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Hilary Smith and Leanne Pryor

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## Addressing the hegemony of English through picturebooks in Gamilaraay

Hilary Smith

Australian National University

And Leanne Pryor

Winanga-Li Aboriginal Child and Family Centre  
Australia

### Abstract

*The reawakening of the Indigenous Gamilaraay language in northern inland New South Wales, Australia involves righting two centuries of prohibition and mistreatment after invasion by English-speaking settlers. Gamilaraay is no longer used as an everyday language in the community, although it has strong emblematic value for the Gamilaraay community. The hegemonic power of English means that it is seen as “normal”, while Gamilaraay use is often confined to ceremonial uses. A burgeoning awareness of the importance of Gamilaraay and other Indigenous languages of New South Wales has been reflected in recent legislative changes, which have in turn resulted in funding support for language materials. This article describes a community development approach in writing bilingual picturebooks in Gamilaraay and English as we progress towards our ultimate aim of normalising the use of Gamilaraay once more.*

### Keywords

Picturebooks; reawakening language; hegemony of English; Gamilaraay.

### Introduction

Giirr ngali dhawun Gamilaraay winanga-y-la-nha.  
Wayamaa-galgaa ngali winanga-y-la-nha, yana-wayi-y-la-ndaay,  
yana-y-la-ndaay, yana-mayaa-y-la-ndaay.

We acknowledge Gamilaraay country.  
We acknowledge the Elders who lived long ago,  
who are living now and who are to come.

Over 250 distinct Indigenous languages were spoken in Australia in the 18th century at the time of colonisation. However, in 2020 the National Indigenous Languages Report (NILR) found that all



languages are currently under threat and only 12 have unbroken intergenerational transmission (Commonwealth of Australia, 2020). Sixteen languages are now regarded as “sleeping”, with no one who can remember or speak the language, and 31 are in a process of “reawakening”, where there has not been any everyday use of the language for some time, but some people are now learning it.

Gamilaraay<sup>i</sup> is a language in inland north-western New South Wales and southern Queensland. It was last spoken fluently in the early 20th century (Austin, 2014). The NILR report states that Gamilaraay language is in the top 10 languages being renewed. The report uses specific definitions of the terms of renewal on a continuum from revitalisation, renewal and then to reawakening/revival/reclamation. The status of Gamilaraay is categorised on this scale as renewal, where “there is still an oral tradition, but there are no fluent speakers, and children are likely to have little or no passive knowledge of the language” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2020, p. 62). However, in our project we refer to reawakening, as a metaphor, which our project participants feel “softer” and appropriate to our approach with children.

The reawakening of Gamilaraay involves righting two centuries of prohibition and mistreatment after the invasion of English-speaking settlers. Written records from missionaries, anthropologists and settlers and linguists as well as recordings made with some last speakers in the mid-20th century, have enabled a dictionary and grammar of the “traditional” language to be compiled (Ash et al., 2003; Giacom, 2017). Although New South Wales passed an act of parliament in 2017 to promote Aboriginal language activities in the state (Aboriginal Languages Act, 2017), and Gamilaraay language has strong emblematic value for the Gamilaraay community, a number of issues for its revival remain from its former status as a banned language (Smith et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2020).

### Normalisation of Gamilaraay

English is not constitutionally mandated in Australia but it is the de facto national language and is regarded as essential for both economic participation and social cohesion, as noted on the web page of the Department of Home Affairs (2020): “Australian society values the English language as the national language of Australia, and as an important unifying element of society”. Despite the Department’s mandate for multiculturalism (which appears to be focused on immigration), there is no mention of the social and economic benefits of multilingualism which have been recognised for some time in educational discourse (Hatoss, 2004; Lo Bianco, 2000). In the context of Aboriginal languages, the NILR outlines considerable economic benefits and opportunities (Commonwealth of Australia, 2020) as well as personal and social benefits. However, the hegemonic power of English as the national language means that in Gamilaraay communities, such as Gunnedah, English is seen as “normal”, while Gamilaraay use in sentences is often confined to ceremonial or cultural uses. However, single words are often used in everyday life among Gamilaraay people. These include greetings in spoken and email correspondence, and words from the country such as *bandaarr* (kangaroo), *dhinawan* (emu), or *bigibila* (echidna).

