6 From “Civilising Missions” to Indigenous Language Reclamation

Language Policy, Language Shift, and Maintenance in Australia and Norway

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1 Introduction

Indigenous peoples around the world share a history of marginalisation, oppression, silencing, and even displacement. Stringent assimilation policies in combination with processes of modernisation and economic development have led to language shift, as adults stop using their mother tongue with the next generation. Many nation-states set out on “civilising missions,” portraying Indigenous populations as inferior and their languages as primitive. Such representations often became tools of government serving the colonisers’ interests in extending military, economic, political, and cultural control (Lane and Makihara 2017). Educational systems came to be one of the major tools in these civilising projects, as illustrated by the similarities between policies directed towards the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia, and the Sámi population in Northern Norway (Simpson and Wigglesworth 2008; Johansen 2013). In both contexts, assimilatory policies were the explicit goal of the national authorities, and schools and education were key tools in these processes. Indigenous children were sent to boarding schools where the use of their mother tongues was forbidden, with these schools seen as tools for providing cultured education and assimilating Indigenous children into the national cultures and language.

In this chapter we review this terrible history, which illustrates the many similarities in coloniser behaviours despite being at opposite ends of the world. We compare the treatment of the Australian Indigenous population with that of the Sámi in Norway, with a particular focus on the role of schools and educational systems. We end the chapter with a discussion of the current-day situation, with a focus on language reclamation work, changes that have taken place in the educational systems, and the current efforts to revitalise these Indigenous languages. Europe did not only colonise other continents but also developed and implemented tools of colonisation at home (Lane in press). Our comparison of Australia and Norway

reveals that, despite the different geographical situations, the processes and outcomes were remarkably similar in both cases.

2 Historical Setting and the Linguistic Context

2.1 *Australia*

It is estimated that the Indigenous population (the term Indigenous is used to refer to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples) of Australia had been the sole residents of this huge nation for a long period, between 50,000 and 120,000 years (Dudgeon et al. 2010). It is difficult to estimate the exact size of the Indigenous population prior to 1788, but many scholars now accept that there were at least 750,000 people (Commonwealth of Australia 1998). Tragically, the period from 1790 for many decades marked a horrific period of the massacre of Indigenous peoples, including men, women, and children, by British soldiers, police, and settlers whose access to guns and other weapons, unavailable to the Indigenous population, led to extraordinary losses of Indigenous life. In 1869, the Victorian government introduced the Aboriginal Protection Act with the goal of Aboriginal “protection”, but which in reality prescribed almost every aspect of Aboriginal life – including where they could live, how they could work, and whom they could marry. Following Federation in 1901, the other states followed suit with NSW introducing the Aborigines Protection Act in 1909 and with similar legislative acts passed by other states. These were punitive and restrictive laws which, while claiming to be “for their own good” were in fact far from it, resulting in the extensive the cultural genocide of the Indigenous population who were dispossessed from family, culture, and language (Dudgeon et al. 2010).

These laws allowed the authorities to move Aboriginal people from their traditional lands, often to missions or other lands far from those they knew, where they were treated as incompetent to manage their own lives, and were “subject to arbitrary rule by mission managers and police” (Commonwealth of Australia 1998, 10). Children were frequently removed from their families and the *Bringing Them Home* report (1997) details the experiences of these “stolen generations,” and estimate that between 1910 and 1970 between 10% and 30% of Indigenous children were removed from their homes, their families, and their communities causing widespread devastation, desolation, and loss at both a personal and community level.

