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It "bendy dis one": Recognising and building upon Australian Aboriginal students' linguistic repertoires as educational resources

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Abstract
There is a considerable body of research documenting the languages First Nations children bring to school. However, despite language being a key factor impacting on educational outcomes, there is little research focussing on the students' language use within schools outside specific learning contexts. Therefore, in this study we sought to explore the language resources used by Australian Aboriginal children at school, particularly those underexamined cohorts living in regional and remote locations. We examined how they used language in the classroom and in the playground, and with different audiences (e.g., peers vs teachers). Naturalistic language data were collected in seven schools located in different settings within Western Australia. 230 children and their teachers were recorded. The data show these students draw on their full linguistic repertoire when at school – moving between lighter or heavier varieties of Australian Aboriginal English (AAE), their traditional languages (e.g., Martu and Kija), SAE, as well as Kriol (an Australian creole) in some remote locations. We also found they adjusted their language choices according to the audience and content of their discussions and they utilised processes of translanguaging as part of these school interactions.

Keywords
Australian First Nation students
Aboriginal English
Kriol
Traditional languages
Translanguaging
Classroom language use

Introduction
According to the results of the last census there were 812,728 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people[1] (henceforth Australian First Nations people) constituting 3.8% of Australia's population (ABS, 2021). In Western Australia, the setting for the current study, the census showed there were 89,000 (3.3%) First Nations people. In Western Australia, as across Australia, they come from a diverse range of cultural and linguistic diverse backgrounds. They will have access to and potentially speak some of traditional languages as well as Aboriginal Kriol (especially in the north of Australia), Australian Aboriginal English (AAE) and the language of the wider community, Standard Australian English (SAE)[2].

[1] Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are Australian First Nations; this paper focuses on Aboriginal people as it was conducted in Western Australia where they are few Torres Strait Islander people.
[2] Note we use the term SAE as it is the most frequent in the literature, is the dialect of Australian English (e.g., *Macquarie Dictionary*, 2009; *Australian Oxford Dictionary*, 2004) and is used throughout the Australian national curriculum.

Traditional languages are those languages that have been spoken by Aboriginal people for many thousands of years within and between their local communities. Like all languages, traditional languages have changed over time. Some examples of traditional languages in Western Australia include: Noongar, Martu Wankga, Kija and Gooniyandi. When the British first came to Australia in 1788 it is estimated that there were over 250 traditional languages spoken in Australia (McConvell 2010) with approximately 70 in Western Australia. With the impact of colonisation, the number has reduced dramatically and now only about 12 languages are spoken as a first language across the nation. However, in recent times there has been a push towards language revitalization with an increasing uptake of traditional languages being taught in schools, and particularly in Western Australia.

Kriol is the name of an English-lexified creole spoken right across the northern part of Australia and, especially in the Kimberley region (Western Australia). As with all creoles it started as a pidgin language resulting from contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. It was then passed down within families to become one of their home languages. Kriol is now the most widely spoken Indigenous language with over 20,000 Aboriginal speakers in Aboriginal communities. Kriol is not a dialect of English, but rather a separate language (Harris 1986).

Australian Aboriginal English (AAE), on the other hand, is a dialect of English just as American, Scottish and Irish Englishes are dialects. AAE differs from SAE in sometimes subtle, but often more obvious ways. Although described as a single dialect, it varies considerably from one location to the next, existing on a

> " …. continuum, ranging from acrolectal (or light – closer to the standard) and basilectal (heavy – furthest from the standard)" (Vaughan & Loakes, 2020, p. 723)

For this reason, in our discussion of the data below, we use the convention AAE/K as per O'Shannessy (2012) when the sample is of the heavy AAE variety and incorporates Kriol features.

AAE is the home language of many First Nation people who use it for their everyday communication, mostly with family and friends. It is also an important identity marker for Aboriginal people. It differs from SAE at all linguistic levels – phonetically, syntactically, semantically and pragmatically but also has many features similar to SAE (Eades, 2013). AAE is used widely by Aboriginal people as a lingua franca and has multiple dialects which can be differentially understood by SAE speakers depending on how different the dialect is from SAE.

SAE is the predominant dialect of English-speaking people in Australia. Across Australia, First Nation people have various levels of exposure to and use of SAE. As with most 'standard' forms, SAE is the dialect that is codified – that is, closest to the written form of the language. In Australia it is the language of power, predominantly used in government, educational and legal institutions. It is also the dialect used by most teachers in their classrooms across Australia. While SAE generally the classroom dialect, it is not necessarily the language of greatest utility for children's learning. Cognitively powerful languages are typically those that children are assumed to enter school with so the motivation for the current study was to determine what languages Australian First Nation students bring to school.

