Australian National University

The changing ecology of Australian (Indigenous) languages

AUSTRALASIAN AID CONFERENCE 2018

Panel 2g – Language rights to meet the Sustainable Development Goals

Jane Simpson

ARC CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR
THE DYNAMICS OF LANGUAGE

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge and celebrate the First Australians on whose traditional lands we meet and work, and whose cultures are among the oldest continuing cultures in human history.

Indigenous languages in Australia

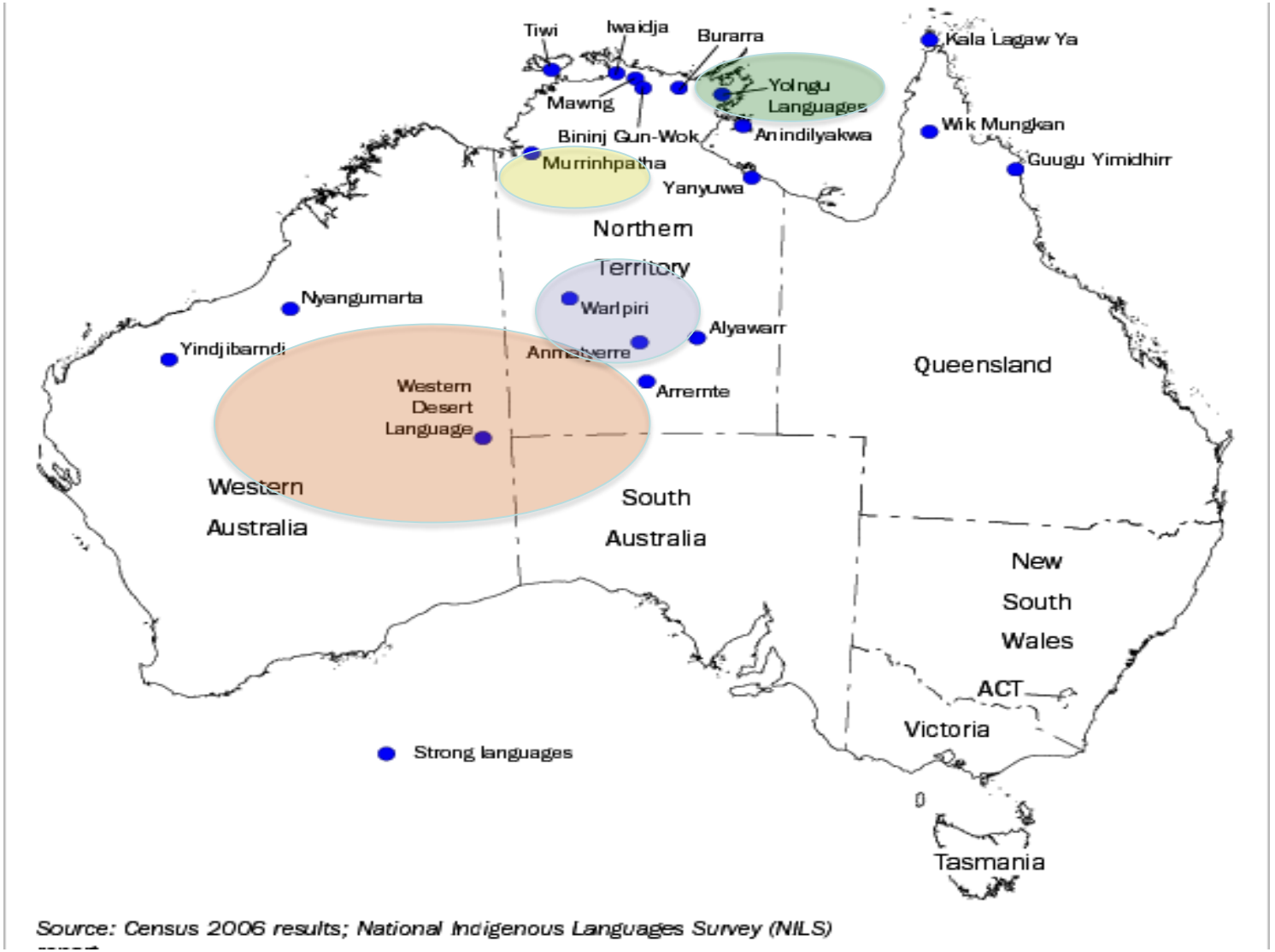
Three situations

- ***Language as means of communication***
  - *Traditional Indigenous languages*
    - still spoken by children in communities
    - in the diaspora
  - *New Indigenous languages*
- ***Language as emblem***
  - *Traditional Indigenous languages*
    - no longer spoken in everyday talk

