What languages are Aboriginal children learning?

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ACLA Project

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Communities and languages involved in the project
## Situation of languages

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The effect of contact

- Devaluation of traditional languages
- Addition of new codes
  - Standard English and its associated range of written and spoken registers
  - Pidgin English
  - Kriol
  - Mixed Languages
- Switching between codes
Types of code

**Register:** a language variety appropriate to a particular language situation e.g. formal or informal language

**Dialect:** When a language L has two or more distinct forms which are associated with different regional or social or ethnic groups

**Language:** a dialect or collection of dialects which cannot be understood and spoken by other people without considerable language learning effort
Code-switching

• When people talk with each other, they may use just one code throughout the conversation, or they may use different registers, dialects or languages in the same utterance or conversation. They may switch codes.
How children learn codes

• **Input**
  – from parents and caregivers
  – from playmates
  – from the media

• **Interpretation of input**
  reconstructing rules of a code on the basis of the input
Codes in contact

• **Pidgin**: a simple code that develops as a means of communicating between speakers of two languages which are not mutually intelligible

• **Creole**: a language which evolves when children hear a pidgin and develop it into a full language. Usually it resembles one of the languages (the *superstrate*) more than the other (the *substrate*).
  – Acrolect: a form of creole closer to the superstrate (English)
  – Basilect: a form of creole further from English (‘heavy Kriol’)

• **Mixed language**: a code whose parts resemble two distinct codes
New codes in Central and Northern Australia

- standard English
  - has many registers
  - *used in schools, Government Departments and the media*

- pidgin English,
  - evolved as a way for speakers of Aboriginal English and speakers of standard and non-standard Englishes to talk with each other
  - *now mostly used by a few old people who are first language speakers of traditional languages*

- Kriol
  - evolved from the pidgins used in Australia and the Pacific
  - has many geographically linked dialects
  - *now used by many Aboriginal people in the centre and north*
The ACLA project

Designed to address three research questions:

1. what language input do indigenous Australian Aboriginal children receive from traditional indigenous languages, Kriol and varieties of English, and from code-switching involving these languages as used by adults and older children?

2. what effect does this have on the children’s language acquisition; how is the input reflected in their production?

3. what processes of language shift, maintenance and change can be hypothesised to result from this multilingual environment, as evidenced by the children’s input and output and the degree to which this reflects transmission of the target languages, the loss of traditional languages, or the emergence of new mixed languages?
Relationship to other studies of children’s language acquisition

- Longitudinal studies of the first language acquisition of individual children
- Longitudinal language sampling designs
- Cross sectional designs
Previous studies of bilingual acquisition

• Traditionally have involved single children, often growing up in a “one parent, one language” environment

• Focus has been on the cognitive processes of the child, particularly with respect to the child’s ability to differentiate the languages

• Recently has been increased focus on the effect of the input on the child’s mixing
Mixed input

- Traditionally mixed input has been negatively evaluated
- In Central Australia code switching reflects normal conversational behaviour
- Children receive variable input in different codes
- Input is from a wider circle of relations and peers than reported for Western children
- Study will investigate how children deal with this input, and the effect it has on their own language
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Lajamanu: input to children

- input to children is in Warlpiri and Light Warlpiri, with a lot of code-switching:
  - between Warlpiri and English / Kriol
  - between Warlpiri and LW

- input to children is only partially separated in terms of interlocutor, context, etc

- children learn both LW and Warlpiri

- children’s production is mostly in LW
Sources and characteristics of Light Warlpiri

- most verbs and verb morphology from Kriol (some Warlpiri verb stems)

- most nouns and nominal morphology from Warlpiri (some nouns from English and Kriol)

- auxiliary system drawn from Kriol
  - but auxiliary system possibly also has innovative forms
MOVIE OF TEN-YEAR OLD LAJAMANU
WARLPIRI GIRLS PLAYING CARDS

With CLAN transcript

• Some of the speech describing actions from the cards are in traditional Warlpiri, or standard English, but they are not completely fluent.

• Most of the speech either describing the cards, or other interaction, is in Light Warlpiri eg:
From the Lajamanu video

Warlpiri
*DDD: jinta-ngu karnta-ngu ka ma-nu warlu.
%mor: one-ERG woman-ERG IMPF get-pst firewood.
%eng: a woman is getting firewood.