In pre-colonial Australia, there were 700–800 language varieties comprising between 250 and 300 distinct languages (Simpson and Wigglesworth 2018); at that time, it was not unusual for people to speak three or four languages from their local region. Many languages had small numbers of speakers, often not exceeding 1000 speakers, and that remains the case today. The impact of colonialism on these small languages was disastrous, and the decline in the number of Indigenous languages that continue to be

spoken across all generations (a necessary condition for language transmission) has been rapid. The period since colonisation has seen many traditional languages disappear, particularly in the more populated south, but at the same time there has been an increase in the number of “new” mixed languages, for example, Light Warlpiri (O’Shannessy 2012) and Gurindji Kriol (Meakins 2014). A variety of creoles have also emerged, often referred to in Australia as Kriol, with multiple dialects, which are spoken widely across the top end of Australia. In addition, there are various dialects of Aboriginal English spoken widely across the country, often acting as a *lingua franca* between different groups. Three National Indigenous Language Surveys have been undertaken. The first was reported in 2005 (NILS1 Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, and Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages), the second in 2014 (NILS2 Marmion, Obata and Troy 2014), and the third in 2020 (NILS3). These report that increasingly fewer children are learning their traditional language as a first language, with the number of communities where the traditional language is transmitted to children reducing from 18 in 2005 to 12 in 2020. McConvell and Thieberger (2001) predicted that by 2050 no traditional languages will still be spoken. At this rate, this prediction will come true.

Australian Indigenous languages appear genealogically unconnected to languages outside Australia, but they can be categorised into either a member of the large Pama Nyungan group (Bower and Koch 2004), or as non-Pama-Nyungan (Evans 2003) for a small set of languages that do not meet the Pama Nyungan criteria. Typologically, Australian languages are quite similar to each other in their sound systems, the way information is structured, and the semantic categories they use (Simpson and Wigglesworth 2018). But many also have typologically rare properties, which are generally not found outside Australian languages. Kinship relations, for example, have been reported to be encoded in the syntax and morphology of the languages themselves (see, for example, Blythe 2013; Evans 2007; Hercus and White 1973). If this loss of language continues at this rate, these typological differences will be lost forever; their loss may have implications for our understanding of human cognition and its range of complexity (Evans and Levinson 2009, 431). Across the world, many Indigenous communities are experiencing this loss, a process that also affects self-perception, identity, and sense of belonging.

2.2 Norway

As in the case of Indigenous languages in Australia, the Indigenous Sámi languages in Europe also are in a vulnerable position. The Sámi people live in the Northern parts of Norway, Finland, and Sweden, and on the Kola Peninsula in Northwest Russia where they settled before the national borders were drawn. There are ten Sámi languages running in West–East belts,

divided by national borders, and the result is that each Sámi language is spoken in different countries. The Sámi languages belong to the Finno-Ugric language family and are related to the national languages Finnish, Estonian, and Hungarian.

North Sámi is the largest Sámi language and is spoken in Northern Finland, Norway, and Sweden – traditionally a diverse and multilingual region and where the presence of Sámi peoples dates back for as long as we have written records. The earliest written records of this historical multilingualism are from the late ninth century when the chieftain Ottar described the Sámi livelihood as being based on hunting and fishing. Their produce was valuable and led local kingdoms to compete for jurisdiction and taxation rights, and the Sámis were regarded as the states' common subjects. In periods until 1751 when Denmark–Norway gained jurisdiction over most of the area, the Sámis paid taxes to several kingdoms, and by staking claims in this area, states strived to secure their taxation rights. When the border between Denmark–Norway and Sweden–Finland was established, the Lapp Codicil, a set of regulations regarding the rights of the border-crossing Sámi was implemented. For a fee, the Sámi were granted access to renewable resources on both sides of the border; they purchased the right to choose which country they were citizens of; rules to facilitate reindeer grazing across borders were put in place. The final border demarcation (Norway–Sweden and Finland–Russia) was established in 1826.

In Norway today, there are five main groups of Sámi peoples: Lule, Northern, Pite, Skolt, and South Sámi. Today, Pite Sámi and Skolt Sámi languages are no longer transmitted in the family domain in Norway, but there are attempts at revitalising the languages via cross-border collaboration (Todal 2020). In the Action Plan for Sámi Languages, the Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion (2009) estimated that in Norway less than a thousand people speak Lule and South Sámi, whereas North Sámi has approximately 25,000 speakers. In 1990, Norway ratified the ILO Convention 169 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, which defines Indigenous people as

peoples in independent countries who are regarded as Indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonisation or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions

Finland, Sweden, and Russia have not ratified the ILO Convention, but still regard the Sámi as an Indigenous people. Norway, Sweden, and Finland have also ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, a convention under the auspices of the Council of Europe. The aim of the

Charter is to protect and promote languages used by traditional minorities and enable their speakers to use them both in private and public life.