Situation 1

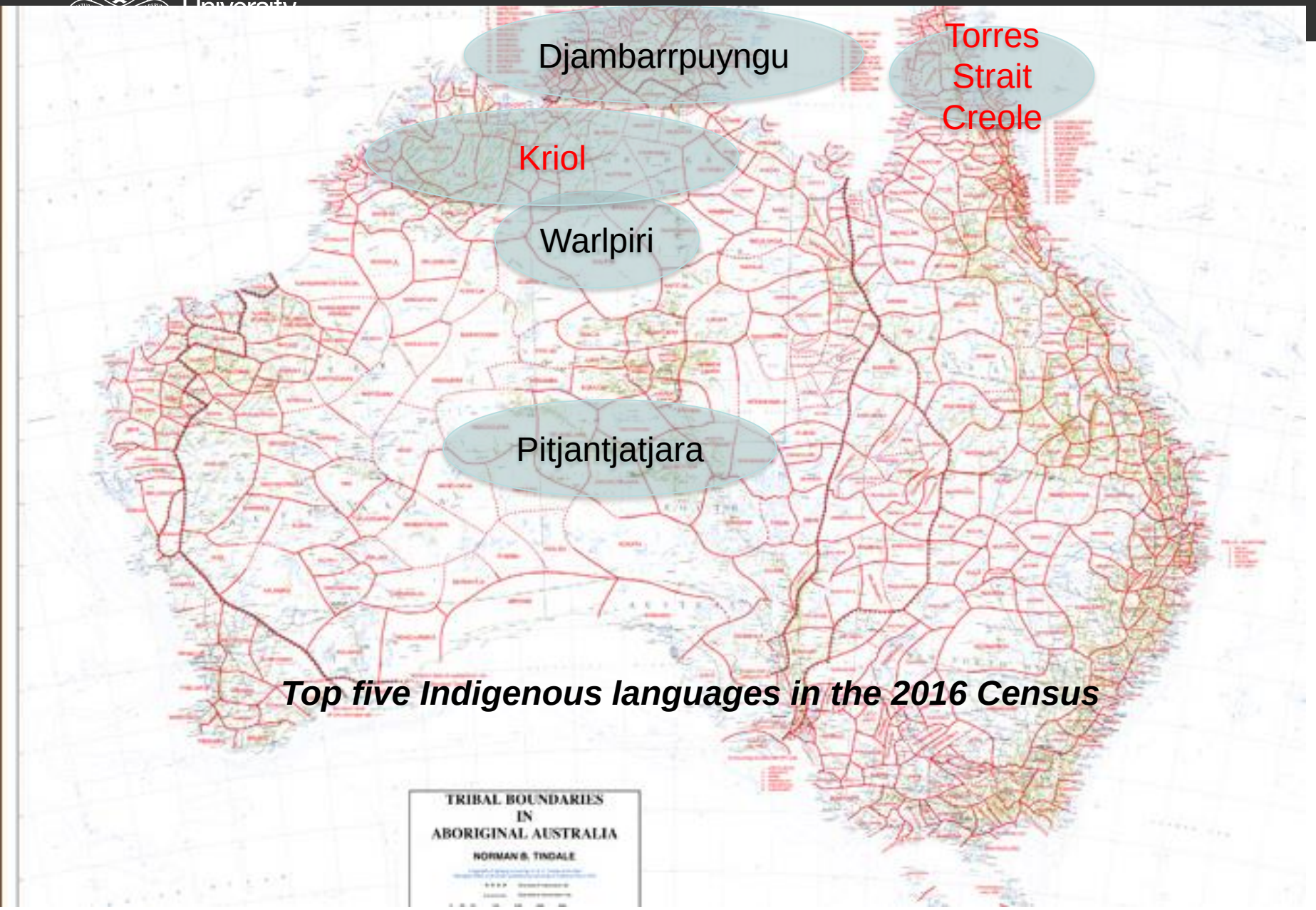
- "Strong languages" = languages of everyday talk, still spoken by children
- Finding data
  - Census Problems:
    - under-reporting of people in remote areas
    - lack of knowledge of names
    - reporting of emblem languages rather than languages of everyday talk