English: be quiet

Light Warlpiri
*BBB: wan man(i)-ng i-m hit-ing it ama-(k)urlu-ng watiya.
%mor: one man-ERG 3sg-nfut hit-prog 3sgO hammer-COM-ERG tree
%eng: a man is hitting a tree with a hammer

Warlpiri
Kriol/AE
Light Warlpiri Possessives: sources and distribution of structures

LW uses structures from Warlpiri, AE/Kriol and SAE

• Warlpiri:
  • on nouns: -kurlangu/-kirlangu/-kang
  • on pronouns: -nyangu
  • juxtaposition with noun

• AE/Kriol:
  • juxtaposition with noun
  • is (from SAE ‘his’)
  • ma/mai (from SAE ‘my’)

• Not found in Light Warlpiri - Kriol bla(nga)/fu/bu
Possessives, LW examples (1)

Source: Warlpiri:

1. Wara! Nungarrayi-kang yu-m brok-im
   oh name-POSS 2sg-NFUT break-pst-TR

   Oh no! You broke Nungarrayi’s.

2. Ngaju-nyang wumara yu old-im mayi?
   1sg-POSS money 2sg hold-TR INTERR

   Are you holding my money?
Possessives, LW examples (2)

Source: AE/Kriol:

1. we yu rdaka?
   where 2sg hand

   Where is your hand?

2. i-m wiri-jarl mai ka , ngula i-m wita
   3sg-NFUT big-very 1sgPOSS car   ANAPH  3sg-NFUT small

   My car’s very big, that one is small.
Combinations of possessor + possessed by language

Languages of possessor and possessed

E/K + E/K
Wrlp + E/K
Wrlp + Wrlp
E/K + Wrlp

% of tokens
Gurindji speakers by age, 2001 ABS data

Katherine region survey 2003

National Census 2001
• input directed to children is in Gurindji Kriol

• children may hear older adults using Gurindji amongst themselves

• input to children is only partially separated in terms of interlocutor, context, etc

• children learn predominantly Gurindji Kriol, and have some understanding of Gurindji

• children’s production is only in Gurindji Kriol
Sources and characteristics of Gurindji Kriol

Kangarnta-yawung-tu, i garra abim jartkarra dat kimbi. An i garra teikim nyanuny na yapakayi karu.

‘The crocodile will eat the nappy. And it will take the baby.’

- basic meaning verbs from Kriol, eg teikim ‘take’
- some verbs from Gurindji eg jartkarra ‘eat’
- verb endings from Kriol eg -im
- nouns from Gurindji and Kriol eg kangarnta-yawung ‘crocodile, kimbi ‘nappy’
- noun endings from Gurindji eg -tu
Possession in Gurindji Kriol

Kura-yawung kimbi bo Leyton jarran.
‘That pooey nappy is Leyton’s.’

Leyton-ku kura-yawung.
‘Leyton’s pooey nappy.’

Binij Shadow kirt leg.
‘That’s it then Shadow broke his leg.’

Imin kirt nyununy leg.
‘He broke his leg.’

?Imin kirt im leg.
Children learn Wumpurrarni English and English. Input directed to children is in Wumpurrarni English, English, and a little Warumungu and other traditional languages. Children hear some Warumungu and other traditional languages from older (grandparent age) people talking amongst themselves with a lot of code-switching. Input to children is only partially separated in terms of interlocutor, context, etc.

Children learn Wumpurrarni English and English.

Children’s production is mostly in Wumpurrarni English, but they can switch in role-plays to speaking close to standard English.
Sources and characteristics of Wumpurrarni English

• most verbs and verb endings from Kriol (occasional Warumungu imperatives)

• most nouns from English and Kriol

• some noun endings from Warumungu

• auxiliary system drawn from Kriol

• great variability from heavy basilectal language of some speakers between 20 and 40 to light acrolectal language of school children
Variation in input (1)

SPR: an diswan iya, nyili bin pokim jina no musbi wintirri-jja. and this one here, a thorn has run into his foot, no it's a stick
*SPR: yu luk jina deya rait thru da fud. you look at the foot, right through the foot
*SMJ: wirntirri-jji.
by a stick
*SPR: yeh wintirri bin pokim imkay jina. Yes a stick has run into his foot
*SPR: im bin na ding na puuruwan jina na. He’s got a whatsname, sore foot now

....

