Chapter 14
Code-Mixing as a Means of Sustaining an Aboriginal Language: The Case of Ngarrindjeri in the Lower Murray Region of South Australia

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Abstract In his book *Two-way Aboriginal Schooling* Stephen Harris writes about the threat of code-mixing and code switching to the very survival of Aboriginal languages in the remote Northern Territory. He argues that the interference of English in the mixed speech of traditional language speakers challenges the social and cultural functions of their languages. He therefore advocates for domain separation, following on from the writings of Joshua Fishman (*The rise and fall of the ethnic revival*. Mouton, Berlin, 1985) and Jim Cummins (Review of Educational Research 49:222–251, 1979). Harris proposes a preferred option of learning Aboriginal languages and English as two viable yet separate systems of communication, particularly in bilingual school settings. In this paper I share a contrasting perspective from the language revival context; in particular, the survival and subsequent revival of the Ngarrindjeri language in the south of South Australia (SA). I argue that code-mixing has actually helped sustain Aboriginal languages such as Ngarrindjeri throughout the assimilation era of the 1930s–1960s. The mixing of two very different languages has enabled the dominant language, English, to serve as a vehicle of communication, while the Ngarrindjeri words that 'pepper' English (numbering up to 450) have sustained that Aboriginal language and, more importantly, maintained a unique heritage and proud identity. In fact, the resultant relexified English has been more than a badge of identity; it has served a real functional purpose: to allow the transmission of information among Ngarrindjeri people while excluding outsiders from the conversation. However, now that Ngarrindjeri people are actively reviving their language, the women in particular strive to leave English behind, and once again speak their language in full sentences without the shackles of English.

Keywords Ngarrindjeri · Nunga English · Code-mixing · Language revival

> A long time ago my ancestors walked all over this land. Then the white man came speaking in a foreign language. My people were told by the white man: you must not speak, sing or teach your children your language. So we learned to hide our language and our secrets from the white man and now we must learn our language and teach our children. There is an

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> awakening of pride in my people as the first people of this land. So today our language must once more take its place beside the many languages of this country. (Rhonda Agius *FATSIL Newsletter* 2001)

Introduction

In contrast to the Kaurna language of the Adelaide Plains, Ngarrindjeri is an Aboriginal language that never went to sleep. As the Elder Rhonda Agius explains, 'We learned to hide our language and our secrets from the white man'. In this chapter I argue that it was the socio-cognitive process of 'translanguaging', or what I am calling 'code-mixing', that saved the Ngarrindjeri language from falling into a deep sleep. The Ngarrindjeri people, who are well known in South Australia for their pride, and strength in numbers, have collectively ensured that their language continues to survive, and even thrive, despite the various attempts by 'the white man' to assimilate its people over many decades since colonisation.

To use the Garcia and Wei (2014) definition of translanguaging, the Ngarrindjeri people used their language and English 'as an integrated system', often using the two languages simultaneously. Although the two languages have different grammars and sound systems, the Ngarrindjeri people continued to use them together within the domains of family and community life.

In this chapter I address the ideas introduced to the Aboriginal education debate by Harris, namely the concept of domain separation, as a response to the likelihood of code-mixing. Harris espoused domain separation for remote Aboriginal schools, following from the writings of Fishman (1985) and Cummins (1979), who suggest that minority languages are better protected by keeping their use separate, rather than 'mixing' them with the dominant language.[1] My discussion will focus on contemporary language revival in South Australia, rather than bilingual education in the remote Northern Territory (NT) in the 1980 and 1990s. I do not criticise Harris's deductions. As he himself says of his (1990) study:

> This study is confined to remote communities, because they are the places where the notion of 'two-way schooling', or interchangeably 'both-ways' schooling', is being talked about. But because there are significant continuities within all Aboriginal groups in Australia, it should help focus on what schooling potentially holds for all Aboriginal people in terms of culture destruction or culture maintenance. Having said this, it is recognised that there are always dangers in overgeneralising… (Harris, 1990, p. 2).

I hope to demonstrate in this chapter that revival was probably one of those many different situations that Harris did not include in his general argument.

