

# ○ EVERYWHERE AND NOWHERE: INVISIBILITY OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CONTACT LANGUAGES IN EDUCATION AND INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE CONTEXTS

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The language ecologies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Queensland are characterised by widespread language shift to contact language varieties, yet they remain largely invisible in discourses involving Indigenous languages and education. This invisibility – its various causes and its many implications – are explored through a discussion of two creoles which developed in Queensland: Yumplatok (formerly Torres Strait Creole) and Yarrie Lingo. Although both are English-lexified and originate in Queensland, they represent different histories and different trajectories of awareness and recognition. The Yumplatok discussion emphasises issues arising from speakers' own

attitudes, including Sellwood's own lived experiences. The Yarrie Lingo discussion highlights issues arising from its creole–lexifier relationship with (Standard Australian) English. Finally, this paper examines a recently published government language report, highlighting the ways that Indigenous creoles are marginalised: this marginalisation exacerbates their invisibility in mainstream discourse.

**KEY WORDS:** contact languages, creoles, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, Indigenous education, English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D)

## PARADIGMS OF INVISIBILITY

In the sphere of educational discourse, Indigenous Australian languages tend to remain in the margins, and consideration of Indigenous students as learners of English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D)<sup>i</sup> is rare. Without acknowledgement of such a fundamental learner attribute, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can be positioned within deficit models with the usual responses of getting back to basic literacy skills, a focus on attendance or health issues, a focus on cultural inclusivity, referral to speech language pathologists and learning difficulties (e.g. Angelo & McIntosh, 2010). Indeed, Martin (2008, pp. 68–69) suggests that “programs and practices become obsessed in ‘filling up’ the perceived lack of cultural knowledge and experience on the part of [Indigenous] students, [their] families, and homes, as a means to replace their ‘bad’ English.”

The invisibility of Indigenous peoples and their languages has a long history in Australia. The myth of ‘terra nullius’ on which the nation was founded negates their very existence (e.g. Martin, 2008). A more recent source of invisibility noted in education discourse, consists of hiding the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by characterising them in a single, homogenous grouping (Luke, Woods, Land, Bahr & McFarland, 2002), or by not disaggregating data from communities speaking Indigenous vernaculars versus those with Standard Australian English (SAE) (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004).

The invisibility of languages other than SAE – spoken by Indigenous Australians, as well as by others – is also the result of a “monolingual mindset” (Clyne, 2005) or a ‘monoglot ideology’ which sees monolingualism (in English) as the norm or even the ideal (Siegel, 2010, p. 187). ‘Monoglot’ or ‘monolingual’ paradigms fail to empower Indigenous EAL/D learners as (incipient) multilinguals in the classroom. Policy developed, curriculum conceived and pedagogy enacted with a ‘monolingual mindset’ neither celebrates these learners’ rich linguistic resources nor expects explicit and respectful teaching of SAE. Instead, the role of language(s) can be completely overlooked or subsumed entirely under an overarching category of literacy (e.g. McIntosh, O’Hanlon & Angelo, 2012).

Additionally, however, current Indigenous language ecologies are complex and less visible due to the ‘shifting landscape’ caused by widespread language contact. Indigenous language use in Queensland reflects a diverse range of vernaculars, including English–lexified contact

languages, creoles and related dialect varieties, with usage shifting away from traditional languages (Angelo, 2006). Heartfelt and justified concerns at the loss of traditional languages may also, by the very depth of their esteem or impassioned urgency, obscure these contemporary Indigenous vernaculars, particularly when they are (erroneously) viewed as just poor versions of English (e.g. Language Perspectives Group, 2011, p. 10).

Indeed, the very linguistic make-up of English-lexified contact languages connects them to English, rendering them liable to be viewed as impoverished versions of English, and invisible as full, valid languages. This invisibility might almost seem justified, then, if these contact languages are seen as a kind of (just not very good) English. This “standard language ideology” (Siegel, 2010, p.186) assigns an inherent superiority to the standard language, restricting other varieties by denigration, correction and exclusion. Educational practices promote these exclusive ideologies so speakers of unstandardised language varieties, perceived as inferior, can become “accomplices in their own domination” (Corson, 2001, p. 18), “voluntarily coerced” (Corson, 1991, p. 235, both cited in Siegel, 2010, p. 187). As a result, first language (L1) speakers of full and valid contact languages may be educated into a belief that their own languages have no place.

