

2015 VCE Indigenous Languages of Victoria: Revival and Reclamation examination report

General comments

Overall, students produced some excellent answers to questions on the 2015 Indigenous Languages of Victoria: Revival and Reclamation examination.

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 1a.

the man	<i>maal</i>	<i>maaldu</i>
the horse	<i>yarraman</i>	<i>yarramandu</i>
the snake	<i>winydjingu</i>	
saw	<i>nunday</i>	
pulled	<i>duuray</i>	
swam	<i>yugarray</i>	
stood	<i>djuwarray</i>	
went	<i>gagay</i>	
speared	<i>babay</i>	

Students were required to provide both variants for ‘the man’ and ‘the horse’, and to provide answers that were free of spelling errors.

Question 1b.

Word order is not used to distinguish subject and object in Wargamay. Unlike English, the subject and the object can appear in either order. This needed to be illustrated by reference to two sentences, one each from two of the following sets:

- object, subject, verb – sentence 7

- subject, object, verb – sentences 3, 6, 8, 9 and 10
- subject, verb, object – sentence 11.

Question 1c.

The Wargamay word corresponding to the English word ‘man’ has two forms: *maal* and *maald*.

Maal occurs in sentences such as 1 and 2 where ‘the man’ is the subject and there isn’t an object, and in sentences such as sentence 8 when ‘the man’ is the object.

When ‘the man’ is the ‘doer’ of an action and there is also someone or something affected by the action (i.e. ‘the man’ is the subject of a verb that also takes an object), the form *maald* is used. i.e. the person doing the action has a suffix which is *-du*, in this case. Students could have referred to this as an ergative or agentive suffix. This was illustrated in sentences 3, 7 and 11.

Question 1d.

ηalun̄ga: in the water

ηalunyiny: from the water

Question 2a.

ηayba, *ηadja*, *ηanya*

All three words begin with *ηa*.

Question 2b.

- *ηayba* functions as the subject of an intransitive verb (i.e. when the sentence has no object), as in sentences 4 and 5.
- *ηadja* functions as the subject of a transitive verb (i.e. when the sentence includes an object), as in sentences 8 and 10.
- *ηanya* functions as the object of a transitive verb, as in sentences 3, 7, 9 and 11.

A high-scoring answer would have included an overall clear explanation and/or additional observation (for example, that the use of three different forms for the same pronoun, such as occurs in Wargamay, is common for pronouns in Australian Indigenous languages.)

Question 2c.

There are only two forms for Wargamay nouns that are subject or object. The unsuffixed form is for subjects of verbs that don’t have an object and for objects, whereas the suffixed form is for the subject of a verb that does have an object. A high-scoring answer might have included the observation that this is a common pattern for case suffixes in Australian Indigenous languages.

An answer that used the terms ‘ergative’ and ‘transitive’ and/or ‘doer’ and ‘person or thing affected’ was also equally acceptable.

For the first-person pronoun there are three different forms.

Question 2d.

Sentence 1: The horse swam in the water – *yarraman yugarray ηalun̄ga*

Sentence 2: The man frightened the snake – *maald* *winydjingu biiramay*

Sentence 3: I cured the man – *ηadja maal gunamay*

Students could have used the words in any order.

Question 3a.

wadthan

Question 3b.

The suffix *-(d)o* marks the ergative, or case indicating a transitive subject of a sentence. The suffix *-(d)a* marks a genitive case, indicating the possessor.

Marks were awarded where students indicated the suffixes as *-do/-da*, respectively, or *-o/-a*. The ‘*d*’ probably arises from a morphophonemic process, but students did not need to discuss this.

Question 3c.

Without the word *manyina*, the expression *pāpaka wadthanda* would probably mean ‘The heart of the opossum.’

Question 3d.

The forms in Tables 1 and 3 have a suffix *-a*.

Question 3e.

It appears that the suffix *-a* must be added to possessed nouns.

Question 3f.

wrek-a *wadthan-da*

tail-possessed opossum-possessor

Students might have added that possibly both the possessor (possum) and the possessed (tail) are marked with the same suffix *-(d)a* (the ‘*d*’ perhaps arises from morphophonemic processes). The two suffixes are similar.

Question 3g.

wadthan-go

opossum-to (allative/recipient)

Meaning ‘to an opossum’, *-(ng)o* is an allative marker meaning ‘to’ or ‘towards’.

Question 4a.

Extending the meaning of existing words; for example, ‘blood’ is used to mean ‘wine’ because the colours of blood and wine are similar and both are liquids. The word ‘inside’ is extended to mean ‘shopping mall’, which is a large interior space.

Question 4b.

The creation of new words by joining or compounding two existing words

A high-scoring response would have included that the example *tukuwingkura* is formed with a translation of the English ‘micro’, meaning small, whereas compounds like *witoturlo* and *kurdimai* are descriptive creations to indicate an object.

Question 4c.

‘Womaniser’ is created by ‘female’ + ‘inclined to’, making a note that the written form of the suffix is altered by this process (from *-pina* to *-binna*).

A high-scoring response would have noted that the words derived by *-purka*, also show change in the verb root, from *mettendi* (steal) to *metteri-* and from *nuinyarendi* (be naughty) to *nuinyari-*.

Question 4d.

Answers were drawn from the target language(s) of reclamation that students were familiar with. The words needed to be written clearly, with glosses, and the processes presented with the original and derived forms with the kind of information provided in Tables 1 to 4.

Section 2

Question 5a.