My thesis is that the mixing of the two codes—the dominant English language and the suppressed Ngarrindjeri language, within the speech of Nungas[2] throughout the assimilation era from the 1930s to around 1960—is what saved the Ngarrindjeri language from falling into a deep sleep. This contrasts with the thesis of Harris's (1990) book with regards to code-mixing and the threat it poses to the ultimate survival of Aboriginal languages and cultures in the remote NT:

> The struggle against cultural absorption, the felt need of Aborigines to live in two social worlds, and the search for a design of bicultural school which allows the learning of a second culture without destroying or demeaning the first, are the interest of this book (Harris, 1990, p. 1).

In this chapter I will provide some historical context for the Ngarrindjeri language and its speakers, and offer some insight into their language and its use over time, starting from the early mission era to the present. Much of this era includes the unashamed use of code-mixing. The Ngarrindjeri people are a 'water people' whose homelands cover the lower Murray River, the lakes, sea and Coorong region of South Australia (SA). So I use the metaphor of *yakalun*, meaning 'the flowing (of waves) backwards and forwards' to describe the way the Ngarrindjeri language has 'ebbed and flowed' over the years. Since I have been actively involved as the 'support linguist', working continuously with the Ngarrindjeri community since 2003, I can share many positive examples to support my argument concerning language mixing, language change and the possibilities of language revival.

One of these positive stories refers to something that happened just days ago. We launched the Third Edition of the *Ngarrindjeri Dictionary*, in the presence of local councillors, politicians and many excited adults and children, on May 28th 2021 at the Port Elliot Kindergarten. It was a Reconciliation Week event, which began with the Master of Ceremonies (MC) telling everybody to *Tau yanun* ('stop talking') so the formalities could proceed. All Nungas know what *Tau yanun* means, so there was instant silence. The MC, Jade McHughes, then confidently proceeded to give a 'Welcome to Country' speech in full Ngarrindjeri with impeccable pronunciation and grammar. The MC is a respected Ngarrindjeri woman and future leader who has completed a Certificate III in Learning an Endangered Aboriginal Language and a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. She is now fully qualified to teach her Ngarrindjeri language to adults within any Registered Training Organisation that teaches her language. She is also an Aboriginal Community Education Officer at the local Port Elliot Primary School, where she teaches children her language, and is the Chairperson of MIPAAC (Miwi-inyeri Pelepi-ambi Aboriginal Corporation) . MIPAAC is the organisation (largely run by women) that coordinates all the Ngarrindjeri language and cultural activities in the southern Fleurieu region of SA, with government support.[3]

The Ngarrindjeri dictionary we launched (Gale et al., 2020) is the third edition we have produced since revival activities began in 1985. It contains 4265 head words, and each word has information about the written and oral sources, the etymology, cultural and linguistic notes of interest, synonyms, sentence examples and any dialect variants. In the Foreword, 10 women tell their own personal journeys of re-learning their language and what it means to them. At the back there is a Finder List, from English-to-Ngarrindjeri, to help people search for words, followed by pages of 'Useful expressions', plus a detailed explanation about how to create new words for modern day purposes, along with some examples, such as *yu:l-amaldi* for 'surfer' (from *yu:li* 'wave' + *amaldi* 'person').[4]

Background

Long before any written resources were prepared, Ngarrindjeri was a thriving language, spoken from the tip of the Fleurieu Peninsula, north to Murray Bridge on the Murray River, and south along the Coorong towards Kingston in the south-east. It was spoken by up to 18 different clans, each with their own dialect. The Ramindjeri dialect of the Encounter Bay region was first recorded by the German missionary Meyer, who listed 1760 words and published a sketch grammar in 1843. By 1859 the negative effects of colonisation saw the need for the Raukkan mission to be established, by George Taplin, on the shores of Lake Alexandrina, under the auspices of the Aborigines Friends Association. In 1864 Taplin published the first portions of the Bible ever to appear in an Aboriginal language in a dedicated volume. Then in 1879 Taplin published an ethnography and an English-to-Narrinyeri wordlist. Taplin's wordlist and Meyer's work provide the key primary sources for subsequent revival activities and resource production. The invaluable sentence examples from Meyer not only give insight into the complex grammar of Ramindjeri, with its bound and free pronouns and anti-passive constructions, but also into the colonial circumstances of the time.