## THE INVISIBILITY OF CONTACT LANGUAGES

The discourse of “invisibility” (Martin, 2008) began with Lieutenant James Cook’s declaration of ‘terra nullius’ over Australia. While the Indigenous population was deemed invisible, at the time of Cook’s arrival there were some 250 Indigenous language groups, characterised by wide-spread multilingualism (e.g. McConvell & Thieberger, 2001, p. 16 & p. 26). This linguistic diversity continues to this day – with the added complexity of a spectrum of contact language varieties – both between and within speakers of Indigenous languages (e.g. Wigglesworth & Simpson, 2008; Wigglesworth, Simpson & Loakes, 2011, pp. 320–322). These rich language ecologies have remained largely outside the awareness of the dominant ‘monolingual mindset’ of Australian mainstream culture and are only sporadically and inconsistently included in education discourse (McIntosh et al., 2012; Malcolm & Königsberg, 2007).

To illustrate how invisibility permeates responses to Indigenous contact languages in education, this paper provides case studies of two different English-lexified creoles, Yumplatok (formerly Torres Strait Creole or Broken) and Yarrrie Lingo. Each arose in Queensland under different circumstances of language contact and each has a different history of recognition. However, they are both English-lexified creoles, classed as distinct languages from English due to their differences from their lexifier on all linguistic levels. They are not considered dialects of English, which would exhibit only minor linguistic differences (e.g. Angelo, 2004; Wigglesworth et al., 2011, p. 321). The discussion of Yumplatok also examines language invisibility factors predominantly from the perspectives

of Yumplatok speakers, including a personal perspective provided by Sellwood, as a (mainland) Torres Strait Islander and Yumplatok speaker herself. The discussion of Yarrie Lingo, on the other hand, primarily highlights language invisibility factors arising from confusions caused by the relationship of a creole to its lexifier, particularly in the context of schooling. The paper completes its study of the invisibility of contact languages with an examination of the recent *Our Land Our Languages* report (House of Representatives [HOR], 2012). A close reading reveals how these languages may be obscured even in documents where their inclusion is attempted.

## THE ORIGINS OF YUMPLATOK

Language contact, language shift and language loss typify the language ecologies in most Torres Strait Islander speech communities in the Torres Strait and on the mainland. Unless otherwise stated, Shnukal's (1988) description of Broken (as Yumplatok was then commonly termed) is the source for the following brief sociolinguistic history leading to the development of Yumplatok.

An English-lexified pidgin was introduced into the Torres Strait in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Torres Strait Islanders had extensive contact with this pidgin as Christianising activity spread following 'The Coming of the Light' (the arrival of English and South Sea Islander missionaries) in 1871. The Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of Sale of Opium Act of 1897 established government controls, including regulatory restrictions on Torres Strait Islanders explicitly discouraging the use of traditional languages, thus encouraging the use and spread of 'Pidgin English'. Torres Strait Islanders' access to English was severely limited with often only one English speaker living on each island. The remoteness of their islands and restrictions on their movement also excluded Torres Strait Islanders from active participation in English-speaking communities on the mainland.

From this early 'Pidgin English' a creole developed and spread to different islands. By the early 1900s, children were heard speaking this creole in the islands, first on more easterly islands, then on more central islands by the 1930s. The spread of Yumplatok was aided by the movement of people across the traditional east-west language divide of the Torres Strait. Its usefulness as a lingua franca was made apparent by the 1936 maritime strike. Yumplatok played a pivotal part in organising this strike as it facilitated communication across the traditional language barriers, enabling the involvement of 70% of the entire Torres Strait Islander maritime workforce.

During the 1940s when the traditional languages of the Torres Strait, Kala Lagaw Ya and Meriam Mer were still widely spoken, Yumplatok held a certain prestige. Torres Strait Islanders believed it to be English, the 'white man's' language. After World War II, Islanders increasingly realised that what they were speaking was in fact not 'white man's English', as

Europeans working in the Torres Strait regarded Yumplatok as “an ‘ungrammatical’ or ‘bastardised’ form of English” (Shnukal, 1988, p. 8). These attitudes devalued Yumplatok and some Torres Strait Islanders accepted and promulgated this low opinion of Yumplatok. From then on, Yumplatok began being labelled ‘bad’ or referred to as ‘Broken (English)’ (Nakata, 2012; Shnukal, 1988, 2002).

