2021 VCE Indigenous Languages of Victoria – Revival and Reclamation external assessment report

General comments

The quality of the students’ responses varied, but some papers were very good indeed.

One area for general improvement is that several students missed answering some of the questions, leaving them blank. It is strongly recommended that students attempt all the questions; even if a student is unsure about an answer, it is better to attempt the question and possibly get some marks than not to attempt at all.

There were two essay questions: Question 5 and Question 6. Question 5 was designed to allow the students to be creative and gave a prompt in terms of a drawing and some cultural information on which to build their answers.

Specific information

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

Section 1

Question 1

Responses to Questions 1a. to 1h. were generally very good.

Question 1a.

man *waguuja* *wagujaŋgu*

wife *wagaaldu* *wagaalnda* *wagaalni*

uncle *galŋa* *galŋaaŋgu*

mother *mujam* *mujaambu*

kookaburra *gurŋa*

crocodile *ganyarrani* *ganyarraŋgu*

dog *gudaaga* or *gudaga* *gudagaŋgu*

axe *baŋgal* *baŋgaalda*

beach *digarramu* *digarrala*

looking at *wawal*

going *galiŋ*

biting *bajal*

laughing *maŋgaŋ*

talking about *bujiŋ*

this *yiŋu*

Full marks were given for a fully correct answer in form and spelling.

This question gave students a scaffold for some of the following questions and assisted them to analyse the data that followed.

Question 1b.

The order in Yidiny is subject – direct object – verb, exemplified by sentences 2, 3, 5, 8 and 12. If students used sentence 9, they could point out the direct object was a complex noun phrase: (my) wife’s dog.

Question 1c**.**

The subject of a transitive sentence (ergative) has a different form from a direct object and/or subject of intransitive sentence (absolutive). If the students picked the examples of ‘man’ or ‘mother’, they needed to talk about all three functions, but if they picked the other words, they only needed to talk about the two functions that were represented. If they explained the forms in terms of word order rather than function, they received one mark.

A number of students mistakenly argued that because there is clear case marking of transitive subjects (ergative), word order does not matter, or that there is no fixed order because of the ergative case marking. However, the fact that a language has ergative morphology, indeed case marking, does not guarantee that the word order is free.

Question 1d.

The forms were in sentence 3 a transitive subject; in sentence 6 a dative/locative; and in sentence 9 a possessive/genitive. Students received full marks if they talked about the functions in sentences 6 and 9 using the English prepositions.

Question 1e.

In sentence 4, the addition of the suffix *-da* (and the lengthening of the final vowel of the root) changed the meaning to ‘with an axe’. Students only needed to say it means ‘with’, although the term ‘instrumental’ was also accepted.

Question 1f.

Correct responses needed to identify that *-la* means ‘to’ and *-mu* means ‘from’ (or away from).

Question 1g.

Correct responses were:

* *Ganyarraŋgu gurŋa wawal*
* *Wagal maŋgaŋ* (*wagaal maŋgaŋ* would also be accepted)
* *Gudaaga galiŋ digarramu*.

For the second translation, some students used the ergative form *wagaaldu*. Students had to work out the absolutive form; those who used the ergative were probably not reflecting on whether or not this sentence was transitive.

Question 1h.

A correct response was: The kookaburra sees / is looking at the crocodile.

Question 2

Responses to Questions 2a. to 2e. were generally very good.

Question 2a.

Correct responses were:

* *Ganyarrani galiiny.* (The crocodile went.)
* *Galŋaaŋgu gurŋa wawaalna*. (Uncle must look at the kookaburra.)

Question 2b.

The correct response was *Digarrala galin* (Go to the beach!).

Question 2c.

In Yidiny, there is no difference between present and future, for example, *galiŋ* means ‘is going’ or ‘will be going’.

Question 2d.

The correct answer was the imperative. The term ‘command’ was accepted.

Question 2e.

In Yidiny, the verbs have a special form that has a final *-na*, and the last vowel of the verb root (as observed in either the present or imperative form) is lengthened. English uses a construction with an auxiliary (verb) that must be in front of the main verb.

Question 3

Responses to Questions 3a. to 3j. were generally very good.

Question 3a.

The correct response was:

* *wirrkak* – make (as in make a fire)! (command / imperative)
* *dŷilpahk* – strike (as in light a fire)! (command / imperative).

Question 3b.

These were (transitive) imperative/command sentences, which consist of the bare root form of the verb followed by an object. Students could add that the subject was implied.