In this article we present our picturebook project as a small step towards challenging the hegemony of English in our community, through our aim of normalising the use of Gamilaraay once more in Gunnedah and beyond. Here we reclaim a positive use of the term “normalisation” in relation to policy for Aboriginal Australia, where it has previously been used as a critique of a deficit model of social service delivery which does not allow for cultural difference (Sullivan, 2013). Instead, we are focusing on the way normalisation is used for te reo Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand, “to advance the language towards normalisation, through increased awareness and acceptance of the usability of the language in all contexts” (Higgins & Rewi, 2014, p. 28).

### The Yaama Gamilaraay! project

Winanga-Li Aboriginal Child and Family Centre (Winanga-Li) is based in Gunnedah, at the approximate centre of Gamilaraay country. Winanga-Li has 90 percent Aboriginal staff and runs a

variety of family support programmes as well as an Early Learning Centre. A major interest of the organisation is the reawakening of the Gamilaraay language. Since 2017 we have had funding for the Yaama Gamilaraay! (Hello Gamilaraay!) language project. It is largely funded by the New South Wales Department of Education to develop early childhood resources in Gamilaraay, most of which we have made available online.<sup>ii</sup> To supplement the first set of materials we also included five bilingual picturebooks. In 2021 we received funding for 10 more books from the New South Wales Aboriginal Languages Trust.

### Community development aims

The co-authors of this article are the co-leaders of the Yaama Gamilaraay! project: A non-Indigenous applied linguist, working together with a Gamilaraay community Elder who manages the Early Learning Centre at Winanga-Li. Technical linguistic support to the project is provided by a non-Indigenous linguist based at the Australian National University, who compiled the research for the dictionary.

The involvement of non-Indigenous academics in Australian language revival has come under increasing scrutiny, as noted by Gaby and Woods (2020, p. e269), who state that the engagement of “outsider linguists with Indigenous communities may not only fail to mitigate the linguicidal effects of colonization, but may even replicate colonialism itself”. Gaby and Woods (2020, p. e276) outline four practical steps for beneficial collaborations: “‘Rep/matriate Indigenous language knowledge’, ‘Recognise Indigenous knowledge sovereignty’, ‘Avoid degrading or dehumanising language or rhetoric’, and ‘Acknowledge the contexts of language’”. We aim to take these steps in our Gamilaraay language work. In our project we endeavour to support the growth of linguistic knowledge in the local Gamilaraay community about the language in ways which they can meaningfully engage in order to take ownership of the reawakening processes.

Unlike some other Indigenous Australian language communities, there is generally no resistance to non-Gamilaraay people learning and speaking the language (Austin, 2015). However, we are clear that our area of responsibility is the Winanga-Li community, and although our Elders are willing to share the language resources we develop, we acknowledge that there is no single “Gamilaraay community” and other communities may have different approaches towards the language. We have prioritised co-operative working relationships, and our modus operandum has been developed through ongoing discussions rather than formal processes. For example, we check ideas and specific materials with Winanga-Li Elders and other staff members as they arise, rather than through a formalised set of procedures.

The Yaama Gamilaraay! project has taken a community development approach, described previously in Smith et al. (2018). The writing of picturebooks is carried out through this community development approach. Throughout the project we are involving as many Gamilaraay community members as possible: Elders, parents, educators and teachers, artists and photographers participate in the conceptualisation of traditional and modern stories, the production of illustrations and the recording of audio support. For the first five books the linguistic support was the only input from outside the local Gamilaraay community; the community participants included two artists, the three children (with their parents/grandparents), two photographers (one is a non-Gamilaraay parent of a Gamilaraay child), and three “voices” in the audio recordings. For the next 10 books we have also made links with other Gamilaraay artists across Australia.

### Educational and linguistic aims

Our educational aims are to encourage the development of the children’s Gamilaraay language as well as to develop the cultural and general knowledge in which it is embedded, and therefore the children’s overall cognitive development. This reflects Cummins’ linguistic interdependence theory, where there is a common underlying proficiency which refers to “the interdependence of concepts skills and linguistic

knowledge that make transfer possible” between the children’s two languages (Cummins, 2000, p. 191). The development of Gamilaraay and English language and literacy are therefore intertwined.