3 Assimilatory Processes – Civilising Missions

The idea of a monolingual nation-state got a foothold particularly from the nineteenth century, and multilingualism and Indigenous languages were overlooked and often even oppressed. Dorian (1998, 10), quoting Grillo (1989, 173–174), has described the Western view of minority languages as an ideology of contempt: “an integral feature of the system of linguistic stratification in Europe is an ideology of contempt: subordinate languages are despised languages,” also reflected European values transferred to the Australian context. Social Darwinism did not only rank ethnicity, but also languages (often linked to race and ethnicity), which led to a hierarchisation of languages where some languages were seen as stronger, more adaptable, and more suited for rational thought than other languages. In many cases, as discussed above, the colonised Indigenous people, and, by association, their languages, were seen as inferior and their speakers were made into “Others” through policies of assimilation and oppression. This attitude was no less prevalent in the European colonies, where oppressive policies, such as in Australia, were developed and implemented on a far larger scale.

3.1 *Australia*

The assimilationist policy adopted in Australia between 1930 and 1969 followed the earlier protectionist policy, which had been intended to reduce the Aboriginal population. In fact, the result had been a decrease in numbers of full blood Aboriginals, but an increase in the numbers of “mixed” blood or “half-caste” Aboriginals, which was taken as indicating that “Aboriginal identity could be destroyed through a process of absorption” (Armitage 1995, 19) with the goal of complete assimilation into the white world. In 1937, all states adopted assimilation policies designed to ensure that Aboriginal people were adopting the ways of the white population with a goal of national homogeneity but also as a result of fears about the future of the white nation and the undesirability of Aboriginality in a white Australia (Moran 2005).

Children were seen in particular as being susceptible to being assimilated into Australian (European) society and they continued to be forcibly removed from their families, their homes, and their communities to be raised in missions, in boarding schools where they could be trained as domestic servants or farm labour, or placed with (largely white) foster families where, as Read (1998, 10) argues, they had variable experiences in their treatment, meeting dedicated foster parents, neglect, and even abuse.

The approach to assimilation inevitably varied from one state to another, including the Northern Territory, but was focussed generally on training and

employment and education. Aboriginal families were housed in white areas; children continued to be removed and the only route to being exempted from these “protections” and controls was achieved by the Aboriginal people giving up their traditions and culture, and demonstrating that they could manage economically in white society (Moran 2005).

From the earliest days of colonisation, the Indigenous people of Australia never had their ways of life, or their traditional cultures, recognised; the protectionist policies put in place by successive state governments ensured that they had few rights. Australian Indigenous people were not recognised as Australian citizens until 1967, following a referendum in which over 90% of the enrolled population voted for changes to the constitution that would recognise Indigenous citizenship, improve services to Indigenous Australians, and allow them to be counted in future censuses (Attwood 2007). While assimilationist policies purported to be in the best interests of the Indigenous population, they had a disastrous effect on the maintenance of Indigenous languages and cultures and contributed massively to the dispossession felt widely across Australia by Indigenous communities. Indigenous Australians are still not recognised or mentioned in the Australian constitution, although this is currently under discussion, with the current Federal government announcing in 2019 that it would hold a referendum on Indigenous recognition in the constitution within three years (New York Times 2019).