Question 3c.

The verb root was followed by *-ak* or *-ahk* marking the imperative, as *Wāiwahk-kalk* (‘fetch a log’). Responses that indicated the marker was *-k* were also accepted.

Question 3d.

Possible responses were:

* *Wāiwahk-bahtyŭn* (no marks were removed if there was no hyphen)
* *Mōōtyak-bahtyŭn*.

Question 3e.

The correct translation was: Throw a/the reed spear!

Question 3f.

The correct translation was:

* *Galpōōrak* cut off! (command / imperative)
* *bāŷrkook* tail (literally his tail) – either answer was accepted.

Question 3g.

The correct translation was ‘pull out’ (imperative) or ‘pull it/him out!’. Because the final element of this word is the sound *-k* (or *-ak*), which marks the imperative, and because there are two meaningful parts of this sentence, then *bōōrkak* must be the section that means ‘pull him out’. There is no part of the utterance that corresponds to the English ‘him’ because a third-person singular object does not need to be expressed in this language.

Question 3h.

The correct translation was:

* *Birkang* – by the/his tail. This is tail *bāŷrk* and here spelled *birk* plus an ablative/instrumental.
* *Bartōmak* – throw him down! (imperative/command).

Question 3i.

The correct translation was: Where is his/her pipe?

Question 3j.

The correct translation was: *Bāŷrkin* (*birkin* was also accepted).

Question 4

Responses to Questions 4a. to 4h. were generally very good.

Question 4a.

The correct answer was borrowing.

Question 4b.

Example answers include:

* ‘f’ [f] as in fowl
* ‘ff’ [f] as in coffee
* ‘s’ [s] as in saddle
* ‘ss’ [s] as in pussy cat
* ‘c’ [s] as in necklace
* ‘v’ [v] as in veranda
* ‘s’ [ʃ] as in sugar
* ‘sh’ [ʃ] as in tin dish
* ‘tch’[ʧ] as in matches
* ‘es’ [z] as in the final sound of matches.

Note that these three sounds are not present as phonemes in G/Y but may be found as allophonic variants. Examples from the following group of words were accepted.

* ‘c’ [k] as in coffee
* ‘ck’ [k] as in stocking
* ‘p’ [p] as in pistol
* ‘t’ [t] as in tin dish.

Question 4c.

The correct response was:

* fowl – *baawuul*
* flour – *bulaawaa*
* coffee – *gabi*
* knife – *nhaybuu*.

All four examples were required to get full marks.

A number of students only gave examples where their *f*- was in the initial position and did not look for the sound of *f* in the middle of a word, as in coffee, or at the end, as in knife.

Question 4d.

The correct response was:

* verandah – *barranda*
* pussy cat – *budjigurr*
* pistol – *birridul.*

Also, the /*l*/ is soul – *dhawubu*.

One example of each of *v* and *p* was required for full marks.

Question 4e.

An example of a correct response was:

* pussy cat > *budjigurr* – *t* > *rr* or
* nanny goat > *nhanigurr* – *t* > *rr*
* tin dish > *dhindirr* – *t* > *dh*.

If this was written out in long hand, clearly showing what was English, what was G/Y and what was the direction, it was acceptable, as in ‘tin dish becomes *dhindhirr* and initial *t* becomes *dh*’.

Question 4f.

An example of a correct response was:

* matches > *maadjirr* – *z* > *rr*
* necklace > *nhiigilirr* – *s* > *rr*
* tin dish > *dhindirr* – *sh* > *rr*.

In ‘matches’, most English speakers pronounce this with a ‘z’ sound, but some may pronounce it with ‘s’, or students may confuse spelling with written form and write this sound change as *s* > *rr*. This answer was accepted if clearly explained and presented.

Question 4g.

Neither *r* nor *rr* are found at the start of a word in Gamilaraay and Yuwaalaraay, hence a syllable *yu*- is added in front of the *r*/*rr*.

Question 4h.

The correct answer was that *h* does not exist in Gamilaraay/Yuwaalaraay.

Section 2

Question 5

No students answered Question 5.

Question 5a.

In Question 5a., students were required to describe the protocols and processes of community involvement in the production of the resources, and the benefits that community knowledge would bring to the process. They also had to describe the need to carefully examine the original sources of the language, and how features of neighbouring languages or other Indigenous languages might need to be brought in to cover some of the gaps in the record of the target language.