## A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE STATUS OF YUMPLATOK

This section highlights some past and ongoing struggles for the Torres Strait Islander community in terms of the (in)visibility of Yumplatok in education. The first author, Sellwood, gives an insider’s account below of the shifting status of Yumplatok as a Torres Strait Islander and speaker of Yumplatok herself.

At the time of this paper I am working as a lecturer in the School of Education, James Cook University, Cairns. I was born in Cairns to an English father and Torres Strait Island mother. I am considered a ‘mainlander’, a person with Torres Strait heritage born on mainland Australia (Watkin-Lui, 2009). My mother was born and grew up on Thursday Island and my father lived on Thursday Island from his early teens as his father was the lighthouse keeper on Goods Island. Both my parents speak Yumplatok, which is my mother’s L1 and my father’s second language (L2), English being his L1. My parents and my mothers’ parents moved down to Cairns in the late 1960s, along with many other Torres Strait Island families seeking better economic prospects and education for their children. The status of Yumplatok at this time was definitely low.

When I entered school there was no recognition that SAE was my L2, or even a third language for some of my Torres Strait Islander relatives. During my early schooling in the 1970s, I was constantly corrected and told to *tok propa* by teachers and family members alike, and discouraged from using Yumplatok. Such comments impaired my image of myself as a learner, so very early on I viewed myself as not ‘a good learner’ in the classroom or not having the ‘right stuff’ to be successful in school. Nakata, a Torres Strait Islander academic, tells of similar experiences in his schooling where education was a constant feeling of “trying, trying, but never getting it quite right...always knowing that I wasn’t understood in the way that I meant” (Nakata, 2012, p. 86). Essentially, the language I brought to school was viewed as a ‘broken’ form of SAE, invisible as a full, valid language in itself.

Although Yumplatok is one of the two officially recognised creoles in Australia (e.g. McIntosh et al., 2012, p. 450), in my personal experience, the status of Yumplatok as a ‘real’ language can still be a contentious issue amongst Yumplatok speech communities in the Torres Strait and on the mainland. In 2008, for example, I was invited to a symposium on Thursday Island to speak about language issues. My

presentation about Yumplatok and how Yumplatok-speaking children might have a tricky time doing school while learning English caused some dissention in the (Torres Strait Islander) audience. One opinion expressed was “it’s [Yumplatok] a bastardised language created by colonists to keep us down.” Other comments included “our kids just need to know how to code-switch” and “our cultural identity is what is most important.” Being challenged by those who I regard as my own community was quite confronting, but it also signalled to me that Torres Strait Islanders are passionate about language(s) and that some stigma still attaches to Yumplatok.

These personal insights reveal how the Torres Strait Islander community has not reached consensus about the status of Yumplatok. Since the comments illustrate sites of contestation regarding Yumplatok, in the following section we unpack the complexities inherent in these views.

## THE CONTESTED GROUND OF YUMPLATOK

The first comment highlights what Shnukal (1988, p. 8) records as “Torres Strait Islanders think[ing] that they were duped into speaking a form of English that would mark them as second-class citizens.” That is, some Torres Strait Islanders believe that the ‘real’ purpose behind the development of Yumplatok was another form of paternalistic control over Islander lives, something shameful and substandard best kept/left invisible.