Responses could have included:

- interest in Aboriginal languages
- desire to pursue a linguistic challenge
- desire to expand knowledge of Aboriginal languages/heritage
- identity
- confidence/pride
- passing on information/heritage to new generation
- politics and language policy
- connect/reconnect with land/ancestors
- recover something that was stolen
- assert their rights to their language and culture.

Question 5b.

Answers could have included some of the following:

- It is important to consult/learn from Elders and community members who have been interested in language, to gain some understanding of their knowledge and passion for their language, and to share with them the outcomes of your work, as may be appropriate.
- Aboriginal languages have some sounds and sequences that are not distinctive in English. Listening to people speak Aboriginal languages can help us to speak fluently.
- Different people may have spelled words differently. Comparing different spellings can help us to work out how a word is pronounced and from this we can work out a consistent spelling system.
- Sentence grammar, for example noun/pronoun forms and suffixes, to make it clear who is doing an action, to whom, when, where, etc; other pronominal forms, verb endings for tense, etc., different word/constituent order, lack of articles. We need to know about all of these to form correct sentences.
- New words are always needed to express new ideas. We need to understand different ways to make new words; for example, by meaning extension.
- We can use language creatively in new ways such as songs, poems, picture captions and speeches; however, we would want to model this on authentic sentence grammar as far as possible. People sometimes create non-standard forms.
- Being able to access and read records of early settlers/government officials who were interested in the language gives us an extra window to the language of past generations. However, non-Aboriginal settlers were sometimes influenced by the grammar and sound systems of their own languages and so this may need to be taken into account in understanding such material; for example, Aboriginal languages have sounds not found in English, so they may not have been heard or recorded accurately.

Question 5c.

Responses could have included:

- identity (individual and group identity)
- knowledge of heritage
- confidence/pride
- passing on heritage to new generation
- key to understanding the environment
- key to understanding aspects of Koorie English
- key to understanding aspects of Indigenous cultures and ways of thinking
- key to understanding place names
- large gaps in knowledge of these languages
- uncertainties in grammar and pronunciation
- teachers are uncertain about the language
- some people think we should not be learning the language
- some people might think that language revival is an impossible dream
- there is no need for these languages because everyone associated with them speaks English.

Question 6a.

Responses could have included:

- Cultural marriage customs: Dalawurr's parents come from different clans, as is customary in the Yolŋu culture, and they therefore speak different clan languages. That is why Dalawurr knows both her father's and her mother's language.
- Kinship identity: By speaking Djapu as an adult, Dalawurr identifies as a member of a Djapu-speaking clan.
- Family relationships: A Yolŋu person's mother and father typically come from different clans and therefore will speak different clan languages. Dalawurr grew up speaking her mother's (clan) language (Gumatj), but later switched to speaking her father's language (Djapu).
- Language and land: Dalawurr grew up speaking Gumatj, her mother's clan language, and as an eldest child is a caretaker for Gumatj land. She also has responsibilities for her father's land, and should speak the language of that land as an adult. Dalawurr understands a number of related clan languages, probably including those spoken by her different grandparents.
- Government policy regarding missions, reserves, land rights and schooling: Dalawurr is a trained literacy worker, so her use of language includes writing and reading in various clan languages, which is a result of mission and government schooling as it applied to Yolŋu people, and which is now maintained by Yolŋu people.

Question 6b.

Responses could have included:

- Cultural marriage customs: Snooky's parents came from different localities and different language groups. This is most probably due to issues of white contact, displacement and the mission life rather than cultural marriage customs, but it is consistent with a broader cultural custom of avoiding marriage with close family.
- Kinship identity: Snooky says that he grew up speaking Ngarrindjeri, his mother's language, even though he lived in Narrunga country and his father was a Narrunga man. Thus he maintained his close identity with his mother and her heritage. It is not clear whether, in this area, it would have been customary for children to switch to speaking their father's language as they become adults, as is the case in Arnhem Land. Language customs would have been disrupted by the government/school policy of punishing children for speaking Aboriginal languages.

- Family relationships: Snooky said that he later studied his father's genealogy and found out that his father's people originated from Adnyamathanha mob in the Flinders Ranges.
- Language and land: Snooky is clear about his mother's language, Ngarrindjeri, being from Raukkan (Point McLeay), which is some distance away in the south-east of South Australia. He is also aware of Narrunga being the language of the Point Pearce country.
- Government policy regarding Aboriginal missions, reserves, land rights and schooling: Snooky expresses his sadness at the government/school policy of the times, of discouraging/forbidding the use of Aboriginal languages, and the resultant language loss, which, as an adult, he is trying to repair through language study and reclamation.

Question 6c.

Responses could have included the following:

- Dalawurr: As a child, Dalawurr would probably have said that she spoke Gumatj. As an adult, she would probably say that she is a speaker of Djapu, but that she also knows Gumatj, and a number of other clan languages. She would probably also say that she speaks English, depending on the context of the question. This question is probably not a question an Aboriginal person would customarily ask. Knowing a language and being a speaker of a language area are different things.
- Nelson (Snooky): The answer would depend on who was asking. As a child, Snooky may have said that he spoke Ngarrindjeri, though as he became aware of the negative attitudes to Aboriginal languages he may have avoided this. As an older child and young adult he might have said that he spoke English. As it became more acceptable in the wider world to identify with Aboriginal heritage, he might say that he speaks Nunga English, though he probably also speaks Australian English without Nunga features when he is speaking in non-Aboriginal contexts.