We are aware of only six picturebooks previously written in Gamilaraay (and English):

- Three were in a Ngamila, Yawala, Garay Guwaala–Look, Read and Say series: *Milduulu with My Little Eye* (Tighe, 2012a)–*Gagan Colours* (Tighe, 2012b), and *Minya Ngaya: What Am I?* (Tighe, 2012c).
- Two were stories: *Dhural Buluuydha–A Noise in the Dark* (Gayford & McLaren, 2013) and *Original Girl–Mari Miyay* (Witheyman-Crump, 2007). The second of these was out of print.
- There was one online picturebook in five Aboriginal languages including Gamilaraay, available through the State Library of New South Wales: *My Weekend With Pop* (Simpson, 2017).

These books were all written and translated by Gamilaraay authors (with some linguistic support) and used the standard spelling. There are several other Indigenous language book projects in Australia, but we were not aware of any which would meet all of our project aims.

### Confidence-building

Even with support of online “flip books” or downloadable audio, we found that teachers and educators<sup>iii</sup> were not confident enough to read the previously published Gamilaraay picturebooks aloud to the children. Since the educators are themselves Gamilaraay, this hesitancy has even more significance for language reawakening than that of non-Aboriginal educators reported in a recent Western Australian study (Adam, 2021). Addressing the lack of confidence is a key focus of the picturebooks project.

The deep lack of confidence with Gamilaraay language is the result of the colonial history of invasion, massacre and land confiscation on Gamilaraay country.<sup>iv</sup> For a culture which does not separate land, language and people (Rigby et al., 2011), the alienation of land from community has had a devastating effect on Gamilaraay communities. In addition, using the local language was prohibited, and parents speaking Gamilaraay to children was a reason for taking them into care in the Stolen Generations until the 1960s (Waters, 2016). These events are part of the oral traditions and well within the living memory of many Gamilaraay families, and are a major contributor to intergenerational trauma, as described in our audio-visual project (Smith et al., 2020).

A related aspect is a wish of Gamilaraay people to avoid making mistakes in speaking the language. This may be connected to the Aboriginal concept of shame:

the feeling of acute self-consciousness and often painful inadequacy which arises when one is exposed, in the flesh or in the anticipation, to the critical gaze of others, most particularly that experienced under the scrutiny of the ‘outside world’. (Kwok, 2012, p. 29)

Therefore shame is described by Kwok (2012, p. 40) as a “double-edged sword” for Aboriginal Australians: it is a form of resistance by allowing for the survival of cultural autonomy and difference, but it also contributes to social and economic marginalisation. In language reawakening contexts, such as Gamilaraay, people who identify as Aboriginal may feel shame both among community members and in the wider “outside world” in not being able to speak the language which is intrinsically part of their culture. This can be highlighted in the expectation for its use in public events such as the increasingly common recognition of local Aboriginal traditional owners of the land in “welcome to country” ceremonies (Merlan, 2014). Connected to this aspect of shame is the concern some Gamilaraay people have about showing disrespect to their ancestors by making mistakes in the language.

Such dynamics reinforce the hegemony of English and can result in an apparent reluctance to use any Gamilaraay language, particularly in the post-colonial forms of the language, i.e., reading and writing. Our approach therefore reflects that of Waters (2016), in using Gamilaraay language as resistance to hegemonic pressures. The project has a range of components, focusing on the development

of theme-based units with resources such as posters, videos, songs and flashcards. These have been supported through the picturebooks project.

### The first book set: Bilingual early readers

We have used a number of ways to help encourage the use of Gamilaraay in early childhood reading materials.

#### Spelling system

Reading aloud requires the ability to decode the sound-letter system, and this provides a challenge for adults who do not speak the language. Gamilaraay has a standardised spelling which is well-accepted by the community; it is used in the dictionary which is available for free download or as a phone application, as well as in hard copy (Ash et al., 2003). Although the dictionary has a regular sound-letter relationship in the spelling, there are some non-English sounds in Gamilaraay phonology, represented in the standard spelling by ng, dh, dj, nh, and rr. Some of these sounds are no longer regularly used by community members and tend not to be represented in the “English” spelling of Gamilaraay words in place names, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Examples of “English” Representations of Gamilaraay Place Names**