The last fluent speakers of Ngarrindjeri were recorded in the late 1930s to early 1940s, when they shared full texts of different genres with the anthropologists N.B. Tindale and later Ronald and Catherine Berndt. These same texts were the subject of research for an Australian Research Council (ARC) project grant 75 years later, which helped with our contemporary understanding of how Ngarrindjeri grammar functions at the discourse level (Gale et. al., 2021). By the 1960s, amid the assimilation era of government policy, documentary linguists were recording those who remembered any of the Ngarrindjeri language. By this stage people were only remembering short sentences and single words and phrases. Furthermore, the phonology had changed (through English influence) and the retroflex series of sounds—rt, rn, rl—had been lost.

In 1985 a fire started to burn in the *mi:wi* of Aunty Eileen McHughes (note: *mi:wi*, 'the small intestines' are the Ngarrindjeri seat of emotion). She decided she wanted to re-learn her language, and speak it once again like she remembered her Grandpa Michael Gollan speaking it in the 1960s. So she found herself a linguist, Steve Johnson, who was willing to help, at the School of Australian Linguistics (SAL), Batchelor in the NT. During the three trips that Eileen made to Batchelor, along with other family and community members, they recorded all the words they could collectively remember. Johnson could detect the English influence in the way they were pronouncing their words, so he got them to listen to recordings of 'traditional' speakers of Yolŋu Matha in Arnhem Land. He got the Ngarrindjeri 'language warriors' from SA to listen carefully to the way interdental, retroflex and nasal sounds were made by the Yolŋu, in contrast to those more familiar English sounds.[5] While at Batchelor, they were asked to contribute to the *SAL Newsletter* with a written article in Ngarrindjeri. The SA collective decided to write a play about a man stealing a car and a bag of money and the subsequent pursuit by a policeman.

Their topic of choice is significant. They all knew the necessary Ngarrindjeri words: *kainggaipari* 'policeman', *pethun* 'stealing', *ko:rni* 'man', *ngopun* 'running', *pu:thi* 'paper money', *punawi* 'bag' and *titjari* 'car'. It is surprising how much Nunga English can sound like a completely different language (compared to English) when relexified with almost every word from an Aboriginal language.

Nunga English

By the time Aunty Eileen made that trip up to Batchelor in the 1980s, the Ngarrindjeri community had developed their own code of communication, which they used to exclude others, and to communicate with their own inner circle of Nungas. Researchers and educators label it 'Nunga English' or 'Aboriginal English' (Malcolm, 2018; Eades, 2013). The underlying language (or substrate) is English, but it is sprinkled with words from the local Nunga languages: Narungga, Ngarrindjeri and Wirangu from the west coast. Often the sentences have more Ngarrindjeri words than English ones, but the basic grammar is that of English. For example, one hears expressions such as *Nakan that katjeri ko:rni ngopun over there!* meaning 'Look at that good-looking man walking over there'. If that same expression were to be said using the traditional grammar of Ngarrindjeri it would be: *Nak-inti-yan katjeri ko:rni, itjan alingyi ngopun!*

Nunga English uses all the 'rude' words from Ngarrindjeri and other Nunga languages, rather than their English equivalent; for example, words for wee (*kumbu* or *kandji*) and poo (*kuna*), and words for private body parts and genitalia, such as bottom, vagina, penis and breasts. These are the words that are remembered the most and have been used continuously, even during the assimilation era. These are the types of words that Rhonda Agius referred to as the 'secret' language in the quote at the beginning of this chapter. Such Ngarrindjeri words and expressions are used in everyday Nunga speech as a secret code that just Nungas understand. They serve to exclude English-only speakers, and sometimes to save embarrassment, especially when talking about bodily states and functions. Such words include:

kumari & *mundhana* & *rlunuk* 'pregnant'

tji:bili & *tjokeli* 'vagina'

tjung & *mrani* 'penis'

Some older Nungas have remembered expressions for embarrassing situations, such as