Situation 1: strong languages



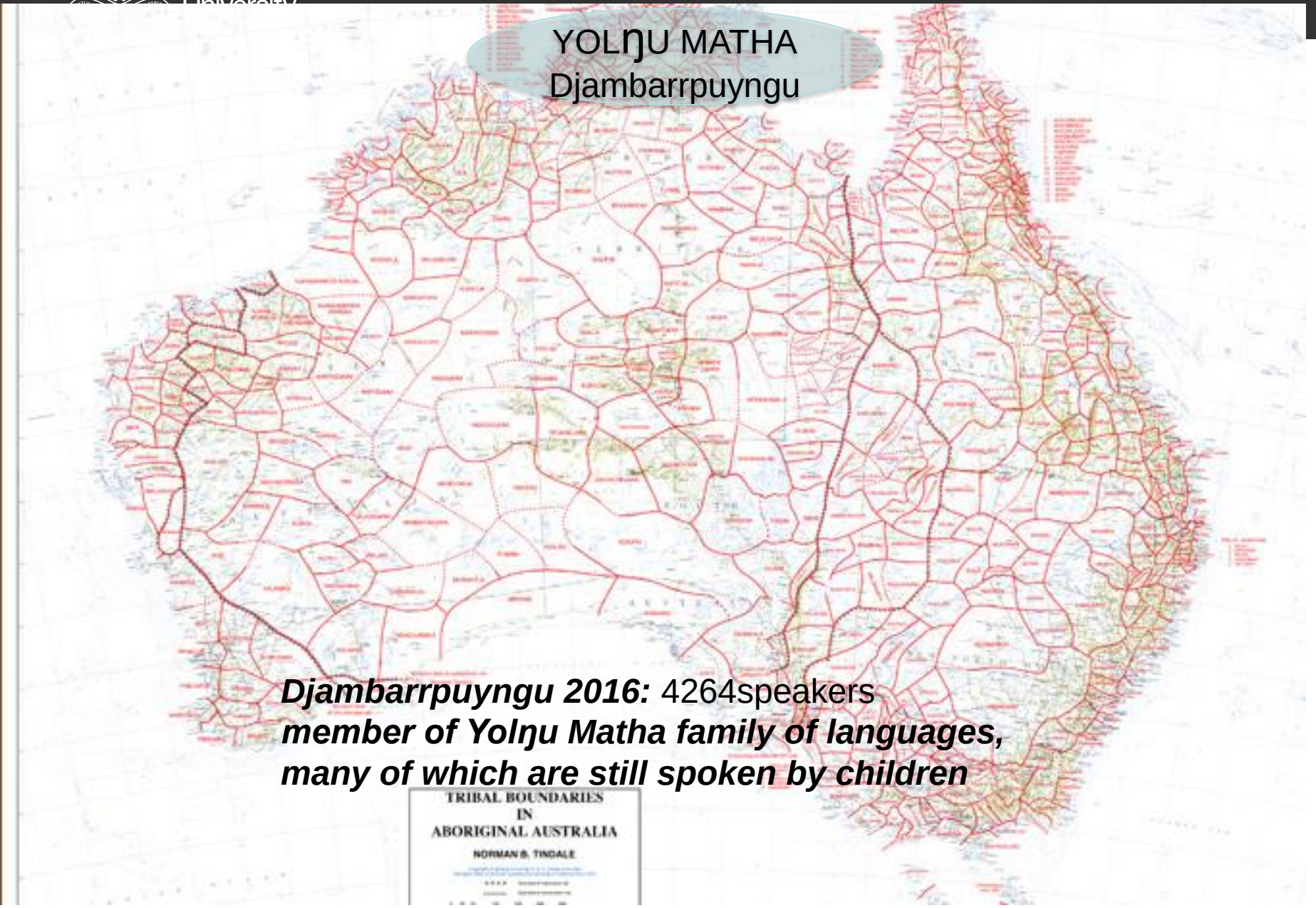
FEATURE ARTICLE 3: LANGUAGES OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES – A UNIQUELY AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE: Kazuko Obata and Jason Lee, http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/1301.0Feature+Article42009%E2%80%9310