The diversity of linguistic backgrounds impacts significantly on Australian First Nation school students and those who teach them, especially with respect to how teaching and learning is undertaken and, in particular, how national testing is used to gauge academic success in schools (e.g., the National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN]). Teaching is mostly monolingual, primarily in SAE (i.e., it is English-centric in nature) and thus inherently discriminatory for those who do not come to school speaking this as their home language. Assessment and testing related to this teaching is conducted in SAE and so represents further linguistic and cultural bias (Nguyen, Oliver & Rochecouste, 2014; Wigglesworth, Loakes & Simpson, 2011). Educationally this

is particularly problematic because of the 'washback effect' (Cheng, 2004) – what is assessed sets the parameters of what is taught and how the teaching is done. Specifically, in Australian classrooms assessment and testing focus on written SAE literacy, and so this is the key priority for teaching even though the national curriculum explicitly recognises the role of oral language and the interaction of first language/dialect acquisition for literacy success (ACARA, 2013). Furthermore, such an emphasis on written rather than oral language using only one linguistic code (i.e., SAE) stands in stark contrast to the language traditions of Australian First Nations people. Traditionally their communication occurs through oral language, with multiple languages used for the sharing of knowledge. If assessment and testing continue to be used to guide the teaching and learning pathway, we argue that the full linguistic repertoire of First Nation students, including the predominance of oral language, needs to be better accounted for serve the needs of these learners.

At present pedagogical protocols clearly disadvantage First Nations students as is demonstrated in their national testing performance: For example, a decade ago ACARA (2013, p. 127) reported that 'the percentage of Indigenous students who achieved below the national minimum standard is more than twice the percentage of non-Indigenous students who achieved below the national minimum standard'. Little has changed in the intervening period. The common assumption that is made about these results is that their language and literacy skills are deficit. Yet, previous research points to their highly developed communicative competence, albeit not necessarily in SAE (see for example, Poetsch, 2018; Simpson & Wigglesworth, 2008; Wigglesworth & Oliver, 2024). However, less is known about the languages these students speak daily, how their languages are utilised in the school context (both inside and outside of class) and with different audiences in these settings. With better understanding of the language skills of Australian First Nation students means we can build on these in school. It is also necessary not just to recognise the various linguistic codes that are used by Australian First Nation students – traditional languages, Kriol and AAE along with SAE – but how these linguistic resources may come together for meaning making within school settings. We need to draw conceptually and theoretically on recent perspectives, including translanguaging, and consider what role these may play in students' communication.

Canagarajah (2011, p. 401) describes translanguaging as 'the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system'. It is important to note that translanguaging differs from code-switching (CS) in that:

> 'it refers not simply to a shift or a shuttle between two languages, but to the speakers' construction and use of original and complex interrelated discursive practices that cannot be easily assigned to one or another traditional definition of a language, but that make up the speakers' complete language repertoire' (García & Li Wei, 2014, p. 22).

García (2011) highlights the nexus of school practices and home language where translanguaging can help learning to occur across languages, while at the same time helping students to learn to use language flexibly, strategically and appropriately according to context.

For First Nation students, translanguaging serves additional roles. Many students especially those living in regional and remote areas, will need to add competence in SAE to their existing linguistic repertoire since when they start school as they may have had limited access to SAE (see Wigglesworth and Simpson, 2018 for a detailed discussion). They will also need to learn to move flexibly and appropriately between their home languages and SAE. Research conducted within Australia, and to a greater extent overseas, suggests that translanguaging is a 'dynamic communicative strategy' (Kieswetter, 1995, p. 6) that may support such language learning because it helps students expand their vocabulary by learning equivalent words in different codes (Mokgwathi & Webb, 2013; Tian & Macaro, 2012). Within the classroom and at a fundamental management level, it allows order and on-task behaviour to be maintained and disruptive behaviour to be reduced because it facilitates students' understanding and enhances their class participation and engagement in discussions (Uys & Van Dulm, 2011). Furthermore, classroom discussions promote opportunities for 'exploratory talk' by students, which facilitates the overall learning process (Setati & Alder, 2001, p. 246). This is achieved by fostering understanding of

Western educational concepts and enabling links to be made between Western social and natural scientific notions and Indigenous ways of understanding, knowing and perceiving (Shizha, 2007). Overall, therefore, translanguaging can be viewed as an important learning and teaching resource (Setati & Alder, 2001).

The way in which translanguaging manifests in the classroom context for Australian First nation students has been a focus of some attention recently (e.g., Oliver, Angelo, Steele & Wigglesworth, 2021; Steele, Dovchin & Oliver, 2022), but there is still a dearth of understanding about how languages are used within the different contexts of school (e.g., in the classroom vs in the playground) and to what extent translanguaging is used by students and teachers in these contexts and its value. Furthermore, most translanguaging research has described urban bilingual and biadectal educational contexts with "less attention [being] been paid to certain contexts and particular speakers" (Oliver & Exell, 2024, p.125). Given the important consequences for their learning across the curriculum, particularly in terms of their acquisition of literacy in SAE, a further aim of this research is to examine language use, including the use of translanguaging, by First Nation students attending schools in regional and remote locations where they have minimal, if any, access to specific language learning from language teachers trained in English as a Second Language or Dialect (EALD) methodologies.

Research questions

Given the consequences of current teaching practices and assessment regimes for First Nation students and the potential contribution of translanguaging to their learning, the current research seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What languages do First Nation students living in regional and remote areas in Western Australia use in the school context and with different audiences (both in and outside of class)?
2. How do they use their language for classroom learning?
3. In what ways and for what purposes do they access translanguaging at school?
4. What are the implications for this cohort's language use on teaching and assessment?