Nrugi-nam-itj ko:pi 'your nose is snotty (so wipe your nose)'

Tau yanun 'stop talking'

Tau plapun 'no touching'

Tremun ya taraki! 'spread your legs'

Nangkathawi down ya mundi! 'put your hanky down your chest'

Ngopun kandji 'Going (for) a piss (a wee)'

Ngopun yaramun pulgi 'Going to the toilet' (literally: going to the pissing place)

The meanings of some Ngarrindjeri words have also changed over time. Their scope has sometimes been reduced to fulfil the need for specific narrow meanings. Again their use excludes English-only speakers. Such words include *muthun* 'drinking grog (only), not water)' and *plapun* 'feeling/touching someone in a sexual way' (not just patting, touching). Many Aboriginal languages have developed terms and expressions to survive contact with the law, particularly with the police. All Nungas know the following terms and expressions:

Pethun 'stealing'

Pu:thi 'paper money'

Kainggaip or *kainggaipari* 'policemen'

Wurangi kringkri ko:rni 'mad white man'

It is all these words and expressions that are peppered within the English speech of Nungas to create what could be called a 'mixed language' in the sociolinguistic practice of 'code-mixing'. It is because Nungas have continued to use these words in their everyday speech that Ngarrindjeri has never gone to sleep, as the neighbouring Kaurna language did. It is not just the 'rude' and secret words that are used by Nungas. They have also remembered the Ngarrindjeri words for many fish, birds, mammals and plants. This is because their parents and grandparents continued to live and hunt on country alongside the Raukkan mission or in fringe camps. Aunty Eileen says that her language was stronger because she grew up at Three Mile fringe camp out of Tailem Bend, and didn't have a mission superintendent forbidding her family from speaking their language. Nungas have told me they didn't realise they were speaking a different language when they were kids at Raukkan until they went to the local high school and found that other kids in the school yard couldn't understand what they were saying. Their so-called mixed language was, for them, a single language system; for example, they only knew the word for 'drop-tail lizard' as *kendi*, and didn't know it was a Ngarrindjeri word. They thought that everybody called that little lizard *kendi*, even English speakers.

Language Revival

In the mid 1980s, with SA Education Department support, a scholar at the South Australian College of Advanced Education, Brian Kirke, gathered a team of Ngarrindjeri people to produce a 'Ngarrindjeri Yanun' Language Kit for use in SA schools. Kirke had previously worked with Pitjantjatjara (still spoken as a first language in the northwest of the state), so he did some research on the traditional grammar of Ngarrindjeri. A limited number of kits were made available to schools in 1986 (Kirke et al., 1986), which included sets of sight word cards, stimulus pictures, a comic booklet with amusing scenarios using the phrases composed with traditional grammar, and a cassette recording of the comic dialogues. He also included a copy of Taplin's (1879)

English-to-Narrinyeri wordlist and Meyer's (1843) Raminyeri wordlist, but excluded Meyer's grammar. Schools simply did not use (or know how to use) the kits, and the Ngarrindjeri community failed to embrace the unfamiliar (grammatically sophisticated) language in the comics and recordings. It was nothing like the (much simpler) Nunga English which they were using, and had learned to embrace with pride.

Meanwhile, Aunty Eileen McHughes had made several trips to SAL at Batchelor in the NT with her team of language warriors. Eileen later admitted that not much happened on their return to SA with regards to language revival activities, however she did assist with the new Ngarrindjeri language program being offered at Murray Bridge High School from 1994. It was one of the first language revival programs offered in schools in the state. But the program floundered because it lacked good quality resources and there were few qualified or available community people to teach it.