2016 Census

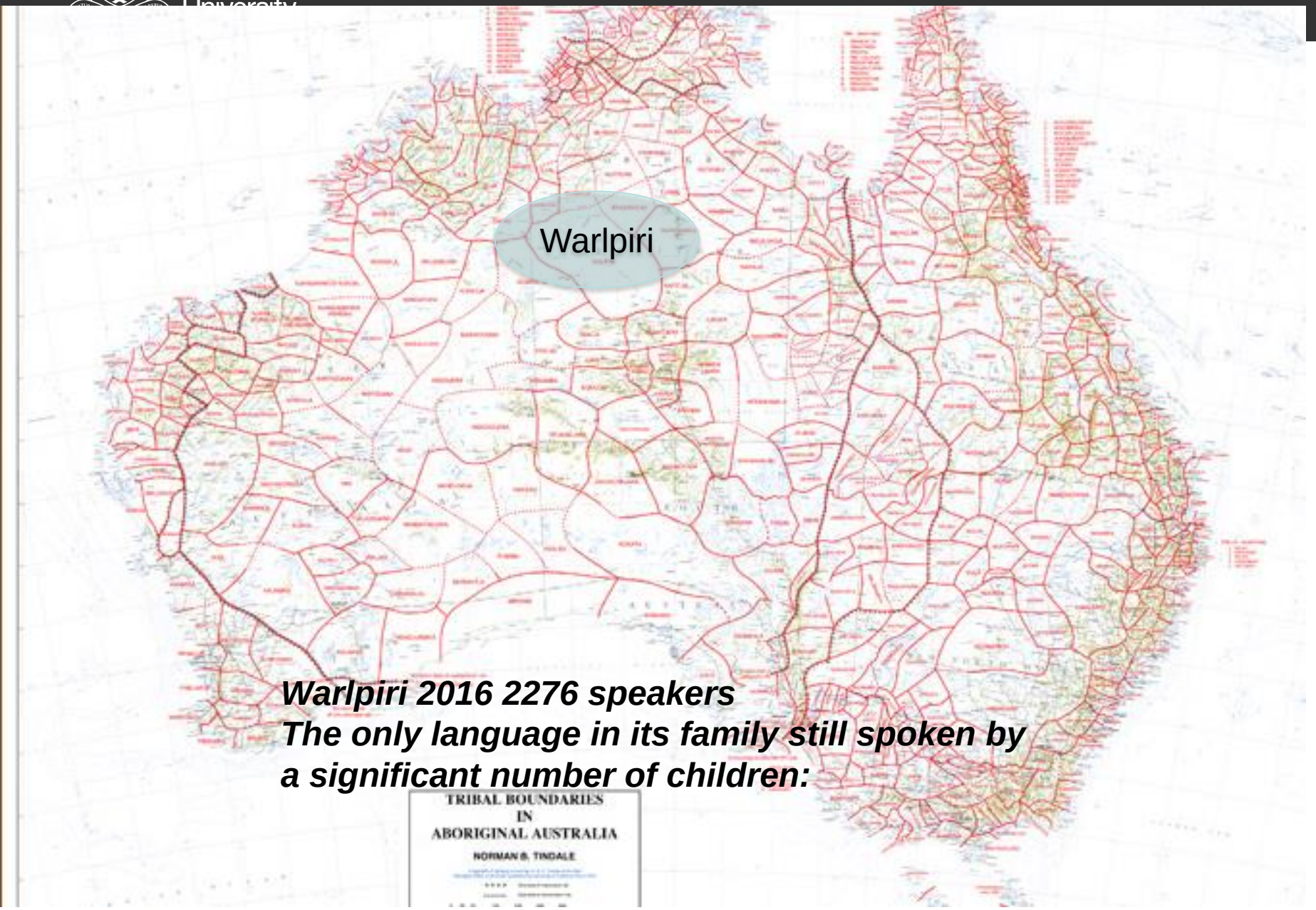


Top five Indigenous languages in the 2016 Census

YOLŋU MATHA
Djambarrpuyngu



Djambarrpuyngu 2016: 4264speakers
member of Yolŋu Matha family of languages, many of which are still spoken by children



Warlpiri 2016 2276 speakers
The only language in its family still spoken by a significant number of children:

Pitjantjatjara: 2016 census: 3054 speakers member of Western Desert family of languages, many of which are still spoken by children

Australian National University

Education Rights

1. The right to an appropriate education
2. The right for communities to have a say in how their children are educated
3. The right to maintain Indigenous languages

Recognised by the *Australian Language Policy (1987)* and *The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (signed 2009)

The right to an appropriate education

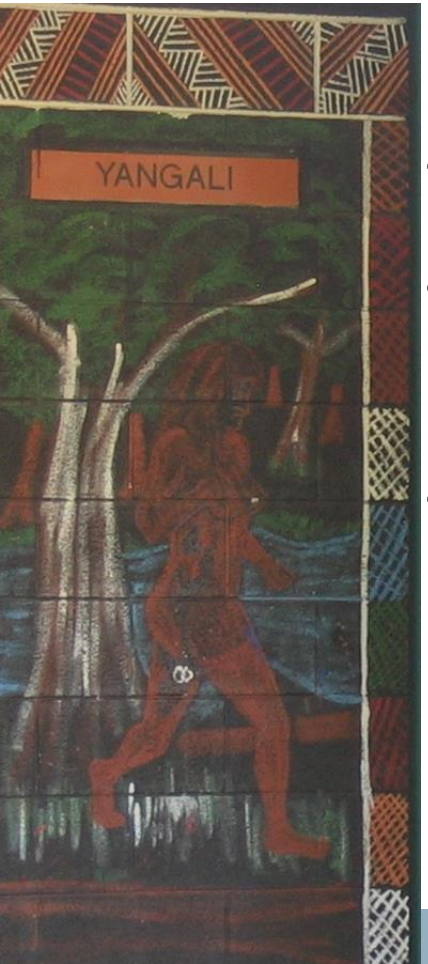
Children who do not speak the dominant language are at a great disadvantage in classrooms where they are taught only in the dominant language (UNESCO 2003:14)