Gamilaraay phoneme	English representation	Gamilaraay spelling	“English” spelling
nh	n	Nharibaraay	Narrabri
rr	t	Baan.giirr	Bangate
dj	z	Biridja	Breeza
dh	t	Dhimbambaraay	Timbumburi

It is noticeable that some of these words have been “converted” into words which look like English. Gamilaraay does not distinguish between voiced and unvoiced pairs of sounds /k/ and /g/, /t/ and /d/, /p/ and /b/. These have been standardised using the spellings “g”, “d” and “b” in the dictionary, in line with the approach generally used by linguists for Australian languages. However, these were written earlier by settlers as either sound in English, including the name of the Gamilaraay itself, which is often written as Kamilaroi or Gamilaroi (or sometimes a shortened form, Gomeroi). Examples of place names where a voiced sound has become unvoiced in “English” spellings are shown in Table 2.

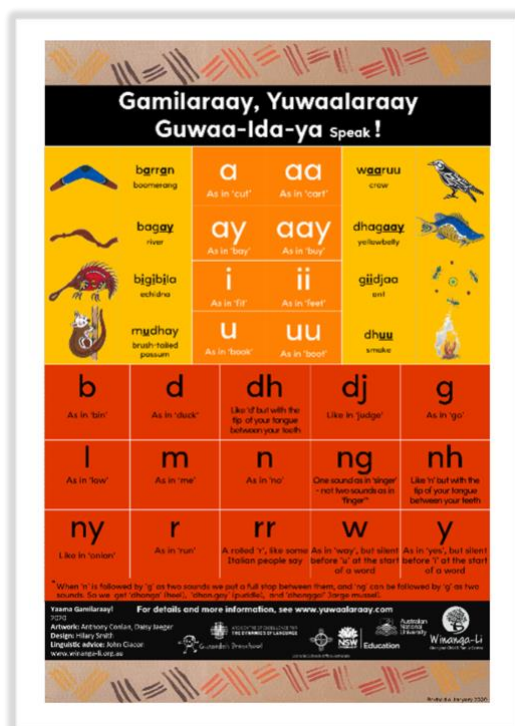
**Table 2. Voicing Changes in English Spelling of Gamilaraay Place Names**

Gamilaraay phoneme (voiced)	English representation (unvoiced)	Gamilaraay standardised spelling	‘English’ spelling
g	k	Gagil	Coghill
b	p	Bilaga	Pilliga
dh	t	Widhalibaa	Weetalibah

There has been little community awareness of the linguistic background to the spelling of place names until recently, but our project aims for a community reclamation of the knowledge and wherever



possible we incorporate the background information. One of the first resources we developed was a pronunciation chart in Gamilaraay (and the related Yuwaalaraay language<sup>vi</sup>), shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Pronunciation chart.**

This chart has been made available for anyone (teachers and educators, parents and children) reading our materials. It is often referred to in our social media notifications whenever the materials we produce include the “special sounds” of Gamilaraay which do not occur in English, and we also have a YouTube video of the sounds.<sup>vi</sup> For many of our resources we provide audio or video versions; these are made with Winanga-Li community members, including the children, rather than linguists. As far as possible we do not correct the pronunciation of Gamilaraay community members, especially the children who are still developing their English pronunciation. Through awareness-raising we aim to develop the repertoire of Gamilaraay sounds in the community and the confidence of community members in linking the spelling to the spoken forms.

### Word structure

As well as decoding individual sounds, a reader also needs to be able to understand the different parts of the words (Kuo & Anderson, 2006; Rastle, 2019). The morphological structure of words in English is more straightforward than in Gamilaraay, which has an extensive system of suffixes. For example, the suffix *-Ga* is used instead of prepositions of place (such as “in”, “at”, “on”, “near”), and it changes its form according to the end of the word it is attached to, e.g., *bigibila-ga* (near the echidna), *gali-dha*, (near the water), *dhinawan-da* (near the emu), *bandaarr-a* (near the kangaroo). Verbs may have three or four suffixes strung together according to grammatical notions, such as tense or movement, for example *winanga-y-la-nha* (acknowledge-verb class-continuous-present). These suffixes are shown with hyphens in the dictionary, which has example sentences for most words. If the reader does not know where the suffixes begin and end, it is much harder to look up both the root word and the suffix itself in the dictionary.