The second comment employs a linguistic term, code-switching, for “the alternative use by bilinguals of two or more languages in the same conversation” (Milroy & Muysken, 1995, p. 7). This term probably entered education discourse in the Torres Strait via a local extension of *Fostering English Language In Kimberley Schools* (FELIKS) (e.g. Berry & Hudson, 1997; Carter, 2011, p. 19). However, in the comment, ‘code-switching’ seems to have diverged from its conceptual underpinnings. Code-switching is a (natural) behaviour resulting from bilingual facility, not a separate skill taught in the classroom. Explicit teaching of SAE is required to increase remote Yumplatok-speaking students’ L2 proficiency in SAE (Angelo, 2012a) so they can (eventually) naturally ‘code-switch’ with increasing control (e.g. Berry & Hudson, 1997). The linguistic concept of ‘code-switching’ requires two or more languages to be used and implies that both, including speakers’ L1, are recognised and valued, and additive bilingualism/multilingualism is operative. However, ‘code-switching’ as used in this forum obscures this: Teaching ‘code-switching’ was positioned virtually in opposition to recognising Yumplatok and explicitly teaching SAE. Rather than acknowledging Yumplatok as an essential part of code-switching, the term ‘code-switching’ itself becomes elevated, albeit skewed. Hence there is more emphasis on ‘code-switching’ and less recognition of Yumplatok-speaking students as L2 learners of SAE.

The third comment about ‘culture’ pervades Indigenous education and is one of the broad, generalised discourses that have entered education policy on Indigenous students (e.g. McIntosh

et al., 2012, p. 448). A broad term like ‘culture’ can, however, hide ‘language(s)’ by implying ‘culture’ ranks more importantly, or by subsuming ‘language(s)’ so they are not separately visible. The comment suggests that there is a significant relationship between traditional languages and traditional culture. But we also communicate, live and transform our everyday culture(s) through the medium of language(s). Such active processes occur through the language(s) we use and for most students in the Torres Strait, Yumplatok is their primary mode of communication, so it is intrinsic to these students’ cultural experiences. Where the broad discourses of ‘culture’ and ‘Indigeneity’ intersect with ‘language’, as in this comment, the significance of traditional languages is always present (explicitly or implicitly), but the significance of contact languages (e.g. Yumplatok) as a cultural vehicle remains invisible.

## **A CHANGE IN STATUS FOR YUMPLATOK**

More recently, and primarily amongst younger people, Yumplatok is being claimed as a symbol of identity. This renewed pride in Yumplatok has produced (re)namings of this language as Yumplatok (Ober, 1999). As a possessive, the pre-posed 1PLINCL pronoun *yumpla* ‘we, us, our’ (cf. Shnukal, 1988, p. 30) precedes the noun *tok* ‘talk’ or, by extension, ‘language’. Yumplatok translates as ‘our way of talking’ in colloquial SAE and ‘tok blo yumi’ in modern Yumplatok, with the formerly 1DUINCL pronoun often now extended to 1PLINCL (for examples of this modern usage, see Tagai State College, 2013). Currently, young Torres Strait Islanders – and many older people – see Yumplatok as a distinctive identity marker, one to be proud of and one which distinguishes them as ‘different’ from the mainstream population (Watkin-Lui, 2010).

While there is still a power differential in schools and the wider community between SAE and Yumplatok, younger Torres Strait Islanders, fluent in both languages – and perhaps also with knowledge of their traditional language(s) – appear to be using them as an asset, claiming the power of “three way strong” (Angelo, Carter & McIntosh, 2010; Department of Education & Training, 2011, p. 4). In Sellwood’s own view, the younger generation see themselves as better positioned than their monolingual counterparts as they have the advantage of experience in multilingual contexts. Many realise that they are powerful communicators, who are perceptive in multilingual and cross-cultural contexts, skills highly valued in the modern multi-media and multi-varietal globalised communicative spaces.

## **ORIGINS OF YARRIE LINGO**

In comparison to Yumplatok, Yarrie Lingo – a creole spoken in the Aboriginal community of Yarrabah, near Cairns in far north Queensland – has different origins and a very different trajectory of recognition. Although a shift away from traditional languages at Yarrabah mission was noted almost a century ago (Thompson, 1989, p. 53), and a study comparing Yarrabah children’s speech to Australian English was undertaken almost half a century ago (Alexander,

1965), little recognition has been afforded this creole until relatively recently. Angelo (2004) made the case for recognising Yarrie Lingo as a creole by comparing it to criteria, including socio-historical, associated with other recognised creoles, as summarised below.