For example, there would be a need to find out about:

* words related to the reed necklace, including its parts, actions involved in making it and actions involved in using it
* words for source materials and tools needed to make a reed necklace
* words for the kinds of cultural uses of the necklace
* expressions appropriate for making and wearing necklaces.

Some of these words might have to be borrowed from neighbouring languages or coined anew (using some of the principles discussed in Question 4).

Question 5b.

In Question 5b., the answer depended on whether the students chose to discuss a dialogue or song.

If discussing a dialogue or conversation, students would be expected to list the kinds of interactions that would be needed: greetings, questions, answers, exclamations and warnings. For example, the dialogue might discuss the process of making a necklace, where perhaps an elder teaches a younger person how to do that, or it might discuss the process of cutting the reed and preparing the thread/string. A conversation may also include ‘fillers’, phrases such as ‘say it again’, ‘not yet’ and ‘go on’, and requests for confirmation of information, such as ‘what do you mean?’.

The text of a song, on the other hand, might have a much wider possible reference. The students would discuss what kinds of things people might sing when either making a specific item or doing a specific activity.

Students would need to mention that the creation of new vocabulary would likely be needed here. Use of repetition is likely to be a feature of a song.

Note that the making (reconstruction) of the necklace could be the focus of a language immersion activity.

Question 5c.

In Question 5c., students might point out that necklaces were made and worn in the target language area. Students might write about the role that necklaces played in traditional society and the features of traditional dreamings that involve the reed necklace and its role.

Question 6

Responses to Question 6 were generally very good.

Question 6a.

There were a number of possible responses.

One imperative is to introduce words and expressions early on that are easy to pronounce and easy to remember. The other imperative is to introduce words and expressions that have a high functional load.

You might first learn nouns, names of animals or body parts OR you might first learn simple sentence exchanges such as ‘How are you?’ / ‘I am well’ or equivalent greetings OR you might start by learning something like the pronouns. The reasons are that:

* nouns name objects that can be identified, pointed to and can have pictures
* question words and single word responses (yes, no, maybe) are often easy to learn and remember and can be used very often (i.e. they have a high functional load)
* sentence exchanges can be used in communication and practised and allow a new student to speak the language immediately
* pronouns allow someone to get to the core of the language’s structure quicker.

What should follow might include: pronunciation of sounds not used in English and stress patterns in the language.

Activities introduced to facilitate learning might include language games, songs and language immersion activities, for example, sending SMS messages or emails to each other.

The grammatical aspects that are most difficult include pronoun system, case endings, verb tense and number marking.

Ergatives are difficult for English speakers to understand. The same is true of bound pronouns (especially when they show little alignment with free pronouns), inclusive versus exclusive pronouns, the inclusive construction, verb classes, noun classes, free word order, and alienable versus inalienable possession. Allomorphy always presents a challenge to language learners.

Other items that may present challenges to English speakers are:

* demonstratives, in languages that have more than a two-way ‘this–that’ distinction
* relative clauses that may be expressed by different syntactic structures or by two full clauses
* other kinds of multi-clause structures like subordinate clauses.

There may not be a one-to-one correspondence of meaning between an English word and a word in an Aboriginal language. A very common example of this is with kinship, where in many Aboriginal languages there is a distinction between, for example, elder brother and younger brother, but the word for elder brother also refers to the son of one’s father’s brother if that person is older than the speaker.

Students came up with different orders in which they talked about things relating to this: (1) checking protocols, (2) grammar, (3) songs and games, (4) land and identity, (5) tense, then ergativity and finally complexities like split ergativity. This was another creative and well-thought-out potential approach.

Question 6b.

Traditional stories that have been written down may provide examples of language use that is not found in everyday language; stories are more likely to be something that members of the community would want to share with learners, although perhaps not with the same level of detail that they would with people who are more knowledgeable. They may also be the basis for songs or other resources.

Question 6c.

Students could have mentioned that there are differences between cultures in terms of what is talked about. Some examples might be that kinship terms (e.g. father, mother, uncle, aunt) have (or may have) different meanings in Indigenous languages and are also used in different ways. Similarly, place names often have meanings that are clearly understandable to speakers, in the way that place names in contemporary Australia often do not. Hence, learning the meanings of place names, and the cultural connection with those names, is perhaps more important in Indigenous languages than in English. (It is likely that some of the recorded place names in Victoria have unclear meaning and unclear reference.) Hence, if you learn kinship and place names properly, you are learning broader aspects of culture.