Then in 2003 I was asked to write a Ngarrindjeri language curriculum for a cluster of schools in Murray Bridge, including the High School. That was when I first began working officially with the Ngarrindjeri community as their support linguist.[6] I immediately teamed up with the Ngarrindjeri *mi:mini* Dorothy French (who was working at a Murray Bridge school) and began recording all the words and expressions that the Elders could remember. They numbered at least 450 words. Not surprisingly, the remembered words were representative of the domain of private family and community banter, as exemplified earlier in Nunga English, as well as the domain of cultural information, such as the names of birds, fish, animals and artefacts. What was surprising (to me) was the number of keywords that no one remembered anymore, ones that are required to talk about oneself and one's family. *Not one pronoun* was remembered, nor any possessive pronouns, and a surprising number of kin terms had been lost, such as the words for 'son' and 'daughter'. The kin terms that were remembered sparked much debate. Some said the kin term *pakanu* meant 'grandparent', while others said it just meant 'grandfather'. Similarly, some said *ngopa* and *ngatju* both meant 'uncle' and 'aunty'; others said that they referred to just 'uncle' and 'aunty', respectively.

From my research using archival sources, I can see that the Ngarrindjeri language once had complex kinship morphology and its kin terms had their own noun class and associated morphology. This complexity has been lost to its speakers, and replaced with a simple system, with inflected terms becoming frozen and given broader meanings. For example, *ki:lawi* meaning 'brother' is a well-known word today, but the old source (Meyer, 1843, p. 60) lists four forms:

Gellari 'elder brother'
Gell-anowe 'my brother'
Gell-auw-alle 'his brother'
Gell-auwe 'thy brother'

Because of the insecurities in the community, following the saga of the Hindmarsh Island bridge in the 1990s, teachers in the schools in Murray Bridge lacked the confidence to introduce any 'unknown' Ngarrindjeri words in the new language

curriculum. This was very limiting when writing lessons about themes such as ‘Me and my family’. I was told I had to put an asterisk (*) alongside the words that were ‘known by the Elders’, as they were the words to be taught in the classroom. I (stubbornly) included a few pronouns in the curriculum, and just hoped someone brave enough would teach them.

In 2007 Auntie Eileen McHughes (the same ‘language warrior’ who took groups of Ngarrindjeri to Batchelor) did become brave and declared, ‘I want to be able to speak in full Ngarrindjeri, just like that Kaurna mob are doing in their Welcome to Country speeches in Adelaide’. This was requested in a language class for adults that we were running regularly (at a Murray Bridge school) in response to community demand. There is nothing like jealousy (or FOMO—Fear Of Missing Out) to get people going in a direction once never thought possible. There has always been rivalry between the different language groups in SA, especially on the football field at the annual Nunga sports carnival. So the Ngarrindjeri were starting to feel inferior in their language abilities compared to the seemingly fluent speeches in full Kaurna that their rivals were now giving at public functions in Adelaide from the late 1990s. This request of Aunty Eileen’s paved the way for the development of contemporary language resources that included words that were *not remembered* by the Elders, and a grammar that had long been lost. Aunty Eileen wanted to speak more than ‘pidgin Ngarrindjeri’, as some people call it. She wanted to speak full Ngarrindjeri once more. This was the impetus needed to apply for Commonwealth funding to produce new language resources, including an Alphabet Book, a Picture Dictionary, a Learners’ Guide and a comprehensive Dictionary (Gale and French, 2009a, b, c).

In 2007, the *Ngarrindjeri Learners Guide* was launched at Raukkan, giving the community the opportunity to start re-learning the traditional grammar, and start constructing phrases and sentences for new and creative purposes beyond the secret code of Nunga English. The *Learners Guide* included the many sentence examples recorded by Meyer, plus a lay person’s explanation of traditional Ngarrindjeri grammar, with a chapter devoted to each different part of speech, including kinship morphology (see Gale and French, 2007, 2010). Then in 2009, at the 150th anniversary of the founding of Raukkan, we celebrated the launch of the First Edition of the *Ngarrindjeri Dictionary*, plus an *Alphabet Book* and *Picture Dictionary* along with CDs containing recordings of Elders with all their remembered words. Many of those Elders recorded for the CDs were those who visited Batchelor twenty-five years earlier.

After the success of our first series of language classes for adults, the development of further certificate courses has seen 31 Ngarrindjeri students graduate with their Certificate III in Learning an Endangered Aboriginal Language. A core unit in this course is ‘grammar’. Although challenging for adult students who have no experience with other languages, Ngarrindjeri women are now using the grammar of Ngarrindjeri to construct phrases and sentences for songs, speeches, conversations, and to write children’s books without resorting to English.