3.2 Norway

During the eighteenth century, there was some recognition of Sámi ways of life and traditions, as they were seen as a “nation” particularly with regards to reindeer herding and in the judicial system, and Sámi was also used as a language of instruction in the educational system. In 1814, after the Napoleonic wars, Norway was ceded from Denmark to Sweden. Though in union with Sweden, Norway had its own constitution, and in this period witnessed the birth of the idea of Norway as a nation. From the mid-nineteenth century, Norway’s attitude to its Northern minorities changed, and the view of the Norwegian nation came to be characterised by a drive towards a homogenous and monolingual nation. From seeing the minorities in the North as taxable subjects and a source of income, the focus shifted towards a view of diversity as problematic, and the goal became to Norwegianise the Northern minorities. The efforts to Norwegianise the minorities were fuelled by a combination of a nation-building process steeped in the idea of a homogenous nation, a fear that Russia would use the Northern minorities to lay claims to the Northern region, and a strive to “civilise” the minorities, in particular the Sámis. A range of measures were introduced, most of which targeted language and culture, aiming to assimilate the Sámi into Norwegian mainstream national culture, which was seen as more superior and civilised. Social Darwinism had a strong influence both in Norway and

Sweden, and “primitive peoples” such as the Sámis were placed at the bottom of the hierarchy.

Crania were measured to determine what hierarchical category Sámis belonged to, and Sámi graves were opened for skulls to be moved to the University of Oslo where they could be measured and studied. Land could be given to farmers of unmixed Norwegian origin (Bull 2014, 74), and a regulation of the Land Sales Act of 1902 limited sales of land in Finnmark county to Norwegian citizens who could read, write, and speak Norwegian and who used Norwegian as their everyday language. Norwegian farmers were seen as more civilised and higher in the cultural hierarchy than the Sámis, as many Sámis were semi-nomadic, herding reindeer. Neither did they have a tradition of farming or owning land, but they had usage-based rights to areas, and therefore Norwegians settled on what they classified as free land. The goal was to establish a strong Norwegian presence in this border area and Norwegianise the population; and thus, the combination of language skills and land rights became an important tool for regulating access to land. The Act did not take into consideration traditional usage of land by groups in the area, but formalised national ownership: the land was not seen as owned by those who used it, but by the nation-state, which could redistribute land to its most loyal or appropriate subjects. Such a lack of recognition of historical use and traditional rules of land tenure is common also in other parts of the world as national states or colonisers lay claims to land (see Clifford (2013) and Connell (2007) for further examples and discussions).

4 The Role of Educational Systems

In many Indigenous contexts, education became the cornerstone for the development and implementation of colonising policies and led to many Indigenous peoples internalising a feeling of otherness. Such policies are found across the world, and the Kenyan writer and academic Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986, 16) reflects on domination through control of people’s culture and self-definition in the following manner:

Its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonised, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people’s culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others.

Ngũgĩ sees language as the key vehicle in this process, describing the bullet as the means of physical subjugation and language as the means of spiritual subjugation (1986, 9). Indigenous peoples, and their cultures and languages, have been vulnerable to assimilation, dispossession, and state violence, the

latter including symbolic violence whereby “power has been legitimized in meanings institutionally produced and reproduced through everyday practices of negative stereotyping, derogatory labelling, and the devaluing of Indigenous languages and epistemologies” (Patrick 2012, 31). Both in the Australian and Norwegian contexts, schools and educational systems were tools for colonisation processes and one of the key driving forces of the subsequent language shift that occurred. Devaluation of Indigenous languages and cultures led to feelings of inferiority by those who experienced the oppressive policies, and in turn they passed their internalised worldview on to their children and grandchildren, believing that they acted in their children’s best interests as knowledge of the national language was the key to success and prosperity, and for many also a way of erasing one’s background to avoid further stigmatisation. Often they are not even aware of this, as time erases the memory of learned practice, and therefore social practices deeply steeped in power relations get (re)produced so subtly that social actors are not aware of these processes (see Li Wei and Kelly-Holmes’ (2021) discussion of intergenerational communication as a key site for language policy and management considerations). Schools are key arenas for symbolic domination and reproduction of culture (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970) and contribute to social and cultural reproduction because knowledge in the educational system is not universal, but rather produced and shaped by particular social actors.). Boarding schools also led to separation from the family and in many cases this caused a disjuncture between the children’s lives in educational settings and their home environment, which in turn for many led to a sense of alienation and loss. Such experiences are all too common, both in the Australian and in the Norwegian contexts.