The previous Gamilaraay picturebooks did not include explanations of the suffixes, and they used the same approach as English in incorporating the suffixes into the words. After consultation with staff

at Winanga-Li we decided to use the hyphenated forms in our books: an English example would be “the girl-s were sing-ing”.

### Sentence structure

We also found that previous picturebooks tended to focus on either the concepts (including vocabulary) or the story itself, rather than the repetition of structures which gives confidence in early reading. The one book (*Minya Ngaya—What Am I?* Tighe, 2012c) which used repetition and included only one word with suffixes, was the one which was most likely to be used by Winanga-Li staff. The challenge was to use simple repetition, while also providing a “story arc” with a beginning, middle and end.

We were inspired by the New Zealand Pasifika Dual Language Resources produced in five Pacific languages (Dreaver, 2015) to consider formats which would work in our context. For example, the first level includes *I Can Write*,<sup>vii</sup> which has seven pages, each with one sentence and one photograph. In their dual language format, the stories are replicated in each language, with the other language found by turning the book over to the back. However, we decided that each page should be bilingual, to give extra confidence to both adults and children reading the stories. We then used an informal word of mouth approach to develop the stories.

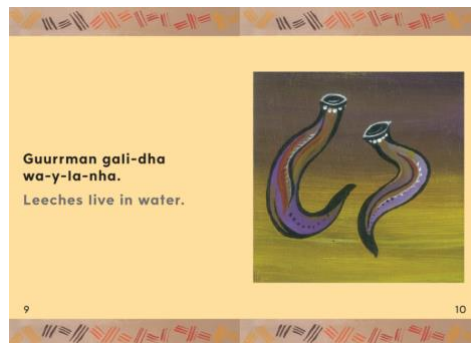
### Story building

We discussed what topics would have meaning in the children’s lives. We wanted to provide what Bishop (1990) has described as “mirrors” reflecting their identities and experiences as well as “windows” into another world outside their own. Often Aboriginal children in Australia are portrayed in remote, desert areas, reinforcing the stereotypical viewpoints noted by Adam and Barratt-Pugh (2020) in their audit of books in four early childhood centres in Western Australia: “An example of this was the only Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Australian being portrayed as living in the outback, being semi-naked and playing a didgeridoo” (p. 826).

This would not provide mirrors of the lives of the children in the rural town of Gunnedah who identify as Aboriginal. They might have one Gamilaraay grandparent as well as others from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The history of colonisation in this part of Australia means that those children who identify as Aboriginal may not “look Aboriginal” in their physical appearance. Research in Western Australia found that although physical characteristics were salient for Aboriginal children (aged 8 to 12), they recognised that Aboriginal children could be any colour, and cultural aspects were the most important aspects of their Aboriginal identity (Kickett-Tucker, 2009). In our case, we have found that the windows the children are responding to are those that provide connections to traditional aspects of their Aboriginal culture which they have been disconnected from.

We were keen to include some Gamilaraay artwork, and the theme of “connecting to country” is strong in discussions around the education of Aboriginal children. One of the topics we decided on was *Minya gali-dha wa-y-la-nha—What lives in water?* (Smith 2019a) We engaged a local artist who had links to Winanga-Li in discussions about possible animals and fish he could paint for the book. One was leeches, as shown in Figure 2. This was a surprise, but the artist pointed out that it was important for children to know about leeches in the waterways around Gunnedah.





**Figure 2. Example from book using local artist's work.**

Since staff members often talked about children staying with their grandparents, we organised a photography session with a Gamilaraay teacher who is a keen photographer and the granddaughter of a staff member. The story *Gundhi-gu Badhii-ngu-To Nan's House* (Smith, 2019b) was then developed from the resulting photos, shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3. Example from photograph-based book.**

The same photographer suggested that the river is a popular focus of activity among children in Gunnedah and important in local culture and tradition. Consequently, we carried out a further photographic session with her and the older children of another Winanga-Li staff member for the book *Baga-dha-At the River* (Smith, 2019c), shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4. Example of story reflecting local culture.**

Another child's mother mentioned that she enjoyed taking photographs of her son, and so she brought in a selection of photographs which we developed into the story *Yulu-gi-la-nha ngaya-I Am Playing* (Smith, 2019d). Her son has a cochlear implant which is visible in several of the pictures but not mentioned in the story, allowing us to normalise his deafness in the book shown in Figure 5.