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Method and materials

This research is a systematic and empirical study of Aboriginal students' language collected in situ – in naturally occurring cultural and communicative contexts in their school environments. We were able to collect an extensive amount of data from diverse locations in the large state of Western Australia (Figure 1) a state about the size of western Europe covering 2.646 million km² and about one-third of Australia's land mass.

The seven schools where we collected data are located in different geographic regions, with a variety of contextual background factors including larger regional (population <30,000) (n = 4) and remote communities (n = 3), with locations in the south-west (n = 1), the Goldfields (n = 2), Pilbara (n = 1) and the west Kimberley (n= 2) and east Kimberley (n=1) regions of Western Australia (see map below):

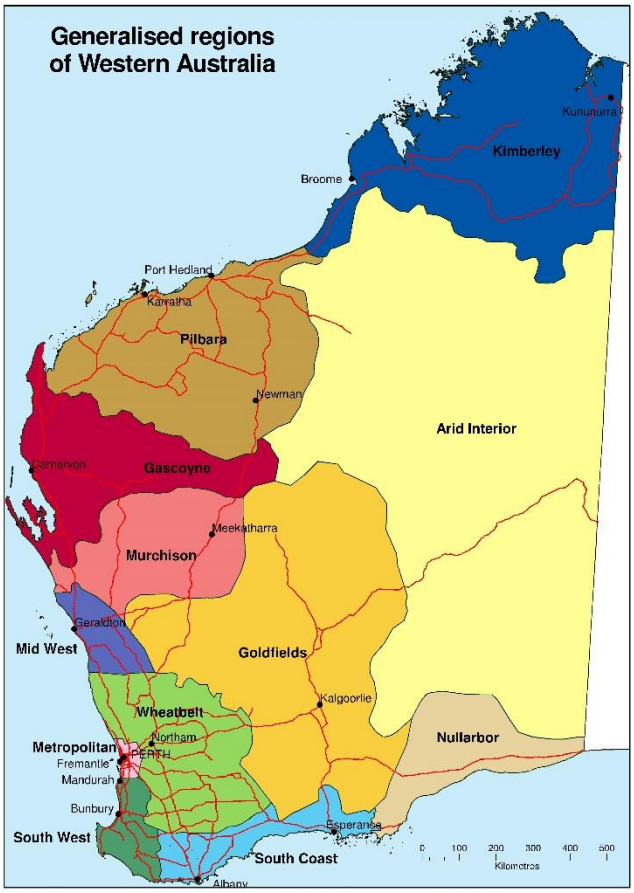

Figure 1
Generalised regions of Western Australia
(https://library.dpird.wa.gov.au/gis_maps/11/)

Permissions

Ethical permissions were obtained from State and Catholic Education sectors, and each university involved. Once approvals were obtained, we contacted the various schools mostly those where there were existing relationships between members of the research team and the principal or teachers at the school. Such relationships, where school leadership and teaching staff feel the consequences of ever-increasing demands on their time, facilitate access which might otherwise be denied. We then explained our intentions and when initial agreement to participate was given, we sought and gained written permission from:

- school principals;
- teachers in the classes where we recorded data;
- Aboriginal Education assistants who were in the classrooms at the time of recording;
- parents or guardians of the students; and,
- the students themselves who gave oral permission on the day.

To achieve this, we relied on the support of school staff members, for example, Aboriginal education staff would visit homes to get parental/guardian permissions or stand at the gate and seek permission from responsible adults as they dropped off or picked up their children from school.

Participants

Within each of the seven schools across Western Australia in which we collected the data, we targeted participants in the junior (ages 6 and 7 years), middle (8 and 9 years) and senior (10 and 11 years) primary school classrooms. Depending on absences, class numbers and willingness of participants, we recorded between 8 and 10 students per class – resulting in 230 student participants in this study. In some schools it was necessary to collect data from more than one class. Consequently, there were sometimes up to three teachers recorded for each age level, but most often there was just one in each of the school classrooms. Note that the teachers' data were not the focus of the transcriptions, but used solely when necessary to understand what was happening in the classroom. In total 32 teachers participated in the research. In most classrooms, but not all, there was at least one or more Aboriginal education assistants with a total of 35 Aboriginal educators in the sample.

Data collection

Before the main study, and with separate ethics approval, we undertook a pilot study at a single school with an additional 22 students and their educators. This was to trial the equipment, to test out our methods of data collection, including refining our recording techniques, and, to determine which specific school contexts were most appropriate for our recording and analysis. The pilot study also helped us to clarify and address ethical considerations including the cultural, psycho-social and linguistic appropriateness of our approach, and the subsequent training needed for all our research team. While this pilot study included videoing the classrooms, in the ethics approval for the main study, permission to video was not forthcoming.

For the main study we travelled to each school spending approximately one week at each school site. With final consent from the students, we commenced recordings as follows: We placed little pocket belts (i.e., 'bum bags') around each child's waist. Inside these was a small audio-recorder with a lapel microphone attached to each child's collar or neck band. These recorders were able to pick up the main speaker's voice and all with whom they interacted very clearly. We recorded children in class for at least an hour – mostly during literacy lessons or other classes that involved a lot of talking – and then in the playground during recess or lunchtime.