Australia officially recognised the effectiveness of mother tongue medium instruction in various reports in 1984, 1987 and again in 1991, which support international evidence that:

> *Mother tongue medium instruction programmes have no necessary detrimental effect on the learning of the dominant language and of mainstream subjects;* ***in fact they may enhance learning in all curricular areas***

Australian National University

The right for communities to have a say in how their children are educated



- Improves community knowledge of benefits of education
- Increased community support
- Lack of community involvement may lead to failure
- If the community is not involved, it is more likely that the children will not learn English and mainstream subjects well.

The right to maintain Indigenous Languages

International Covenant on Civil and Political Right and the UNESCO *General Conference of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity protect the rights of Indigenous people to keep and strengthen their languages* **(Articles 26 & 27)**

Language rights are only as strong as the implementation of relevant policies. However, without explicit protection in law, Indigenous communities have no control over government policies for matters that go to the heart of their children's education and the maintenance of their languages.

The right to maintain Indigenous Languages

International Covenant on Civil and Political Right and the UNESCO *General Conference of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity protect the rights of Indigenous people to keep and strengthen their languages*

Mother tongue medium education programmes in schools are recognised as an important part of effective strategies to maintain Indigenous languages.

Problems in Indigenous schools

Students

- Students know insufficient English to understand classroom instruction given in standard Australian English.

Teachers

- There are few Indigenous teachers.
- There is little professional development for Indigenous teachers to teach in their first languages.
- Schools often have no ESL/EFL or EAL/D trained teachers.

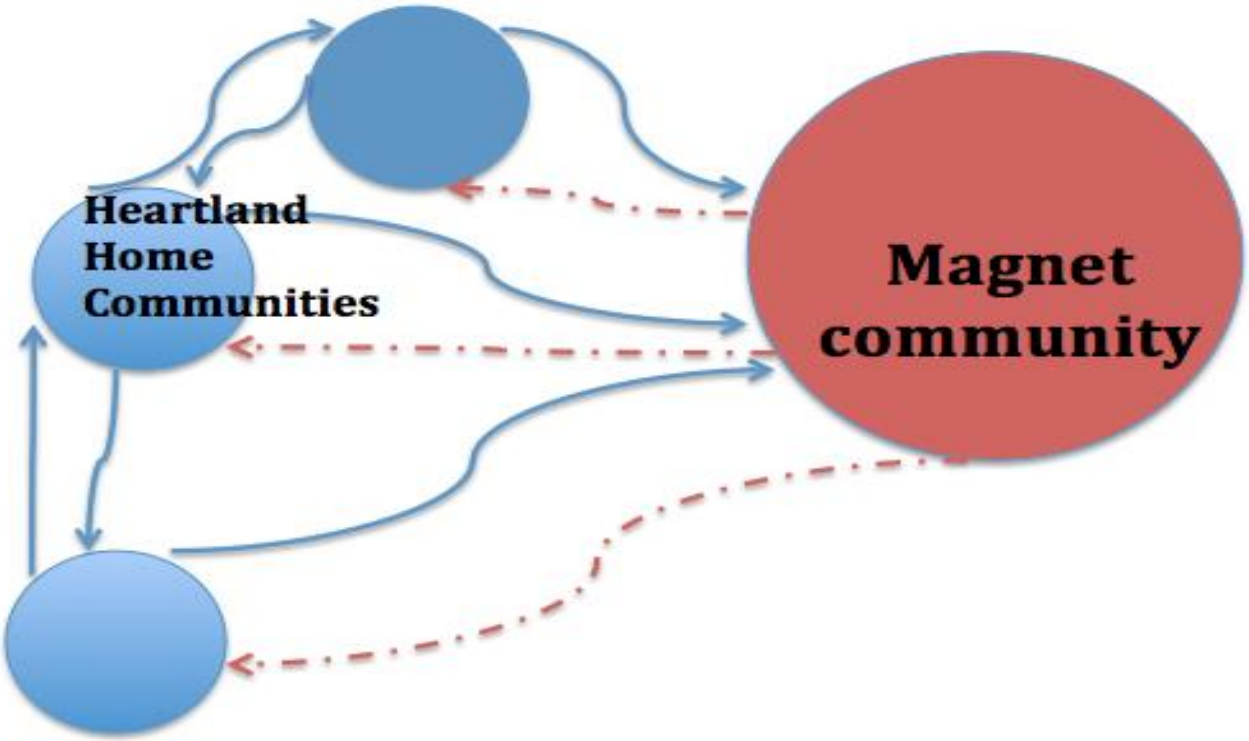
Curriculum and assessment

- There is little support for developing rich curricula in Indigenous languages for all school levels.
- National assessment is in English and takes little account of L2 students.