**Figure 5. Example from story developed from photographs.**

Our final book was based on the flashcards we had developed for teachers to use in counting from one to ten; *Maabuba-la-Let's Count!* (Smith, 2019e). This used commissioned artwork by another Gamilaraay artist who has links to Winanga-Li, as shown in Figure 6.



**Figure 6. Example from book adapted from flashcards.**

### Content of the books

Each story followed a simple “story arc”, with repetition of simple sentences and a slightly longer sentence at the end. An example is given in Figure 4 above, which is the final page of the story *Bagadha-At the River* (Smith, 2019c):

At the river.  
 We (two) sit at the river.  
 We (two) walk at the river.  
 We (two) swim at the river.  
 We (two) play at the river.  
 We (two) eat at the river.  
 We (two) are very happy at the river!

We included important grammatical information in the English translations where relevant, such as the dual first-person pronoun “we” in the story with two children at the river. We were mindful of the “linguistic landscapes” on the page (Daly, 2018) in our decisions about the relative size and prominence of the two languages in the bilingual format. By writing the Gamilaraay text in black font, with English underneath in grey, we aimed to give dominance to the Gamilaraay language, while providing support in English.

A wordlist, explanation of the suffixes, and explanation of the sentences was included at the back of each book as well as a version of the pronunciation chart (with follow-up links for more information). The books were all designed with a uniform background and border artwork from another Winanga-Li

staff member. They were published in cooperation with Library For All Australia and are available on their free application for Android phones.<sup>viii</sup> Sound files for four books have been produced and are available on our project website.

### Impact of the first books

From anecdotal feedback and our observations, we are convinced that these five books have strengthened Gamilaraay as a source of emblematic pride (Simpson, 2019). When asked about their use, a local teacher reported to us:

My classes have really enjoyed them because locations like the river are familiar to them and they know some of the people featured in the photos. This really added to the level of engagement and the books were a well-read part of our classroom library.

I think there’s a real sense of pride from the [Gamilaraay] kids. They love the opportunity to share their culture and language with their classmates.

The initial hard copy print run of the books was 25, and we have had two more runs of 50 each. However, the timing of the launch of the books just before the COVID-19 pandemic has meant that we have been unable to carry out any formal impact assessment or our planned workshops with teachers and parents (based on those from the New Zealand Pasifika Dual Language books) to maximise their use. Nevertheless, during the design and production of the books we were able to identify some opportunities for diversifying our approach for the development of future books.

### The second set of books: Mixed approaches

When we received funding for another 10 books, we decided to broaden our approach, in content and format.

#### Supporting the maths curriculum

One of the requirements of the contract for the 10 books is to link with the school curriculum, and so we added in another counting book, for “skip counting” in twos. In conjunction with another Gamilaraay artist, we wrote a bilingual book which uses colour to aid the counting. This is designed to be read by an adult together with a child or group of children, by counting the legs of various animals, as shown in Figure 7.

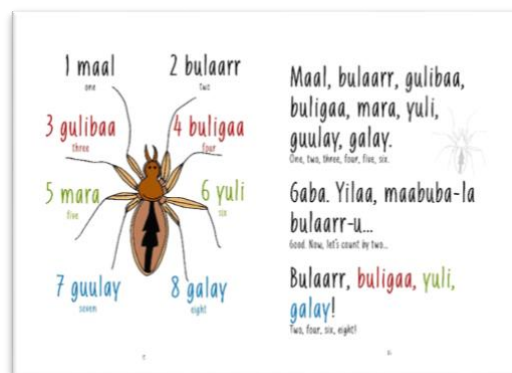


Figure 7. An example from the draft “skip counting” book.

A further book we have planned to support the development of mathematical concepts will focus on shapes in the landscape.

### Monolingual comic strip

We are keen to diversify the approaches used in our materials and avoid confining them to one “look”. One of the first Gamilaraay and Yuwaalaraay teaching materials in 1999 used comic strip stories to develop language around specific cultural themes, using both languages together. We have received permission from the artist to reuse the artwork with text in Gamilaraay only, updating the text to reflect the linguistic work which has subsequently been carried out as part of the reawakening process. We have shown an early draft to a local primary school teacher, who has said that she would use it with children in the class as a translation exercise, encouraging the use of visual clues provided by the graphics. We will provide a translation at the back of the book, as a check of meaning.