Analysis

Once we had recorded the data, we downloaded the electronic files and these were transcribed - a very time-consuming process because of the diverse languages used by the student participants. Once the transcriptions were complete, anything that might be sensitive or would enable identification of individuals or families was deleted. Each transcription underwent multiple checks including by Aboriginal research assistants familiar with Kriol and Aboriginal English.

Because of the unique social and cultural contexts in which the data was collected, our analysis was informed by Discourse Analysis (Gee, 2014). That is, we examined how the students made meaning and worked to understand others, including their teachers, created their different identities (e.g., as a student at school, as a friend, and, as an Aboriginal person), engaged socially and made or maintained relationships, importantly determining what linguistic codes they used when doing these things. We carefully identified which languages (SAE, AAE, Kriol or Traditional language tokens) were used by the children, for what purposes, and where they occurred (playground or classroom). We then explored patterns of use and specifically whether the students engaged in translanguaging across their different languages and dialects, and how they did this according to context and their interlocutor. We also examined those occasions where the teachers focussed on the children's language use in the classroom, both in terms of pointing out linguistic differences between SAE and the children's languages and focussing on the children's linguistic abilities. No quantitative analysis was attempted due to the nature and volume of the data involved.

Findings

First Nation students living in regional and remote areas bring a diverse range of languages to school. While the teachers mostly only use SAE, we found the students used their full linguistic repertoire to support their learning. In doing so they accessed translanguaging convey meaning and support their understanding. These findings discussed below.

Language use

The language used by the students ranged from SAE to AAE, some Kriol and tokens of traditional languages. Some children spoke mainly SAE, while other predominantly spoke AAE (or AAE/K), but also used other languages including SAE (especially in the classroom), but also traditional languages and Kriol. Along with other languages, the use of traditional language appeared in our data to a greater or lesser extent at each of the schools. It should also be noted that three of the schools (two regional and one remote) where we collected the data taught traditional languages as part of their curriculum, although only at a relatively minimal level of a few hours a week. Even so, traditional language was most prevalent in those schools located in remote areas or where there were students in a school who had moved there from remote areas. In contrast, Kriol was only used in the Kimberley schools.

AAE: In all schools the main language spoken by the children was AAE. Although there are many similarities between AAE and SAE, they are distinct dialects of English. AAE includes pronunciation, syntactic and semantic differences such as 'd for t' the dental stop /d̪/ is replaces the SAE voiced interdental fricative /ð/. Example 1 was spoken in class by junior primary child from a school in a regional town in the goldfields:

Example 1:
Look, das– dis (*this*) is hers, hi:ya (*here*), dis is hers iya (*here*).
(Junior primary, classroom, remote)

Example 2 is from another junior primary children outside her class, during a bushwalk, from a school in the remote goldfields.

Example 2:
See dat (*that*) little bug dere (*there*)?
(Junior, outside classroom, remote)

Syntactic differences, for instance, include the use of zero copula where an SAE equivalent utterance would include a copula verb, *is/are/am/be*, see Example 3:

Example 3:
e.g., 'e first, 'e first. Jus' let 'im go first.
(meaning: *He's first, he's first. Just let him go first)*
(Junior primary, classroom, remote)

Another example of a syntactic difference is the use of *yous/youse/yas* for second person plural pronoun:

Example 4a
Do yous wanna (*want to*) come on the oval?
(Middle primary, playground, large regional)

(Child's name) do you want me to help yous with the shed?
(Senior primary, classroom, regional)

There were also lexical differences, for example, the word 'mob' is used to signify a collection of people (meaning 'X and people associated with X') but also can be used for a group of animals or objects and used in an associative plural construction as shown Examples 5a and b. It is a distinctly AAE word and a strong Aboriginal identity marker.

Examples 5a and 5b
You mob! Give them a chance!

(Middle primary, playground, regional)

Miss look at (child's name) mob…

(Middle primary, classroom, remote)

We note that combining examples as we do above is somewhat problematic. However, we have done so for illustrative purposes only. We do note, however, that in terms of AAE there were distinct variations between locations and the context of the school (i.e., regional or remote). For instance, in the remote school in the Pilbara region the students' AAE was influenced by the local traditional language Martu, whereas for the students in the south-west regional school their AAE had Noongar influences – the Indigenous language of that area. The following is a description of some of the AAE features that appeared to be quite localised. This is not to say they do not occur elsewhere, but they were not captured in our data. In example 6, two students are looking through their lunch boxes and one uses the tag question particle 'inni':

Example 6

Wat about I'll save dis… for lunch, inni?

(*Meaning: What about I save this for lunch, yes?*)

(Middle primary, playground, regional town)

This tag question was only found in the data from the Pilbara and Goldfields schools; in contrast the tag question 'unna' was found in the data of most of the schools. There were also lexical items that appeared only in some locations. For instance, the word 'dardy' meaning good or interesting was found only in the south-west data. In Example 7 the students are watching pencil sharpenings come out of an electronic sharpener:

Example 7:

It's actually dardy 'ow it comes out, unna. See, look. It's actually dardy 'ow it comes out, unna?

(*Meaning: It's actually interesting how it comes out, isn't it? See look. It's actually interesting how it comes out, isn't it?*)

(Middle primary, classroom, regional)

Similarly, there were expressions that appeared in the data from just one or two of the schools. The word 'ways' for instance was only captured in the data from the remote goldfields school. Similarly, 'big' in this context means 'strong' i.e. strong in Martu language and culture.

