me if you don't want me to use your information in this project. If you don't want it to be used, I will delete the voice recording and the written form.

## **Your privacy**

I won't mention your name when I give talks or write papers or my thesis unless you want me to. This means that I will remove your name and any personal details before I show the information to someone else. At the end of the project, I will write a thesis (book) about the project, but your name and personal details will not be used in this book without your consent. I will destroy the audio recordings at the end of the project. I will keep the information on a secure online database for a minimum seven years. The information will not have your name or personal details in it.

## **How will this project help?**

This project will help us understand how people learn traditional languages, how they teach languages, and how to pass them on to children.

I will give you a \$20 voucher to reimburse you for your time.

## **Things to consider**

Some people find that talking about languages and language learning can be upsetting, because it can bring up old memories, hopes, frustrations, etc. There is no pressure to talk about things that are too personal. I will remove your name and your details from your information, but some people might be able to guess from the other information who the information is from. You can stop the interview at any time, and you don't need to give a reason for stopping the interview.

## **Contacts**

If you want to participate or discuss any aspect of this study please feel free to contact me on my mobile XXXX XXX XXX or [amy.budrikis@research.uwa.edu.au](mailto:amy.budrikis@research.uwa.edu.au)

Sincerely,

Amy Budrikis (Researcher)

John Henderson (Supervisor)

-----

Approval to conduct this research has been provided by the University of Western Australia with reference number RA/4/1/8663, in accordance with its ethics review and approval procedures. Any person considering participation in this research project, or agreeing to participate, may raise any questions or issues with the researchers at any time. In addition, any person not satisfied with the response of researchers may raise ethics issues or concerns, and may make any complaints about this research project by contacting the Human Ethics office at UWA on (08) 6488 4703 or by emailing to [humanethics@uwa.edu.au](mailto:humanethics@uwa.edu.au). All research participants are entitled to retain a copy of any Participant Information Form and/or Participant Consent Form relating to this research project.

## 11.3 Participant Consent Form

John Henderson  
Linguistics/Social Sciences, M257  
The University of Western Australia  
35 Stirling Highway, Crawley WA 6009  
Tel: 6488 2870  
Email: john.henderson@uwa.edu.au

### Learning Language for Use with Children

#### Participant Consent Form (Interviews)

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have read the Participant Information Form. The researcher answered my questions. I am happy with the answers. I agree to take part in this project. I can stop the interview at any time. I don't need to give a reason for stopping the interview. If I stop the interview this will not be held against me, my information will not be used, and the recording will be destroyed.

I agree to have my interview audiotaped. Any information I give is confidential. Unless I say otherwise, the researcher must remove my name and other personal details from the written information before sharing it with anyone. The only exception is if the information must be shared for legal reasons. If this happens, the researcher is not allowed to keep the information confidential, but will only share it with the right people.

If I choose, I can give permission for this information to be shared without removing my name and other personal details. Any information that identifies me will be stored at UWA and will not be available to other people. After seven years, the audio recording will be destroyed. The written copy of my interview without my name on it will be kept by the researcher for her research. Some of my words will be put into presentations and publications.

I want my name to be removed from any information before it is shared. Yes  No

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant signature      Date

Approval to conduct this research has been provided by the University of Western Australia, in accordance with its ethics review and approval procedures. Any person considering participation in this research project, or agreeing to participate, may raise any questions or issues with the researchers at any time. In addition, any person not satisfied with the response of researchers may raise ethics issues or concerns, and may make any complaints about this research project by contacting the Human Ethics Office at the University of Western Australia on (08) 6488 3703 or by emailing to [humanethics@uwa.edu.au](mailto:humanethics@uwa.edu.au). All research participants are entitled to retain a copy of any Participant Information Form and/or Participant Consent Form relating to this research project.

This means:

The University of Western Australia has approved this project. Anyone who wants to participate in this project can ask questions or raise concerns with the researcher at any time.

If you are not happy with what the researcher says, you can call the Human Ethics Office on (08) 6488 3703, or email [humanethics@uwa.edu.au](mailto:humanethics@uwa.edu.au)

You can keep a copy of the Participant Information Form and the Participant Consent Form.

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