The activities that have really assisted people, in learning and creating Ngarrindjeri as a full language, are writing songs, translating hymns, translating phrases and full texts on request, creating their own texts and stories, writing and giving speeches,

and performing plays and skits. The continuous production of well-considered and constructed texts has helped in the learning of Ngarrindjeri as a full language, but what has been hard for Ngarrindjeri language learners is to speak 'full' Ngarrindjeri spontaneously in everyday situations, in the home and the community, without resorting to English or Nunga English.

Discussion

So the question is: Has the intermediate phase of speaking Nunga English interspersed with Ngarrindjeri words, impeded or assisted the move to speaking Ngarrindjeri as a whole language with authentic grammar and some degree of fluency? Has the continued use of Ngarrindjeri over the years as a secret language, used within a limited domain, enabled people to move towards speaking full Ngarrindjeri for new and creative purposes? My answer is both yes and no.

If we compare the Ngarrindjeri and Kaurna situations, we can ask whether there are more Kaurna people speaking 'full' Kaurna sentences than Ngarrindjeri people speaking 'full' Ngarrindjeri. The Ngarrindjeri revival efforts began in 1985, and have ebbed and flowed over the years, depending on who is involved, how many are actively participating, and what professional and monetary support has been given. The Kaurna revival movement began slowly in 1990, with several Kaurna songs included at the insistence of Auntie Josie Agius at a Ngarrindjeri, Narungga and Kaurna songwriting workshop (Amery, 2016), though the main focus of this workshop was Ngarrindjeri and Narungga. When Jack Kanya Buckskin came on the scene in 2006, Kaurna language revival accelerated. Buckskin made a concerted effort to learn his language, teach it and use it privately with friends, his dogs, and his children, who have now emerged as semi-native speakers of Kaurna. Being the language of the city of Adelaide, Kaurna now has a relatively strong profile as an emblematic language which is used in the public domain. As a regional language, there are less opportunities for Ngarrindjeri to serve these emblematic functions. However, Ngarrindjeri has the numbers, with several thousand people proudly identifying with the Ngarrindjeri nation. It also has the advantage of a shared homeland, called Raukkan (once a 'mission') to which people return on a regular basis for funerals and community events and celebrations.

Both revival movements now have similar funding and have developed comparable resources over the years (although Kaurna has much more accessible digital resources on the web). My perception is that both languages are at a similar place with regards to speaking in full sentences in the domains of public performance. The songs sung and speeches given in public (for both languages) are planned and well considered, as their creators have taken the time to construct them using 'full' sentences and the 'correct' grammar. A number of speakers from both groups have learnt their speeches and songs off-by-heart and therefore sound quite fluent when speaking in public. It is like learning a 'formula', hence the 'formulaic method' that is espoused by Amery (2016) for the learning of Kaurna, whereby people learn 'chunks

of language'. However, when using either language in other more private settings there is much less fluency. This is for both the Kaurna language and Ngarrindjeri, but at least the Ngarrindjeri are speaking Nunga English when they are in the home, along with its many Ngarrindjeri words. This is not the case for Kaurna.

There are many Ngarrindjeri men today who have never spoken Ngarrindjeri in full sentences. They are 'stuck' in Nunga English, and probably always will be. The only ones who have developed their language to speak in 'full' chunks of Ngarrindjeri language, using the 'correct' grammar, are those who have attended formal language classes to learn how the grammar works and how to use the available resources. Learning about noun suffixes and the need for an ergative suffix, for example, to mark the Agent in a sentence, rather than using word order (as in Nunga English) is a crucial lesson that is learnt in formal classes. I have observed in learners a gradual transition stage, whereby those who attend classes switch from using English as the substrate language to using Ngarrindjeri grammar as the substrate. The fluency that speakers, singers and performers reach depends on how much effort and practice they put into improving their language. It is the women who have put that effort in for the Ngarrindjeri language. The Kaurna have a more balanced mix of men and women actively involved in reviving the language, and attending formal classes,[7] but they don't have speakers stuck in that English-substrate phase of a mixed language. My mantra has consistently been, throughout my many years of working in the field of language revival: training, training, training. Regular language classes not only give students an opportunity to learn how to improve their language fluency, but also provide a safe place for them to practise using their language in new, creative and purposeful ways.