Example 8:

Because I growed up… big Martu ways.

(Middle primary, classroom, remote)

Kriol and AAE with Kriol Influenced features (AAE/K): Particularly in the Kimberley remote schools' data, there were a several Kriol features in the children's language. To a lesser extent some of these features were also present in the remote Goldfields school. For example, the past tense marker in Kriol uses the auxiliary 'bin' which appeared in the Kimberley data, but also in the remote Goldfields school.

The following provides further examples of AAE/K used by our participants and show these linguistic features differ markedly from SAE contributing to its identity as a separate language. These are also different from AAE features used in the other schools, especially those located in the southern parts of Western Australia. In Example 9, a senior boy in a large remote Kimberley is explaining to another why a third boy was angry:

Example 9

Yeah? Das why you bin hit-im-bat la head an' 'e 'm tryna tell you! 'e had a sore, on 'is head.

(Senior, playground, remote)

Here ‘why’ is used in place of the word ‘because’ and the utterance means ‘he was angry because you hit him hard on his head even though he had tried to tell you he had a sore head’.

Below a senior primary child in the remote Kimberley school asks a peer to pass her a book:

Example 10
Ah pass-im ya (child’s name), ‘e gat my name on darran.
(*Meaning: Pass it here (name), that one’s got my name on it*)
(Senior, classroom, remote)

One common Kriol feature is the transitivity suffix -im (sometimes -m, -am, or -um). It is not used to reference gender, but rather to signify the object connected to the action of the verb. It can be used with any object, singular (male, female or neutral) or plural, or even when the object is omitted. It probably emerged originally from English pronoun ‘him’ as it also appears in Pacific pidgins and other early varieties of English spoken in Australia (see Meakins, 2014). However, it is now a suffix used on transitive verbs. That is, it can be used to make transitive usages of otherwise intransitive verbs, e.g., run (in the typical sense) vs run-im (run over something, e.g., in a car) (Hudson 1981 p.39). In Example 11, one student is showing another that she has a microphone and is wearing the bag that contains it:

Example 11

(Child’s name)! … Look wat I gat-im on.
(Senior, classroom, remote)

It is difficult to determine the extent that the children in these remote locations use full Kriol. Even so, it is apparent that there are particular ways of speaking in these places and that this is clearly based on the incorporation of Kriol into the students’ language (i.e., AAE/K). It is possible the children move into this language variety more fully outside of school. In addition, language is fluid, evolving continuously, with other influences including from the media, social media, and contact with other Kriol varieties etc and so we expect language use to continue to change in these different contexts.

Traditional language: As noted, at each location, elements of traditional language/s were recorded, although how much traditional language was spoken in the different schools and by different children varied – from single words, to suffixes and other grammatical markers (e.g., past tense ‘bin’) to extended discourse. In some places this use of language by the children was sporadic, but in some other places (e.g., Goldfields remote school) the children used traditional language quite a lot. In almost all the data, traditional language use involved the mixing of different codes - that is the students engaged in translanguaging within an otherwise AAE or Kriol-based, and sometimes even an SAE based, utterance. In some locations (e.g., Goldfields remote school where there was strong support from the school leadership for ‘two way’ learning – see explanation below) there appeared to be extensive use of traditional language. We anticipate that here and elsewhere there would be even greater use away from school. The following list provides the vocabulary recorded at the remote Goldfields location:

Nouns	*mamu*	monster / bad spirit
	wama	bush nectar
	ngaparla	type of lizard (possibly bearded dragon)
	maparn	magic person / healer / magic object
	marlu	red kangaroo
	puluku	cow
	parlaparla	type of lizard

	kata	head
	pina	ear
	ngurtulypa	sweet edible gum (from tree)
	karlaya	emu
Pronouns	*paluku*	his/her/its
	ngayunya	me
	nyuntu	you (subject form)
	nyaa	what
Demonstratives	*nyarranya*	over there / that one over there
Adjectives	*malya*	cool, flash, deadly
	kurnta	shame/embarrassed
	murtumurtu	short
	ngakumpa	mad / deaf
	ngurlu	scared
Verbs	*nyawa*	look! ('see' in imperative form)
	kurlu majala	wait there
Exclamations	*panya*	y'know
	wiya	no
	lo:ya!	Meaning uncertain, but seemed to be said in response to someone doing something naughty/bad/shameless)

In other places the lexicons of the traditional languages have become part of AAE. For example, those with a Noongar background living in the south-west of Western Australia use many Noongar words when speaking AAE. An earlier example showed the use of the word 'dardy' (meaning good or interesting) being inserted into an utterance. In Example 12 two junior primary children at school in a large regional south-west town use the traditional Noongar word 'winyarn' (meaning sad, bad or weak depending on the context) within their AAE exchange:

Example 12
Child X: You *winyarn**, (name), you *winyarn*!
Child Y: YOU *winyarn*.
(Junior, playground, remote)

Similarly, in the next example, at school in the regional Goldfields, two senior primary school students insert Martu words into their AAE conversation:

Example 13
Child 1: Look iya (*here*), I'll jump a– to da other side?
Child 2: You look 'ere, *kuwarri*, *kuwarri*, look? … *Kuwarri*, look iya. Wa::!
Child 1: xxx
Child 2: *Munta* look 'ere, backflip, backflip, look dere!
(Senior, playground, remote)

In this utterance 'kuwarri' is used to get attention and 'munta' is the equivalent of 'oops' in SAE. Traditional words and expressions were heard quite often in the remote schools, especially in the playground. In Example 14, a senior primary child from a small remote community school in the Kimberley region is on an errand for his teacher. As he is running past another child he stops and asks:

Example 14
Ngapa, gimme *ngap*– some… nah gimme some *ngapa*. ….(Gim)'me some *ngapa*.
*Ngapa means water
(Senior, playground, remote)

Language use to support learning

It was clear that the students used different aspects of their linguistic repertoire to make and convey meaning as part of their school-based experiences. Sometimes this was for transactional reasons, such as to share information or to make a request. In Example 15, in a science lesson the Kimberley community school, a middle primary student asks if he can get a new drinking straw for the science experiment they are working on because the one he has is bent out of shape and cannot be used:

Example 15
Miss, 'e bendy dis one, can I git a other one?
(Middle, classroom, remote)

The data also showed the students accessing their full linguistic repertoire to reflect on their classroom learning. In example 16, a Year 5 student at the Kimberley school is showing her teacher the beans she has grown in the school vegetable garden, a project that is a part of their classroom science program:

Example 16
Miss, come 'ere you'nna look my ding? 'e– 'e growing, 'e gat beans in it.
(Senior, classroom, remote)

In this context "'nna" is a derivative of wanna (want to), with the utterance meaning 'Miss do you want to come and look at this thing I'm growing … the pot plants have beans growing in them'. It appears that the student is excited by what they have been doing in their science program and expresses this using her various linguistic resources. Being able to share her joy in what has happened demonstrates her engagement in schooling, something that is not a given for students living and attending (or not as the case may be) remote schools.

In another lesson at the Goldfields school, this time involving computers, a senior primary student makes it clear to his peer the need to log off their computers, doing so using the flexible word ordering of AAE as in Example 17:

Example 17
Child 1: We gotta log off?
Child 2: I'm jus' anyway loggin' off.
(Senior, classroom, remote)

In this way the student shares meaning in the context of the classroom in a way that allows him to also manage his own learning through accessing his various linguistic resources.

There was also evidence that the students used their various linguistic codes for metacognitive purposes – describing what they know about different subject matter learning, but also what they are yet to learn. In Example 18 a middle primary school student from the Goldfields school reflects on another child's handwriting – specifically how she has used cursive writing ("dardy" or good writing) when adding her name to worksheet:

Example 18
Dat's how you write your name in dardy, but I… do not know how to write my name like dat. That's how you write your name connected. But I do not know!
(Middle, classroom, remote)

Similarly, another senior student in a large remote Kimberley school exclaims in AAE:

Example 19
Bina, I can't do-m!
(Middle, classroom, remote)

This utterance, meaning "I can't do that", clearly shows that the student recognises their inability to use school equipment well.
.
Even when engaging in literacy lessons, as in example 20, students make use of their various linguistic resources to engage with learning: one student talks to his class teacher about the diagraph 'ou' (as in the 'ou' sound in the word house) indicating that this was content that had already been covered in the previous day's literacy lesson:

Example 20
Miss we bin do "OU", we bin do "OU"…. We bin do-im yesterday. We 'm do-m.
(Meaning we learnt about the "ou" diagraph yesterday).
(Senior, classroom, remote)

Beyond this, we also found evidence of students being able to share their cultural knowledge and making connections between this and their classroom learning by using their full linguistic repertoire. For instance, whilst on a bushwalk as part of their science and literacy programs, one junior primary student shared his knowledge about plants and animals:

Example 21
Dey'll sting really hard-uh. Das why I don'– I don' touch centapees. An' scorpions. Iss on'(l)y I touch nini one, baby ones.
(*Meaning: They sting really hard. That's why I don't touch centipedes or scorpians. I'll only touch little, baby ones*).
(Junior, outside classroom, remote)

Translanguaging

As outlined above, our data shows that Aboriginal students use a range of languages for various purposes, including to support their learning. We also found that students were able to adjust how they spoke according to who they were talking to and what they were talking about. Sometimes they would use just one language, for example, SAE when talking to their teacher – sometimes inserting a traditional word or using an AAE/K marker to express ownership, kinship, tense etc. However, when talking to their friends in the playground and sometimes even in class to each other, their language use would slide to a greater use of AAE/K or even traditional language. That is, they would 'slip and slide' (Ober, 2022, p. 10) between their various languages in a process called translanguaging. They were able to express their meaning in nuanced ways – choosing language from their full linguistic repertoire in ways that was best 'fit for purpose'. As argued in Wilson, Hurst and Wigglesworth (2018), we found that even the youngest children in our research were able to engage in this process.