The development of Yarrie Lingo differs significantly to that of Yumplatok. People hailing from many parts of Queensland and at least 43 different traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language groups were removed from their lands to Yarrabah Mission from 1892 until 1967, bringing any pidgins/creoles acquired in their various homelands and/or through their subsequent labour in various industries (e.g. Bottoms, 2002; Denigan, 2008; Dutton, 1983; Hodes, 1998; Thompson, 1989). These pidgins/creoles included:

- i. Inland Queensland pidgin (and the related New South Wales and Northern Territory forms) associated with Aboriginal labour in the pastoral industry throughout large areas of Queensland;
- ii. Chinese pidgin associated with the Chinese in early Malaytown in Cairns; large scale maritime, agricultural and mining industries dominated by Chinese interests; the Chinese influx to the Palmer River gold rush, from where many mixed descent children were subsequently removed to Yarrabah;
- iii. Beach-la-mer and related pidgins/creoles of the South Pacific, associated with an original South Sea Islander mission staff member, Willie Ambrym; Kanaka – South Sea Islander indentured labour – in Queensland sugar and cotton plantations; maritime industries, especially collecting *bêche-de-mer* from the mid-1850s on;
- iv. Yumplatok (itself descended from a South Pacific pidgin), associated with Torres Strait labour in maritime and agricultural industries and on the railways; later population movements to Malaytown in Cairns; and
- v. Coastal Queensland pidgin, possibly, through transfer to Yarrabah of approximately 100 residents of Bogimbah mission from Fraser Island in 1904, transferred from Maryborough previously.

From 1900, Yarrabah Mission achieved Industrial School status under the Industrial and Reformatory Schools Act (1865). This Reformatory Act made provisions for children of Aboriginal or ‘half-caste’ mothers to be sent to an Industrial school such as Yarrabah solely on the grounds of their racial heritage. It encouraged active recruitment to Yarrabah of children who, until 1942, were housed in dormitories away from parents (Denigan, 2008, pp. 4–5). A complex tapestry of contact with – but also exclusion from – English-speakers was maintained through the demand for Yarrabah labour from a socially and legally separate mainstream society.

It is only in the last decade that increasing local language awareness has generated the term Yarrie Lingo, nomenclature recognised by speakers as fondly designating the contact language at Yarrabah (Yeatman et al., 2009). Ongoing language work at Yarrabah has



reinforced this newly coined name and increasingly positive speaker attitudes. The school fosters a pride in students' L1 through the recognition that students are adding SAE to Yarrie Lingo, their existing L1 (e.g. Cedric & Hoy in Queensland Studies Authority, 2011; Holzberger & Yeatman, 2010, 2012).

INVISIBILITY PROMOTED BY THE CREOLE-LEXIFIER RELATIONSHIP

Creoles such as Yarrie Lingo and Yumplatok are associated with English because of their historic connection to their lexifier, as well as their ongoing connection to the dominant standard. Where recognition of a creole is not fully achieved, these connections cause it to be considered a (poor) version of the lexifier. With respect to creole speakers “a goal of the education system is proficiency in standard English. But because of various difficulties for creole-speaking students, this goal has largely not been met” (Siegel, 2010, p. 167). The surface similarities of these two codes, emanating from the creole–lexifier relationship, and their classroom implications are examined further here.

As an English-lexified contact language, Yarrie Lingo appears to share linguistic material with its standardised lexifier language, SAE. For Yarrie Lingo speakers, this relationship causes considerable murkiness around the lexifier as a L2 target, encourages learners to transfer elements from L1 to L2, and introduces a rich source of L2 confusions (e.g. Siegel, 2010, p. 139). To communicate, people naturally utilise any (perceived) linguistic commonalities: Similarities are heard but differences are overlooked (Berry & Hudson, 2007, p. 7). However, in the case of a creole and its lexifier, apparently similar forms will always differ in each language, usually in many ways. A major issue for Yarrie Lingo speakers learning SAE is that their L1 has perceivable but unpredictable similarities with the L2 target and any similarities that do exist are only ever partial.

As an illustration, a Yarrie Lingo utterance is transcribed phonemically in Figure 1 below and analysed in Table 1. The context in which it was recorded was of three 5-year-old school students sitting with a teacher, commenting on pictures in a book. Immediately prior to making this utterance, one student has pointed out and counted some of the eggs visible in the illustration.

i	bin	go	get	det	eg	in	det	bakit
3SG	PAST	VERB	VERB	DET	NOUN	PREP	DET	NOUN

Figure 1. Phonemic transcription.