4.1 Australia

The invasion of Australia by the British in 1788 saw the introduction of educational systems across the colony, which reflected the knowledge, values, and beliefs of Western societies. Herbert (2012) argues that for the most part this meant that Indigenous perspectives – their knowledge, their values, and their beliefs – were relegated to the periphery. Educational, employment, and social influences moved in this same direction so that not only were the Indigenous population forced to abandon their own languages, but they were also made to feel ashamed of their languages. Crucially this affected the transmission of language from parent to child with the result that, today, few Traditional Indigenous languages continue to be learned by children, although new mixed languages, English-lexified creoles (Kriol), and Aboriginal Englishes (specific dialects of English) are learned by children. Those languages where greater intergenerational transmission has been maintained are generally those where contact between the Aboriginal people and the colonisers was less, resulting in an increased presence of these languages in communities in the more remote regions of Australia

(Walsh 2005). Herbert (2012) points out that this situation persisted throughout the 1960s with a range of excuses used to explain the poor educational outcomes for the Indigenous population, which included lack of English language, poor health, low self-esteem, and cultural deprivation. Thus, rather than blame the racist nature of society, “attention could be turned away from discrimination and structured inequality as the real cause of educational disadvantage” (Lippman 1994, 138 cited in Herbert 2012), ensuring that these results could not be blamed on either the school context or on white society.

After two centuries of determined assimilationism, and with the election of the Whitlam government in 1972, the Federal government declared Indigenous languages and cultures needed to be preserved and argued for the provision of bilingual schools (Rhydwen 2007).

During the 1980s and 1990s, the modest amount of Federal government support for bilingual education for Indigenous children increased. This was a time of optimism for the future of Indigenous languages, which resulted from both Australian and international initiatives. While only a small number of Indigenous schools were established during this period, the result was an increased awareness of Indigenous issues across the country. This was reflected in various ways – through increased media coverage, but also more holistically by ensuring an increase in the presence of Indigenous history in the school curriculum, which until this point had been quite limited. In addition to this, there was much more involvement by Indigenous communities who were encouraged to participate in their children’s education at school, although the support from local authorities was not universally as positive as it could have been. This support for bilingual education was reflected in an increasing number of research projects (at various institutions, but mainly in the universities), which examined in greater depth the situation of Indigenous languages across the country. Programmes were launched to support these languages through Regional Indigenous Language Centers, funded externally and managed by local Indigenous people. It was this social and educational context during the 1990s that allowed the number of bilingual programmes in English and Indigenous languages to grow to 33 in schools across Australia: 21 in the Northern Territory, 8 in South Australia, and 4 in Western Australia (Black 2007). Most of these programmes adopted a step bilingual model in which instruction began in the Indigenous language of the students, with English introduced orally, and English gradually increasing as the children advanced through the years with a transition to literacy in year four. However, despite the initial period of building and promoting Indigenous languages and culture, toward the end of the 1990s, when bilingual education in Indigenous languages that had been developed in various states, and especially in the Northern Territory, successive governments began its dismantling.

In 1998, the government of the Northern Territory, which had the largest number of bilingual programmes, decided to close them after the publication

of a report commissioned by the administration to examine the effects of bilingual education. The reason given for these closures was the low standard of English that resulted from the bilingual programmes when compared with the standard reached by Indigenous students in school where English was the language of instruction (Nicholls 2005). However, no evidence was provided which would allow comparisons and the administration did not make public any statistics or studies that supported the claims being made about performance in English. When called upon to release the data that confirmed these assumptions, the Education Minister declined.

The final death knell for bilingual education came with the introduction of standardised testing across Australia in 2008 when the results of the National Assessment – Literacy and Numeracy Proficiency was introduced with the results of the first year demonstrating that Indigenous students did worse than non-Indigenous students, and the more remotely they lived, the lower their scores. These results were sufficient for the Northern Territory government to decide to effectively eliminate bilingual programmes by requiring the first four hours of the school day to be devoted to literacy education in English, a decision which caused many of the bilingual materials to be discarded, although the ruling was later withdrawn. There have been a few bilingual programmes that have survived in this climate, and although a few more are emerging as time passes, the vast majority of school educational programmes are still in English. Even when the only children attending these schools are Indigenous, and do not speak English either at home or in the community, when they enter school their whole schooling will be in English, although some schools do have an hour or so of language and culture each week.