Our data shows the remarkable ability of even quite young students to adjust and fluidly move between their various languages and dialects. This seemed to be especially the case as they adjusted the speech according to the audience to whom they were speaking. For example, a junior primary child from South-west school moved rapidly between AAE and SAE, first asking the whole class in AAE – all of whom were Aboriginal - who owned the packet of popcorn left on a classroom table and then asking just the teacher (in SAE), as shown in example 22:

Example 22
Child: Who popcorn! (said to whole class)
Miss, whose popcorn? (said just to the teacher in her very next turn)

That is, this child uses ‘who’ (AAE) to her peers, but ‘whose’ (SAE) with her teacher.

Similarly in the next examples 23, a, b, c, a child from the Goldfields regional town school moves from the SAE form ‘where do I put them?’ when speaking to the teacher to the AAE form ‘where I am?’ and ‘what you playing?’ when talking with peers beyond the formal classroom context highlighting their communicative competence and ability to adjust their output according to audience:

Example 23a

Child 1: Mm? Yeah.
Teacher: Put these boards away please
Child 1: Yes. Where do I put them?
Teacher: In the… tray, on the other side of the <X shelf. X>
(Junior, classroom, regjonal)

Then a few minutes later, the same child uses AAE when trying to find her place in a circle of peers who are eating their fruit for morning tea.

Example 23b

Child 1: Where I am? Where I am?
(Junior, classroom, regional)

And then she continues using AAE out in the playground

Example 23c
Child: What you playing, (another child’s name)?
…
Child: What you playing, (a second child’s name)?
(Junior, playground, regional)

Similarly in Example 24, also in the Goldfields remote school, one child moves from talking in K/AAE using “bin foun” with a peer, but then moves to SAE “we foun’” (*found*) when talking to the teacher:

Example 24
Talking to a friend in the playground
A:h, look what I bin foun’-uh!
……
Look what I bin fou::n’-uh!
I bin foun’ brown sa::n’. ((sand))

A few minutes later the teacher arrives:
Me’n Jemima’s diggin’, an’ we foun’ w– um if we foun’… white san’ we gonna put it up... top.
(Middle, playground, remote)

In the past, this process of translanguaging was often called codeswitching, but as shown in examples above, the students do not simply switch from one language to the other keeping them separate – rather they adjust their speech by degrees as they move fluidly to accommodate their audience. The students in our study engaged in this process as part of their classroom learning interactions. Many come from multilingual communities, and they grow up learning to draw on their repertoires of different languages to express themselves and engage with their communities (Vaughan, Singer & Wigglesworth 2023). However, as discussed earlier, there is very limited research on Indigenous

children's language use in these contexts on how they develop their sociolinguistic understandings (although see Poetsch, 2022; Dixon, 2021; Davidson, 2018).

Implications for teaching and assessment

Our findings have important implications for pedagogy. Firstly, all teachers working with First Nation students should be aware and accommodate within their teaching and assessment the fact that English, in the case of Australia - SAE - is a second language or dialect for many students, especially those living in regional and remote areas. In classrooms they are developing understandings, learning content, and skills in a language or dialect that it is not their first. Just as there is a need to support migrant and refugee children who speak a language other than English at home, so too is there a need to support the language learning of First Nation children who have SAE as their second (third, fourth etc) language or dialect. While in the best of all possible worlds this would be incorporated in their pre-service training, there are variety of resources available including curriculum documentation and associated resources (see ACARA, n.d.) as well as academic papers as indicated above.

Further, a fundamental understanding for all educators should be that although languages and dialects differ – none are 'more superior' than others. Therefore, rather than that constructing students' language backgrounds in deficit ways (i.e., what students don't have or can't do), their languages need to be considered in terms of what they can do, and what they can add to the students' (and teachers) learning experiences. Furthermore, as with all multilingual students, it is important for teachers to understand that for First Nation students their languages and dialects serve a range of different and important purposes: As we have illustrated above, it can serve important educational functions (also see Wigglesworth & Simpson, 2018) and it is vital for social, cultural and family reasons, as well as contributing positively to identity construction.

In terms of their language learning and acquisition of SAE, home language can provide a useful scaffold for development. For instance, in the following interaction taken from the current data (also in Wigglesworth & Oliver, 2024), we can see how teachers are able to do this during a bushwalk they have taken their classes on. In their discussion they can build upon from students' knowledge and home language - about the taste of nectar from a plant - and connect it to the learning experience:

Example 25

Shelley:	Really yellow, inni? (AAE = isn't it?) An' bi::g-uh.
Zanadu:	Yeah really, really, yellow and big.
Teacher 2:	When it's nice and X?
Zanadu:	Den (AAE = then) you can, den you can slap it on your hand an' you can lick it all den! It'll tastes…
Teacher 1:	Does it taste good on your hand?....
Zanadu:	Yeah, it's tastes um, sweet.
Teacher 2:	Tastes sweet?
Shelley:	Yeah like honey!
Zanadu:	Huh?
Shelley:	Wama.
Zanadu:	Wama.

To achieve these types of interactions, teachers need to be familiar with the languages used by their students or at the least be open to learning about them. As Cummins et al., (2005) suggest, to foster academic achievement it is vital that teachers develop an awareness and understanding of the language and culture of their students. At times this can be simply achieved by discussing different words and meanings with students (see example 26 below). Information from local community members also can be a valuable resource for this purpose but requires teachers reaching out to

members of the community, achieved first through establishing relationships and building trust. However, investing time to develop such understandings is worthwhile as it contributes to effective teaching.