Materials

- There is little material in Indigenous languages that will engage children (especially compared with materials available in English).

'Orbiting Diaspora' (Burke 2013)



Yolŋu – beginning of diaspora

2004: 5000 Yolŋu in three distinct types of settings:

- small towns: former mission settlements in Arnhem Land of between 500 and 2000 people: majority of Yolŋu.
- homeland centres. These are family groups living on their traditional country ("homelands"), and usually part of the time in the small towns.
- **Darwin: more than 10% of Yolŋu**

- Christie, Michael and Greatorex, John (2006). Yolngu life in the Northern Territory of Australia: The significance of community and social capital *[earlier version published 2004: Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration Volume 26, Issue 1, 2004]*. <http://www.cdu.edu.au/centres/inc/pdf/Yolngulife.pdf>.

Warlpiri diaspora communities (Burke 2013)

2009-2010

- 900 of an estimated 3600 Warlpiri including:
  - 250 in Alice Springs
  - 100 in Darwin, the capital
  - 60 in Adelaide, the closest large city

Burke, Paul (2013). Indigenous diaspora and the prospects for cosmopolitan 'orbiting': The Warlpiri case. *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology,* 14 (4), 304-322

.

'Orbiting'

- Varied situations
  - "Warlpiri camp" (Alice Springs, Katherine)
  - households from different communities scattered across suburbs in Adelaide
- 'Orbiting' may involve long stays in more than one place.
- Has consequences for language use

Reasons for relocation - Warlpiri

- secondary education
- health e.g. dialysis
- marriage
- seeking alcohol
- alcohol rehabilitation centres
- aged-care facilities
- jail
- only 20 people in fulltime work

Education in the diaspora

Need a critical mass for education system to recognise language need.

Alice Springs:

- independent Aboriginal school has longterm recognition of Warlpiri as a school language.

Elsewhere:

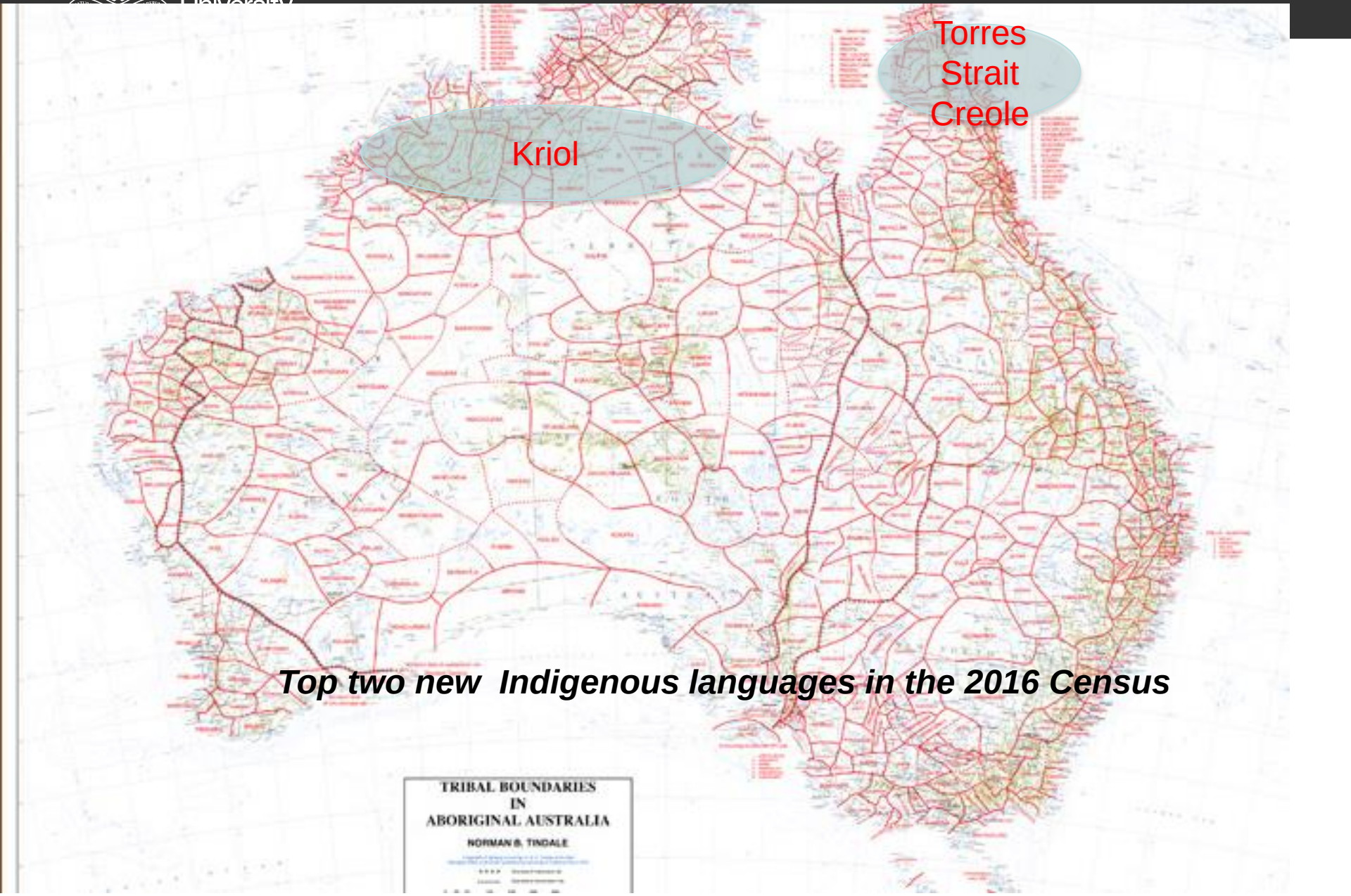
recognition is sporadic

often not based on understanding of language as means-of-communication or emblem

Situation 2: New Indigenous languages arising from contact of traditional languages with English

- Types of language
  - Pidgin (second language speakers)
  - Creole (L1 speakers, one language dominates)
  - Mixed language (L1 speakers, both languages)
- Names for particular new languages
  - *Kriol*
  - *Yumpla Tok (or Torres Strait Creole)*
  - *Light Warlpiri*
  - *Camp English*…….

2016 Census Indigenous languages



Top two new Indigenous languages in the 2016 Census

New Indigenous languages

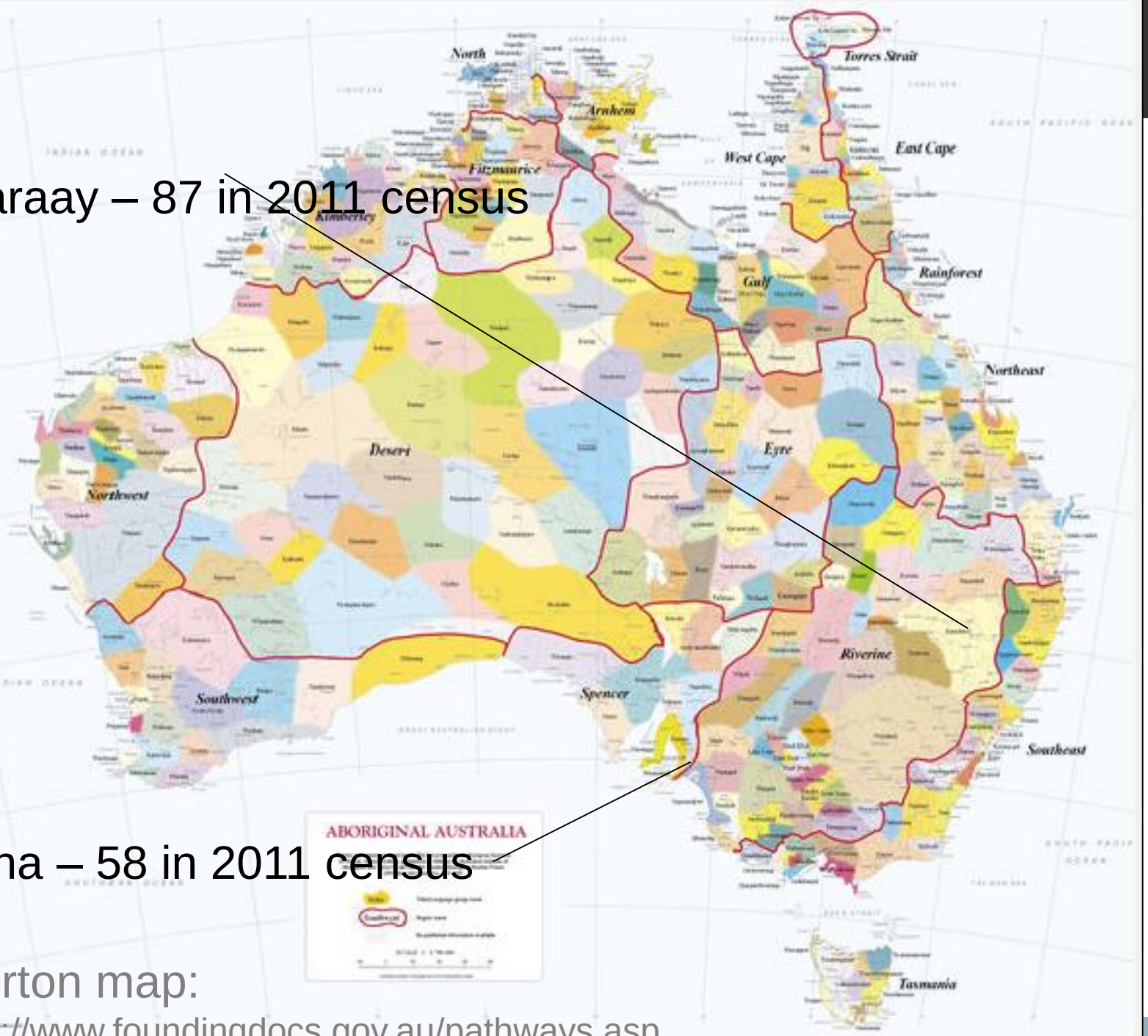
- The number of speakers of new Indigenous languages is greatly under-estimated.
- This can cause serious miscommunication.
- It has major implications for education policy, curriculum and practices.