Every item that appears in this Yarrie Lingo utterance has an etymologically associated form in English, shown in Table 1 below. However, these ‘shared surface forms’ have differences in

meaning or function, exist in different inflectional paradigms, build into different words and enter into differently structured phrases, clauses and sentences. Some of the differences between Yarrrie Lingo and English exemplified from this sentence are presented in Table 1 below. Shared surface forms may also be pronounced differently and, although not identifiable in this example, will be employed in different socio-cultural contexts (Yeatman et al., 2009).

**Table 1. A comparative analysis of etymologically related forms in Yarrrie Lingo and English**

<b>Yarrrie Lingo</b>		<b>etymologically associated English item</b>	
<b>Description</b>	<b>Form</b>	<b>Form</b>	<b>Description</b>
3rd person singular pronoun	<i>i</i>	<i>he</i>	3rd person masculine nominative pronoun
invariant past marker preceding verbs; alternates with nasalised clitic form <i>-m</i> , e.g. <i>aim</i> 1SGPST ~ <i>ai bin</i> ; <i>wim</i> 1PLPST ~ <i>wi bin</i>	<i>bin</i>	<i>been</i>	a participle of irregular verb <i>be</i> with suppletive paradigm: present: <i>am, is, are</i> ; past: <i>was, were</i>
regular verb; non-past form <i>gowin</i>	<i>go</i>	<i>go</i>	irregular verb with suppletive simple past <i>went</i> , 3SGPRES <i>goes</i> , participles <i>gone, going</i>
regular verb; non-past form <i>getin</i>	<i>get</i>	<i>get</i>	irregular verb, simple past <i>got</i> , 3SGPRES <i>gets</i> , participles <i>got(ten), getting</i>
verb chain: motion verb <i>go</i> with transitive verb <i>get</i>	<i>go get</i>	<i>go (and) get</i>	coordinated imperative structure, either literal as in 'go and fetch', or pejorative (medio-)passive, as in 'be gone and be mistreated'
invariant demonstrative (here referring to previously established plural referent)	<i>det</i>	<i>that</i>	singular distal demonstrative determiner with grammatically obligatory plural form <i>those</i>
invariant noun (here, plural number established through preceding discourse, but plural number can also be marked with plural determiner <i>dem</i> )	<i>eg</i>	<i>egg</i>	singular count noun with grammatically obligatory plural form <i>eggs</i>
preposition, no locative/allative distinction; alternate form <i>inna</i> used without following determiner	<i>in</i>	<i>in</i>	preposition, usually locative, sometimes allative, partially synonymous with 'into', 'inside'
invariant demonstrative (here referring to contextually established singular referent)	<i>det</i>	<i>that</i>	singular distal demonstrative determiner with grammatically obligatory plural form <i>those</i>
invariant noun (here, singular number established through context)	<i>bakit</i>	<i>bucket</i>	singular count noun with grammatically obligatory plural form <i>buckets</i>

Shared surface forms act as clues for speakers of either variety, and as an aid to partial but imperfect understanding of the 'other' variety. This facilitates some guessing at meaning. However, Yarrrie Lingo is a separate language to SAE. An SAE-only speaker would not have the language competence to continue describing in Yarrrie Lingo the contents of the above mentioned picture book with confidently formulated grammatical Yarrrie Lingo sentences, let alone to undertake decontextualised and abstract learning through Yarrrie Lingo. Yet teaching staff are rarely creole-speakers themselves and are not placed in the position of L2 learners in Yarrrie Lingo-speaking classroom contexts. Therefore the degree of difference between this creole and SAE, and the subsequent L2 learning needs in the classroom are often invisible to educators (Holzberger & Yeatman, 2012).

The creole-lexifier relationship thus blurs the L2 target and the extent of L2 learning required for speakers of Yarrrie Lingo to acquire SAE. Yet, in order to acquire L2 target features, learners must have noticed them. In more clear-cut L2 acquisition scenarios, the L2 target is already

separate so its features become salient to learners more automatically, often by lack of comprehensibility (e.g. Siegel, 2010, pp. 220–222). Ideally, then, Yarrrie Lingo speakers would experience classroom teaching which recognises their particular L2 learning needs, increases the salience of L2 target features and explicitly teaches them. For this, Yarrrie Lingo speakers, like all creole speakers learning SAE, depend on their classroom teachers (Angelo & Fraser, 2008; Berry & Hudson, 1997). However, a cloak of invisibility shrouds schools' abilities to assist Indigenous creole-speakers in learning SAE, as outcomes are likely to be represented as literacy and numeracy outcomes, disguising the role of SAE proficiency in students' performance (Angelo, 2012a; McIntosh & Angelo, 2011; Wigglesworth et al., 2011).