*SPR: yarnti boi bin raning, im bin jesimbat dat jukjuk deya One boy was running, he was chasing that chook
*SPR: julaka
bird
*SMJ: julaka warlinyinjina
He was chasing the bird
*.SPR: julaka im bin jesimbat. He was chasing the bird
SPR mid 30s, SMJ mid 50s
Features of interaction

- Mother (SPR) uses Warumungu nouns, some case-endings and no verbs
- Grandmother (SMJ) uses Warumungu nouns, verbs and case-endings
- Mother alternates between using Warumungu forms and W.E./English forms with same denotation (jina, fud)
**Variation in input (2)**

- **SBM:** is father an da wangangu.
  - *His father’s on the grog*

- **SLG:** kam iya yu putim iya, kuwarta angkinyi yu luk it.
  - *Come here, put it here, look in your ear [lit. ear your]*.

- **kuwarta** angkinyi yu putim xxx, paninya.
  - *Put it in your ear, like that*

- an yu filim **mine** ding, heart, disaid, hiya.

- yu filimbat **my** heart beating, ye.

- **my:** English, **mine:** Kriol, angkinyi: Warumungu
Distribution of Warumungu features according to age of speaker

Figure 1
Educational implications

• Need to encourage teachers and other educationalists to be interested in children’s home languages
  – Importance of recognising early language experience for educational success
  – Recognition of BICS/CALP distinction and implications for academic success

• Need for more emphasis on these in teacher training (including for Indigenous teachers) in
  – Recognising what the children can do
  – Appropriate ways of assessing their language skills
Educational implications cont’d

• Need for better data not speculation to address questions in educational debate

• need for factoring in current speech in order to encourage language revitalisation:
  – the eg ‘Language nests’

• Examples of where current patterns can be built on (revisiting earlier examples of GK/LW, questions, possessives)
MAKING THE JUMP

A RESOURCE BOOK FOR TEACHERS OF ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

ROSALIND BERRY AND JOYCE HUDSON
Teacher: Who did you go with?
Student: Modiga
Teacher: And who is Modiga? Is he your brother?
The child looked puzzled and shook his head.
Teacher: Is Modiga your uncle? Cousin-brother?
No answer. Then the other children helped out.
‘Y’ know miss, ‘e bin go wid modiga’, they explained as they broom-broomed around the room, driving imaginary cars!

**Kriol**

Mela bin go.

**AE**

We bin go./We did go.
Usmob bin go./Usmob did go.

**SAE**

We went.

Wilat bin go.

We bin go./ Usmob bin go.
We did go./Usmob did go.

Im tharrei.

'E ober dere.

Aibin lukum ola pigipig.

I bin see da pig.

I saw the pigs.
CONTROL
Control is the goal. It comes when people switch unconsciously between SAE and their home language.

CODE-SWITCHING
By this step students are able to recognise code-switching in real life situations and:
(1) extend and apply their knowledge of SAE;
(2) practise switching languages according to social situations.

SEPARATION
In this step students learn to recognise the languages, name them and:
(1) identify the social situation appropriate for each language;
(2) discover differences between SAE and their home language;
(3) practise SAE structures.

AWARENESS
In this step we help students:
(1) realise that there are different languages in the community;
(2) understand that each language is good and should be a source of pride;
(3) recognise Kriol and Aboriginal English as valid varieties of language;
(4) practise SAE structures.
Improving Indigenous Education Outcomes

Schedule 4.2

Under Review March 2004

Issues

The parties agree the key issues to be addressed are:

- Accelerating Literacy is one of the few interventions capable of yielding demonstrable improvements in Indigenous literacy. The program leaders for Accelerating Literacy (Dr Brian Gray *et al*) are based at the University of Canberra. Demand for the program is growing nationally and has brought its developers to the point of needing to package their methodologies so many can implement it.