4.2 Norway

Schools can be a powerful means for domination and subjugation, and in the mission to “civilise” and Norwegianise the Sámi population, from about 1880, the Norwegian state-issued several acts and instructions promoting Norwegian, and more importantly limiting the use of Northern minority languages. The area was multilingual, both on the societal and individual levels. Several Sámi languages and Kven, a Finnic minority language, were spoken in the area, and at least receptive competence was common for Sámi and Kven people. The aim of these policies was to ensure that Sámi and Kven children would become Norwegian speakers, and stringent measures were implemented: the possibilities for using Sámi and Kven as supportive languages in the education were removed, teachers who could document that they had been successful in this respect could apply for a salary increase, and teachers from Southern Norway were recruited (Minde 2005). The explicit goal of these policies was to “make the Sámi as Norwegian as possible – in language, culture, and in their overall view of themselves” (Todal 1998, 357). Teachers should be of “pure Norwegian descent” and

not “foreign” (Jensen 2005). Boarding schools and churches were built to demarcate the border to Russia, which was seen as a threat, and also to establish a Norwegian presence and promote Norwegian national culture in the North.

After World War II, there was a gradual change in Norwegian policies towards the minorities in the North. During the War, the Northern region had been devastated and had to be completely rebuilt after the war. The development of the Norwegian welfare state accelerated, and the authorities expected minorities to develop and be absorbed into the modern mainstream as they got to partake in what was seen as progress, modernity, and social security. The official minority language policies started to change, and a major political decision signalling this change was the Educational Act of 1959, allowing Kven and Sámi to be used in schools. At least in principle, this was the case, but in practice, the old policies lingered, and many teachers still discouraged speaking Sámi.

Somewhat paradoxically, the onset of language shift started after the oppressive policies had been lifted, but as outlined by Lane (2010), it takes time for large-scale discourses such as the language policies to be internalised and later materialised in action through language choice. The combination of negative representations and assimilation policies affected Indigenous populations’ view of their language and culture and had a profound impact on language transmission in the home. Language shift may be a direct consequence of disruptive and oppressive policies, for instance, by physically relocating Indigenous children to boarding schools, or be a more indirect consequence of assimilatory policies such as when parents become convinced that giving up their mother tongue is what is best for their children (Lane 2010). Fishman (1991) emphasises intergenerational language transmission as one of the most important factors in language maintenance and in reversing language shift, but both language shift and revitalisation efforts are very complex processes that may lead to (perceived or actual) differences in competence. Consequences of language shift are often manifested in differences in communicative competence, as well as in language preferences and attitudes, particularly across generations. Elders may express sentiments of discontinuity and loss, which can contribute to the estrangement of the youth who do not speak the ancestral language, but youth may have receptive linguistic skills allowing them to continue to participate in their communities (Lane and Makihara 2017). When people of Sámi background talk about why they did not speak their Indigenous language when growing up, such reflections illustrate that language choice can be internalised so subtly that one does not really see what is happening. Rasmussen and Nolan (2011) describe this outcome as an almost unconscious, collective language choice. Such unawareness of an ongoing language shift is not uncommon and has been described by Kulick (1992) and Gafaranga (2010). Gafaranga (p. 242) reminds us that while Fishman (1991) underscores the central role of

families and community level actions, we face a challenge because “in situations of language shift, the people involved are usually not aware of the actual interactional processes through which the shift is proceeding.” Kulick (1992, 257) describes the process as so subtle and complex that people are not really conscious of what is happening. Children, though unaware of this process, get shaped by socialisation processes and interactional orders, and as pointed out by Meek (2007, 23), their “rejection of their heritage language is but one possible consequence of how children themselves engage with their sociolinguistic environments.” In this sense, language shift is a result of a chain of actions, embedded in ideologies that the social actors themselves may not be aware of, and often only manage to articulate in retrospect.