Invisibility of these language factors means that in targeted language programs in pre-service and inservice teacher training, curriculum materials and teaching resources can be neglected or just sporadically acknowledged (McTaggart & Curro, 2009; Sellwood & Angelo, 2010). Many teaching practices neglect L2 learner needs, as they belong to the so-called “English-as-the-mother-tongue” teaching tradition (Craig, 2001, p. 166, as cited in Siegel, 2010, p. 168). As a result, understandings are required about Indigenous students' language backgrounds, multilingualism, second language acquisition, language analysis and the role of language in (classroom) learning, not just in the form of information but also the assistance to apply understandings in real contexts so as to develop educators' own practical abilities (Angelo et al., 2010; Carter, 2011; Frazer, 2012).

## REVEALING INVISIBILITY

Many layers of invisibility exist around Indigenous creoles, reinforcing to speakers themselves, to their teachers and to policy makers that these languages must be of little or no significance. Such invisibility can be perpetuated through the marginalising effect of dominant discourses. To illustrate this, a close reading of a current and significant document, *Our Land Our Languages* (OLOL) (HOR, 2012), observes how the invisibility of Indigenous creoles is manifested through less position, priority and prominence in this text.

Most of the 214 pages of the OLOL report focus on traditional Indigenous languages. Attention to challenges and opportunities for traditional Indigenous languages is necessary and welcome. Yet, the report's primary focus on traditional Indigenous languages as well as its secondary focus on Standard Australian English (SAE) exists precisely because of the processes of language contact and language shift which have generated contact language varieties, including creoles. The loss of traditional Indigenous languages and a lack of SAE proficiency garner the majority of the OLOL report's attention, but the vernaculars spoken in their stead lack prominence. Although some acknowledgement of Indigenous creoles and/or contact languages is apparent in the report, this is uneven. They are positioned marginally, despite one section on “Emerging languages” (HOR, 2012, pp. 35–38). The OLOL report's

focus on traditional languages and on SAE maintains and validates their prestige, eclipsing the significance of contact vernaculars, including creoles like Yumplatok and Yarrrie Lingo.

The visible and prestigious languages in the OLOL report are traditional Indigenous languages and – to a lesser extent – SAE, not only due to their share of text space, but also due to their share of the action. Recommendations abound for revitalising, maintaining and raising the visibility of traditional Indigenous languages. Similarly, there are plentiful recommendations about teaching SAE and enhancing access to services in SAE. However, there are no recommendations solely about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creoles or other contact varieties. They too should be targeted for recommendations, for instance, further research, description, awareness raising, etc. They should not be absent.

Throughout the OLOL report, the terminology ‘Indigenous languages’ mostly refers exclusively to traditional Indigenous languages, although this definition is not stated explicitly. In this manner, chapter 2, entitled “The role of Indigenous languages”, contains statements about Indigenous languages, such as “Indigenous languages keep people connected to culture and this strengthens feelings of pride and self-worth” (HOR, 2012, p. 8). Such references in this chapter are not inclusive of the creoles spoken by Indigenous Australians: The OLOL report does not *overtly* exclude them here, but the surrounding context indicates that traditional Indigenous languages only are meant at this point. This is unfortunate given that any language is connected to speakers’ sense of self-worth, as described by Sellwood herself above. As vernaculars spoken by Indigenous Australians, creoles are highly relevant in their speakers’ lives.. No adjective such as ‘traditional’, ‘original’ or ‘heritage’ flags that the term ‘Indigenous languages’ will not refer to creoles and other contact languages, although the scope of the term ‘Indigenous’ is explained (HOR, 2012, p. 2). A definition of the term ‘Indigenous languages’ is neither expected nor given due to the invisibility of Indigenous creoles, thus further propagating this invisibility.