Personal Reflection

It is hard work to learn a second language as an adult. It is particularly hard when you can't immerse yourself and hear it spoken fluently around you. In the language revival situation I see the frustration of Elders as they struggle to move beyond their Nunga English, and grapple with learning which suffixes to put on which words. It is humiliating for them when the younger ones catch on, and they don't. I share their frustration. I have felt my own sense of failure in my attempts to learn many different languages over the years.

Starting with Latin as a teenager in high school, it was difficult to learn purely from books with the 'grammar translation method' that was offered. But I did learn the paradigms off by heart, and I learnt the important point that the world can be viewed from another perspective besides that of English. I revisit this experience and the value of the teaching method used in a paper that has been well received by revivalists (see Gale, 2012).

Next I started learning Yolŋu Matha (YM) when teaching in a bilingual school in northeast Arnhem Land (on the same island community of Milingimbi where Stephen Harris did his Ph.D. fieldwork). I put a lot of effort into learning YM, and

some of it must have stuck in my young brain, because returning for a visit many years later I did manage to speak (badly) in YM for short periods of time without resorting to English. What helped was my youth. I had a total of nearly four years exposed to the YM language, and undertook linguistic studies in between my two stints in Arnhem Land. Regrettably, I never became fluent.

After my first attempt at YM, I started learning Warlpiri while working in another bilingual school in the centre of Australia, at Willowra. Again I put in a lot of effort, but nearly all of it has been lost from my brain now. I simply didn't spend enough time in that community, and didn't practise using it after I left (use it or lose it!). But I have retained a number of Warlpiri words and a very small repertoire of authentic phrases that I can spout off when required, with that nasal pronunciation typical of Warlpiri, and which make me sound as if I am fluent, but I am not.

My next failed attempt was Pitjantjatjara. It was at this time that Stephen Harris was writing his book *Two-way Aboriginal Schooling* in Adelaide, and I was working as a teacher trainer at the University of South Australia, in the Anangu Teacher Education Program (AnTEP). Stephen was promoting 'domain separation' (of person, place and topic), so I followed his advice and only spoke (or modelled) 'pure' English in the presence of my Anangu students, as they were really struggling to learn English.[8] This was good for my students, but terrible for my own language learning (and my students were disappointed in my lack of effort in learning their language). Years later, I put effort into learning their language by attending an intensive Pitjantjatjara Summer School.[9] But by then my brain was just too old, and not much seemed to stick. I do have a fair understanding of the grammar though, and again I have retained a small set of phrases that roll off my tongue when required. Such (failed) experiences have given me empathy for the Ngarrindjeri Elders who really struggle to learn to speak their own language later in life beyond their Nunga English.

As mentioned already, my attempts to learn Ngarrindjeri began in 2003. I still remember every word we recorded with Elders, and who told us each word and its variants. It is repetition and continuously assisting with the teaching of Ngarrindjeri today that has helped me remember my Ngarrindjeri. Once again though, I am not fluent. Nobody is fluent in Ngarrindjeri. What I have learnt (as have many other people working in language revival) is that if you want to learn a language, it helps if you start teaching it. You only have to be one step ahead of your students! Of course, you must have good quality resources to help get you by. We have actually produced many of our language resources as we are learning and teaching the Ngarrindjeri language together in formal classes.

In 2011, under the auspices of the Mobile Language Team of the University of Adelaide, I invited Professor Barry Blake to join me in starting a revival program through a series of language workshops for Boandik adults in Mount Gambier, SA. Both Blake and I had our challenges in learning to speak Boandik. Blake had already researched and documented the language, and amazed us all with his ability to compose some useful conversations for different scenarios. I really enjoyed those workshops, but memorising Boandik phrases (a very different language from Ngarrindjeri) was yet another challenge for my aging brain. However, my growing

experience with other Aboriginal languages helped me with pronunciation and understanding the grammar.