A key moment in Sámi history that came to redefine the position of the Sámi people in Norway occurred in 1979 when the Norwegian Parliament voted to allow for the construction of a hydroelectric power plant in Sámi reindeer herding areas. This ignited demonstrations and hunger strikes where Sámis, environmental activists, and other supporters tried to stop the project. They did not succeed, but this event was a watershed for Sámi self-perception and claims to indigeneity. Also inspired by claims to self-sovereignty and linguistic rights by Indigenous communities internationally, the Sámi people started claiming recognition as an Indigenous people, culminating in Norway’s ratification of the ILO Convention. In 1989 the Sámi Parliament was established, after the Norwegian Parliament had passed an amendment to the Norwegian Constitution committing to ensuring that the Sámi people could secure and develop their language, culture and way of life, enshrined in the Sámi Act (1987). An amendment to the Act in 1992, states that Norwegian and Sámi are equal languages and ensuring that a minimum of services in the public administration should be offered in Sámi. The proposal for a Language Act (2020) reiterates the position of Sámi and underscores the state’s responsibility to protect and promote the Sámi languages in Norway.

The role of the schools changed, and from being tools of cultural domination and assimilation, schools came to be seen as central arenas for the revitalisation of the Sámi languages. Introductory courses in Sámi were introduced in two primary schools in 1967, in 1975 Sámi school districts with teaching in or of Sámi were established, and in 1989 teacher training in Sámi was offered at Sámi allaskuvla – Sámi University College, which later became the Sámi University of Applied Sciences (SUAS), today offering a wide range of subjects taught in North Sámi. Their vision is to become a Sámi University and Indigenous University, where Sámi is not only heard and written daily, but also to be a space where values and thinking of Sámi and other Indigenous peoples are in focus and contribute to scientific knowledge locally, nationally, and internationally (Thingnes 2020). This illustrates a point made by Hornberger and De Korne (2018) when they discuss how educators and educational institutions may have a positive impact

on the vitality of endangered languages and the wellbeing of endangered language speakers.

5 Current State of Languages and Practices and Discussion of Reclamation Work

5.1 *Australia*

Language transmission is crucial for language continuation. The situation in Australia has changed markedly over the last 230 years – many languages have been lost; many continue to be spoken but only by older generations meaning they are unlikely to continue. A few are still spoken by all generations and are the first languages of children in those communities. However, this number is rapidly declining, with five of the languages being acquired by children in 2005 no longer being learned by children in 2014 (Simpson and Wigglesworth 2018). A small number of languages, such as Anindilyakwa, Murrinhpatha, and Warlpiri, appear to have increasing numbers of speakers. At the same time, considerable language change has occurred, with several varieties of creole emerging across Australia with multiple dialects (see Simpson and Wigglesworth 2018 for a detailed discussion of the current state of languages in Australia).

In Australia, the crucial link between the Indigenous people, their land, and their languages cannot be underestimated, so language revitalisation is both important and necessary. Indigenous languages which are no longer spoken are considered to be “sleeping” (Amery and Gale 2008), so they can be reawakened using a range of resources such as old recordings, documents, and in some cases elderly speakers (Simpson 2019). The reawakening of languages has meant that many Indigenous people are now actively relearning their languages, including Kurna (Amery 2018; Amery and Buckskin 2012), Gamilaraay (Giacon 1999), Noongar/Nyungar (Douglas 1968), Wiradjuri (Grant 2001), and Ngarrindjeri (Gale 2007). Three of these, Gamilaraay, Kurna, and Wiradjeri, are now taught at the university level, as are Pitjantjatjara and Yolŋu Matha, both languages still spoken by children (Simpson 2019). The new Australian Curriculum Framework for schoolchildren now includes three Indigenous language-learning options: the first language learner pathway, the second-language learner pathway, and the language revival learner pathway. A number of schools, both primary and secondary and including those in urban centres, now teach an Indigenous language as part of their curriculum. Bilingual educational programmes for children who speak Indigenous languages as a first language when they first come to school are also now being re-introduced in some schools. The Federal government’s Indigenous Language and Arts programme provides a grant programme for community-led organisations and currently supports “21 Indigenous Language Centres across the country working on capturing, preserving and maintaining over 150 Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander languages” (Australian Government, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, Office for the Arts 2020). Revitalisation is thus growing with increasing levels of Federal government support through the funding of Indigenous language centres, which are often supported by linguists. There is increasing community-wide awareness of the importance of Welcomes to Country,¹ with communities changing from imposed English names to traditional naming: Ernabella in South Australia, for example, is now known as Pukatja, while Santa Teresa in the Northern Territory is now called Ltyentye Apurte; these are just two examples.