Becoming familiar with and referring to students' language within the classroom helps teachers tap into the students' knowledge base and build upon this. That is, it enables teachers and the learners themselves to scaffold their content and language learning. This is particularly important pedagogically because students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds can mean that their conceptual understandings and ways of thinking may be different from their teacher's. As described above, one way to bridge these different understandings is through the use of translanguaging because it provides a way to access understanding through different linguistic codes. This is demonstrated in the following excerpt where it can be seen how the teacher and incorporates and scaffolds the student contributions in both English and their traditional language:

Example 26

Teacher:	What are those little things, that we can see on his skin?
	What are those <X spots X> there?
Child 1:	Lumps!
Teacher:	Lumps. Yeah. I think they would be probably–
Child 2:	<X This is *kurntany*! X>
	(*Meaning: warts)*
Teacher;	I like it, what are they?
	A number of children call out response.
Child 2:	xxx
Teacher:	Goondai? What does that mean?
Child 2:xxxx	
Teacher:	What is that?
Child 1:	KunTANY. ((*correcting teacher's pronunciation*))
Child 3:	KunTANY.
Teacher:	Kuntan?
Child 3:	Kuntany.

Translanguaging should be a linguistic skill and practice that teachers can encourage and support within their classrooms. It is also possible that teachers could, and possibly should, point out differences in the various codes (e.g. SAE, AAE, AAE/K) to their students so that they can see the differences between their own language use and that of their teachers (see for example, Steele & Wigglesworth, 2021) and understand how these differences impact on their language and learning.

At a more general level, being able to recognise and incorporate home language into the classroom enhances learning opportunities, enables students' learning needs to be addressed, and increases learner motivation (Angelo, & Hudson, 2020). Even when collecting this data, by showing our interest in the students' language, we found that the students responded in very positive ways, and rather than demonstrating feelings of 'shame' or embarrassment about how they talked (as has been described throughout the literature e.g., Purdie, Oliver, Collard & Rochecouste, 2002), most of the children became excited and wanted to demonstrate to us both their cultural knowledge and their understandings within their various language(s) and dialects. Clearly this is something teachers working with First Nation students also need to do. Related to this is the need for teachers to encourage and cultivate the sharing of Indigenous knowledges (even beyond language) – this is of benefit not only to First Nations, but also to non-Aboriginal students - such as the understandings about the environment shown in Example 25 above.

Students' linguistic repertoires make up their personal and cultural identities – it reflects who they are, and how they view the world. There is a body of research that suggests that a close relationship between strong cultural and language identity and positive educational outcomes (Purdie, et al., 2000). By valuing students' language shows students that *they* are valued, and demonstrates who they are

and this, in turn, can lead to greater student engagement and participation. Sadly, as we describe in Oliver et al., (2021), to have students refer to their home language(s) such as AAE and K/AAE as 'rubbish talk' is a sad reflection of past educational practices.

It is not within the scope of this article to address the issue of the myriad ways in which teachers could best harness this kind of knowledge and incorporate it into their classroom practice. Although we recognise the importance of this, the purpose of this paper is to outline the issues based on empirical data collected in schools which could be used to present specific goals and understandings of what teachers can do in their classrooms.

Finally, we understand that assessment can be a fraught space for teachers working with multilingual learners. Teachers need to consider what is being assessed and the ways students can demonstrate this – do they need, for instance, to demonstrate understanding of a maths concept in SAE or is being able to do so in AAE appropriate? That is, can classroom assessments be constructed in more culturally and linguistically inclusive ways? Of course, assessment becomes more challenging when it involves national testing regimes, such as NAPLAN in Australia – but careful scrutiny of these regimes is possible when educators view them through the lens of inclusivity (see Wigglesworth & Simpson, 2018; Steele, Dovchin & Oliver, 2022).

Conclusion

Our data shows that First Nation students living in regional and remote areas in Western Australia bring a diverse range of languages to school. However, with appropriate consideration such linguistic repertoires can be used to enhance, rather than detract, from their learning experiences. To achieve this, it is important for teachers to enhance their awareness of their students' language backgrounds, and to facilitate diverse language use to scaffold their students' content and language learning. The students' linguistic repertoires are strongly connected to their knowledge systems and, if given the opportunity, students can draw on these through strength-based and two-way approaches. In this respect, professional development focussed on addressing these language issues are crucial for those teaching in remote and regional schools. This is particularly with respect to translanguaging - a linguistic feature that if supported by teachers can serve to foster learning, both content and language.

Furthermore, we suggest that there is a need for a stronger connection between research, policy and how this is translated into practice. Data such as that presented in this paper shows the language skills of First Nation students and how this can be scaffolded to enhance learning and academic achievement. Whilst curriculum documentation outlines the needs of learners who have English as an additional language and/or dialect, how such speakers can make use of their linguistic repertoires is less clear and less well known by educators. This is clearly a gap that needs to be addressed.

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The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Data availability statement

The transcripts (data) related to this research are stored at the participating Universities in a password protected shared folder. They are not available to those beyond the research team because of the

Ethics permission that was granted was limited to the team, and because of the nature of the data (collected from minors and containing sensitive cultural information).

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