Finally I am now trying to learn the Kaurna language. I help run weekly classes in Adelaide with Rob Amery who has been working in the language for 30 years. But my brain is now old and tired, and my success is minimal. I do understand how the grammar works though. I have learnt that once you learn a second language, attempts to learn another can build on the successes from the last. To speak any language you need lots of memorised vocabulary, and most of that has to be learnt from scratch. As Kaurna is a very different language from Ngarrindjeri, it has very few cognates. There is no escaping the hard work and memorisation that learning any new language requires.

Conclusion

Returning to the original topic of this chapter, the issue is whether code-mixing assists or hinders language learning. Can language-mixing lead to eventual language fluency? My own experience, and my observations of others, tells me that it is not until the shackles of English are thrown off that gaining fluency becomes a possibility. Leanne Hinton lists one of the rules of her 'Master Apprentice' method of learning an Indigenous language as 'leaving English behind' (see Hinton, 2002, pp. 9–10). I use the analogy with my students of 'taking off your pair of English glasses and replacing them with your Ngarrindjeri (or Kaurna, or Boandik or Pitjantjatjara) ones'. Different glasses help you start to see (and talk about) the world differently.

My observations tell me that code-mixing with English causes language learning to plateau, and to never move on from that code-mixing phase. I have witnessed that with many Ngarrindjeri men. That does not mean, however, that code-mixing doesn't have a place or stage in language learning. It can serve the important sociolinguistic role of reaffirming group identity, and also providing a secret code as a means of communicating with the inner group. Code-mixing also provides a means of memorising and using words from the old language, as well as assisting in pronunciation practice, especially when the sound system of the two languages being mixed is very different. But learning these words (which are often of cultural significance) through code-mixing should only be a stepping stone towards using them in bigger chunks of language, and in more complex sentences that embrace the grammar of the target language, rather than that of English.

The metaphor of *yakalun*, meaning 'flowing backwards and forwards', introduced at the beginning of this chapter, reflects the ebbs and flows of the Ngarrindjeri language and its usage over the last 200 years. At some stage the shackles of English just have to be dropped if the ultimate goal is to become fluent, and for the language to flow freely and move forward again. This is a goal that I hear repeated over and over again by many Aboriginal people, whether they be Ngarrindjeri, Kaurna, Boandik, Narungga or some other proud language warriors.

Endnotes

1. Cummins himself later revisits this issue and the idea of 'solitude' for the two languages (see Cummins, 2008).
2. 'Nunga' is a term used for Aboriginal people of southern South Australia, usually of Ngarrindjeri, Kaurna and Narungga descent.
3. Most money comes from the Commonwealth Government through the Indigenous Languages and the Arts (ILA) program. State government support is minimal.
4. Ngarrindjeri is very rich in traditional suffixes that enable one to construct new words and terms.
5. Fortunately in the modern era of language revitalisation, the phonemic spelling of the language has been retained and we have been able to bring back the retroflex sounds in contemporary speech.
6. I had already got to know the community in the 1990s during the notorious 'Hindmarsh Island bridge' saga, whereby Ngarrindjeri women were accused of 'fabricating' so-called 'secret women's business'. I subsequently co-wrote the autobiography of a respected Kaurna-Ngarrindjeri Elder Veronica Brodie called *My Side of the Bridge*, a book that continues to sell well today (see Brodie, 2002).
7. To date 26 people have graduated with the Certificate III in Learning an Endangered Aboriginal Language, for the Kaurna language. Not all are Kaurna, but they are Nunga. The shortage of Kaurna teachers in Adelaide encourages others to learn Kaurna, and possibly teach it with permission from the Kaurna community.
8. Pitjantjatjara is their first language, and the only strong Aboriginal language in SA.
9. I returned for the next five Summer Schools to assist with their running, and to offer training to the Pitjantjatjara tutors with the Certificate IV in Teaching an Endangered Aboriginal language. Six of them graduated, and arguably became better language teachers. They are fluent first language speakers of Pitjantjatjara, but struggled to answer those tricky grammar questions that their non-Aboriginal students inevitably ask. Learning how to talk about their language and answer such questions was empowering.

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