### Traditional stories

One of the issues in our early readers was that the very simple language used prevented us from telling complex stories. A related challenge is that in some cases we do not have the Gamilaraay vocabulary for some concepts; a modern re-telling of traditional stories requires words which were either not used or have been lost. Developing new words is an ongoing part of the Gamilaraay language reawakening process which takes time, expert knowledge and sensitivity (Giacon, 2014).

It is often assumed that one of the best ways to incorporate cultural relevance for Indigenous children is to use traditional stories. However, this is venturing into the territory of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP), which can be complex (Janke et al., 2021):

Although ICIP may come in many forms, such as stories, songlines, plant knowledge, language, and knowledge of the seasons and the stars, they are often inter-linked. For example, a story about an animal can actually carry important information about a certain place, knowledge about the seasons or land management, and may also represent a person’s particular totem or connection to their ancestors. (p. 9)

An example of this is in the Gamilaraay traditional teachings about Gawarrgay, known as The Emu in the Sky. Gawarrgay is the spirit emu in the dark Magellanic clouds which form the Coalsack Nebula in the Milky Way. Its form changes with the seasons and the tradition links these changes to the activities of the emus on the land, and cultural information such as when to collect emu eggs. The Emu in the Sky is a well-known “songline”, or story across different Aboriginal groups, and particularly important for Gamilaraay and Yuwaalaraay people (Fuller et al., 2014). We decided to base a book on a version which has been translated into Gamilaraay for the Siding Spring Observatory at Coonabarabran, on Gamilaraay lands.

Since the language in the story would be too demanding for many in our community at this stage, we are trialling the use of a translanguaging approach in *Gawarrgay–Dhinawan gungala-ga: The Emu in the Sky*. The story is part of our unit of materials around the topic of the sky and seasons, and so we have written words from the unit in Gamilaraay, glossed with English underneath. Adults reading the stories can choose to use either language, but the Gamilaraay is integrated into the main text to encourage its use. A full translation has also been added below the main text, so that, so that a more confident Gamilaraay speaker and reader can choose to read only in Gamilaraay. This gives a reader three options: mixed Gamilaraay and English, English only, or Gamilaraay only, as shown in Figure 8. It builds on and supports the increasing use of codeswitching in the community, where individual words or short phrases in Gamilaraay are incorporated into English sentences. These materials allow a pedagogy which expands the individual speakers’ linguistic repertoires as a means towards reawakening a community of Gamilaraay speakers.



**Figure 8.** Example from the draft book with translanguaging.

This is a pragmatic approach to pedagogical translanguaging, which has the aim of developing the children’s bilingual repertoires rather than utilising them, as in the original uses of the term (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020). Although translanguaging has been seen as a threat to minority languages when the socio-linguistic context is not adequately taken into account (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017), our approach is embedded in local context. A translanguaging approach has been advocated for senior high school Indigenous students who speak creoles and related varieties in Queensland (Carter et al., 2019), but to our knowledge it has not previously been articulated in early childhood language reawakening contexts. In a situation where total immersion in Gamilaraay language is not yet possible, our approach is a form of “sustainable translanguaging” (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017). Seals and Olsen-Reader (2020) discuss the benefits of sustainable translanguaging for language revitalisation, emphasising that

... it is crucial in a multilingual teaching and learning space to both create a need for the minority language so that it is actually used regularly, and it is important to give any minority languages their own space of focused use. (p. 2)

Our hope is that through its engaging content and illustrations this book will contribute to the regular use of Gamilaraay and that the specific words about seasons and the sky will provide a “space of focused use”.

Some concepts in the story have been adapted for the English-speaking “modern” world which is familiar to the children. For example, we have used the English seasons, which we did not have traditional words to translate. The annual changes on Gamilaraay country were traditionally described as *yaaybaa* “sun time” and *dhandarraa* “frost time”, which we translate as “summer” and “winter”. Community members requested words for the other two English seasons, and these were developed previously by linguists and community Elders: *yarragaa*, “spring”, is the name of the winds which are common at this time; and *bariganbaa*, “autumn”, literally means “the time of the nepine fruit”, a traditional bush food in New South Wales.