Situation 3: Language revival

- After traditional Indigenous languages are no longer spoken by children as their first language..

Most of Australia's Indigenous languages are no longer used as every day means of communication

Gamilaraay – 87 in 2011 census



Kaurna – 58 in 2011 census

Horton map:
http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/pathways.asp

Language as emblem: Reclaiming a language

- Kaurna (Adelaide) is probably the most successful example in Australia
- Last first language speaker died ca 1929
- On-going work on language revival since early 1990s
- Considerable resources (community, university, state and Federal) put into the reclamation from old sources

KaurnaWarraPintyandi

Kaurna Welcome

Marni naa pudni Kaurna yarta-ana.
'Welcome to Kaurna country.'
(Lewis Yerloburka O'Brien)

WARNING

Kaurna language and culture is the property of the Kaurna community. Users of this site are urged to use the language with respect. This means making every effort to get the pronunciation, spelling and grammar right.

Kaurna people reserve the right to monitor the use of the language in public. Users of this site should consult with Kaurna people about use of the language in the public domain. This can be achieved by contacting us (c/-taylor.power-smith@adelaide.edu.au or rob.amery@adelaide.edu.au). Your request will be discussed at the next monthly KWP meeting.

I Understand

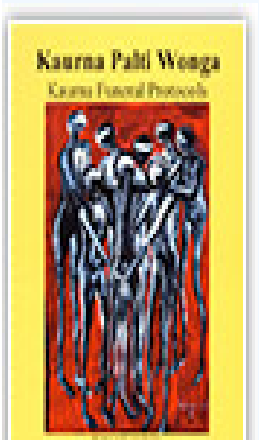
2012 Kaurna Language Courses (Stage 1 (Year 11) & Stage 2 (Year 12) Beginners

Kaurna Course in the northern suburbs

WHEN: Monday evenings 4:30pm untill 7:30pm

WHERE: Salisbury High School

Modern Kaurna materials



Kaurna Palti Wonga
(Funeral protocols book + CD)

Free for Kaurna people
Wholesale $15 - RRP $20 ($18

Kaurna Stickers

Wholesale $1 - RRP $2.50

Available from

- KWP c/- Rob Amery, University

Placenames in the City of Adelaide

Pronunciation of Significant Sites	
1 Pirltawardli (Park 1) 'possum place'	**2** Pardipardinyilla (Park 2) 'swimming place'
3 Kantarilla (Park 3) 'kandara root place'	**4** Kangatilla (Park 4) 'kangatta berry place'
5 Ngampa Yarta (Park 5) 'ngampa root ground'	**6** Nantu Wama (Park 6) 'horse plain'

Language as emblem

- Respect and identity
  - as manifested in..
    - Language courses in and out of school
    - Welcome to country
    - Web presence
    - Place-names …

The first step

- Recognising that we must address languages needs, if:
  - children are to have an education that meets the longer-term goal of all Australians having good educations (including access to the dominant language, and access to heritage language)
  - Australian Indigenous communities are to be able to maintain their languages.

Thank you!

Jane Simpson

jane.simpson@anu.edu.au

ARC CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR
THE DYNAMICS OF LANGUAGE