The taxonomy – or customary usage – of terms pertaining to languages spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can, then, marginalise creoles such as Yumplatok and Yarrrie Lingo. Their commonplace but inexplicit omission from the expression ‘Indigenous languages’ renders statements about ‘Indigenous languages’ ambiguous, and this lack of clarity is a matter of concern in documents and reports. Creoles serve as vernaculars and lingua francas for many Indigenous Australians. As L1s or important modes for regional communication, they need to be factored into some Indigenous language initiatives. However, phrasings such as “Indigenous language interpreters and translators”, in Recommendation 26 of the OLOL report (HOR, 2012, p. xxi) could be interpreted broadly or narrowly: A broad reading factors in all vernaculars, whether traditional or contact languages; a narrow reading includes only traditional Indigenous vernaculars. If ‘Indigenous language’, in Recommendation 26, is construed in a manner encouraged by much of the

report, then a narrow reading would be fostered, with Indigenous creoles remaining invisible and unserved.

On occasion, the OLOL report does overtly refer to contact languages – or creoles. Although these sporadic mentions probably do serve to raise their visibility, they also introduce possible (mis)interpretations by their very intermittency. When contact languages only occur in the wording of one recommendation out of thirty, readers could infer that contact languages must be particularly important for this individual recommendation and less important for all the other recommendations. In the OLOL report, only Recommendation 14 includes contact languages in its wording, whereas the authors calculate that contact languages are a factor in over half the recommendations. Thus non-targeted and uneven mentions can increase the invisibility of contact languages as readers may understand intermittent references as intentional and significant, and the more frequent absences as purposeful and meaningful too.

References to contact languages – sporadic or frequent – may further exacerbate invisibility if these are under-differentiated, leaving fundamental misconceptions unaddressed. As this paper outlines, creoles are subject to multiple misapprehensions: As English-lexified creoles, both Yumplatok and Yarrie Lingo have – erroneously – been considered poor English, which no traditional Indigenous language ever has. In the OLOL report, the “Learning in first language” section (HOR, 2012, pp. 113–120) recommends L1 instruction. A single committee comment (number 4.161) mentions contact languages alongside traditional languages as instructional mediums. This has the appearance of inclusivity, yet at a deeper level it ignores the actuality of creoles. Where language awareness is in its early stages, an English-lexified creole may not even be recognised as a full and separate language, or as a linguistic entity capable of delivering education. Understanding and incorporating these contextual realities is imperative, as the invisibility of creoles hinges greatly on social attitudes.

A deep and justified concern for traditional Indigenous languages is palpable in the OLOL report. The impact on lives and traditional languages of violent contact histories, removals from land or family, and high-handed policies, reverberate throughout. The attachment of traditional languages to lands and islands, peoples and spirituality is obvious. The urgent need to maintain and revitalise traditional languages is tangible. The place for contact languages, however, is difficult to find. Contact languages such as Wumpurrarni English (Morrison & Disbray, 2008) and Gurindji Kriol (Meakins & Wigglesworth, 2013) have been shown to function as reservoirs for traditional languages, serving to keep at least some elements current. So even with regard to traditional language initiatives, ignoring contact languages is ill-advised. But speakers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creoles exist in their own right too. Neither Yumplatok nor Yarrie Lingo could conceivably be called a ‘non-Indigenous language’, as their L1 speakership is probably entirely Indigenous. They have

grown out of Indigenous peoples' histories, express Indigenous cultural practices and are spoken on Indigenous lands and islands.

## CONCLUSION

Contact languages spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been dubbed “the elephant in the room” (Angelo, 2012b, p. 1) because of their invisible yet great significance. Indigenous creoles – and Indigenous contact languages more generally – are ignored, obscured, marginalised or under-differentiated in discourses, ideologies, paradigms, understandings, documents and materials involving Indigenous languages and education. Their invisibility indicates how understandings of Indigenous language ecologies across Australia need to be augmented to confront an ongoing *Lingua Nullius*.

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## ENDNOTES

- i Terminology relating to learners of English as an other, additional, foreign or second language/dialect is in a state of transition currently in Australia. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has selected English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D). Policies, courses and resources are currently migrating away from previous terminology to reflecting this.