In the case of this traditional songline, no individual “authorship” would be possible or appropriate (Janke et al., 2021). Now that we are sure that the books have been well received, we are using joint authorship for all books rather than the applied linguist taking overall responsibility for a project which might have then been unsuccessful.

### Next steps

The current set of books are being trialled by teachers and parents as they are developed, and we have ongoing discussions with staff and other community members about possible topics for the remaining books. At the same time there have been at least two other picturebooks in Gamilaraay and English produced, one of which we were invited to collaborate on; both had a cultural rather than linguistic



focus.<sup>ix</sup> We believe that this indicates an increasing appetite for picturebooks which contribute to the cultural and linguistic reawakening of Gamilaraay.

As our project has coincided with waves of COVID-19 lockdowns and school closures in New South Wales, many of the discussions have been carried out by email rather than face to face, and the project is developing more slowly than we had originally planned. Much of the liaison needs to be carried out with community members remotely, which adds a layer of complexity to the project. We have postponed some discussions which would be more appropriate in face-to-face settings, such as with Elders from whom we would like to seek permission for the use of cultural information. In spite of these challenges, we continue to have interest and support from many different Gamilaraay people, indicated by comments in person and in our social media communications.

Materials which incorporate traditional knowledge about the natural world as it is encoded in language also support and enhance the pedagogical approach teachers in our region are taking for “connecting to country”, an important educational aim in New South Wales (New South Wales Government, 2008). This reinforces our interest in using traditional stories and songlines in the language reawakening process. This will necessitate negotiation and engagement with relevant Elders around the issues of Indigenous Cultural Property as noted above when traditional knowledge is involved, and we hope that the resulting benefits of community support will strengthen the language reawakening programme.

## Conclusions

The development of bilingual picturebooks is a small step on the path towards our ultimate aim of normalising the Gamilaraay language in the face of the hegemony of English language in Australia. Our books include topics from the English-speaking “modern” world as well as topics from the traditional pre-contact world of the Gamilaraay ancestors. Through a mixture of approaches in the use of English and Gamilaraay languages, we are encouraging children and adults to develop their linguistic repertoire to support their cultural, cognitive and educational development.

We are under no illusions about the challenges we face in the reawakening of a language which has been “sleeping” for a hundred years. However, these are counterbalanced by the enthusiasm and pride shown by Gamilaraay children when we introduce material in Gamilaraay to our programmes; there is no reluctance shown by the children in using the language, and their parents regularly express pride in their children’s use of Gamilaraay. We are using the picturebooks to support the building of confidence of the Gamilaraay adults in our community as they grow the next generation’s strength in their culture. We have also observed the excitement and interest from non-Gamilaraay children and adults in learning about the traditions of the place they live in. In this way we hope our project is ultimately contributing to the development of both Aboriginal and settler communities for the future of Gamilaraay country.

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<sup>i</sup> The word Gamilaraay can be spelled in a number of ways, see <https://www.winanga-li.org.au/yaama-gamilaraay/kamilaroi-gamilaraay-or-gomeroi/> In this article we use the linguistically standardised spelling for both the language and people.

<sup>ii</sup> [www.winanga-li.org.au/yaama-gamilaraay](http://www.winanga-li.org.au/yaama-gamilaraay)

<sup>iii</sup> In Australia, early childhood staff are referred to as ‘educators’ rather than ‘teachers.’

<sup>iv</sup> The term ‘country’ is usually used for tribal lands in Australia.

<sup>v</sup> There are three related languages: Gamilaraay, Yuwaalaraay and Yuwaalayaay. Since Yuwaalaraay and Yuwaalayaay are very close, we do not generally differentiate between them in our project.

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=amyXy0NWqPQ>

<sup>vii</sup> *I can Write*, by Fiona Lovatt Davis. Available:

<https://literacyonline.tki.org.nz/content/download/36335/408747/file/I+Can+Write+%7C+E+Mafai+ona+%27Ou+Tusitusi.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> <https://libraryforall.org/get-the-app/>

<sup>ix</sup> *Weaving Warrabah: Weaving our Story*, (2020). Written and published by Yinarr Maramali. *Star dreaming*, (2020), by Mel Armstrong and Jodie Herden. Ella and Mei Productions.