5.2 Norway

The three Sámi languages spoken in Norway are in quite different positions today: North Sámi has the highest number of speakers; it is possible to be educated through the medium of North Sámi from kindergarten through to university level, though only municipalities that have opted to belong to the Sámi administrative district offer primary school education in Sámi, and the number of secondary schools are more limited. Education in Lule and South Sámi are considerably more limited, due to fewer speakers, lack of teachers, and more geographically dispersed populations. The Sámi Act gives stronger language rights in municipalities in the Sámi language administrative district, not only in the educational domain, but also in public administration and in the judicial system. However, a substantial part of the Sámi population live outside the administrative district, particularly in urban areas and therefore do not have the same access to education in Sámi. One of the key indicators of the position of the Sámi language in society is the number of pupils opting to study Sámi. The number of pupils studying Sámi as a second language increased and then subsequently stabilised during the period 1990–2012 (Todal 2018), which may be an indication that as a result of vitalisation efforts and the stronger position of Sámi language and culture, more families see the educational system as a possibility for their children to reclaim Sámi. However, reclaiming an Indigenous language can be a complex and contradictory process. On the one hand, it can contribute to the healing of trauma and loss from the past; on the other, through the very act of reclaiming their language, speakers are forced to face such trauma and loss. People who reclaim Sámi as adults frequently use the term *språksperra* (“the language barrier”) to describe feelings of anxiety, reluctance to speak Sámi, and a fear of being judged by traditional speakers. Linguistic insecurity is known from other Indigenous settings. Based on their study of Ojibwe language reclamation, King and Hermes (2014) point out that emotional aspects of language learning in Indigenous contexts seem to be stronger than in second-language acquisition contexts because of identity politics and social control as to who has the right to claim the role of an authentic speaker run deeper in Indigenous settings.

The consequences and impact of assimilatory and colonialising policies are addressed by several nation-states through the establishment of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, such as Canada and Greenland. Norway's TRC was established in 2018, and it aims to map policies and activities of the Norwegianisation process, lay the groundwork for the recognition of the consequences these experiences had for Sámi and Kven peoples and suggest measures for future reconciliations. An underlying idea is that assimilatory and colonialising policies are not only a concern for minorities and Indigenous groups, but also a national heritage and responsibility for the nation as a whole.

6 Concluding Thoughts

In spite of geographical distance, and demographically and sociolinguistically very different environments, these two contexts have strikingly similar historical backgrounds and similar assimilatory processes. In both Australia and Norway, assimilatory policies were the explicit goal of the national authorities, and schools and education were key tools used in controlling the Indigenous populations. Today, the role of education has undergone significant change. In Norway, schools that used to be tools of assimilatory policies have become potential arenas for the reclamation of language and culture. In the more complex Australian situation, language reclamation tends to be more community-based, although the Australian Curriculum, taught throughout the country, now offers Indigenous languages as an option for children right through the school curriculum and Indigenous culture and history is much more integrated into all areas of the school curriculum than it was. We have shown how educational systems both in Australia and Norway were key tools for colonialism and nation-state building that devalued and ignored Indigenous languages, practices, and ways of knowing. McKinley and Tuhiwai Smith (2019, 2) remind us that Indigenous groups have always had complex education systems, but colonialism and exploitation have shattered Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing. Today, schools may have the potential for healing pain and restoring disruptions caused by oppressive policies. However, schools can be more than a domain for the teaching of or in Indigenous languages; they can also be a space for acknowledging Indigenous ways of knowing, learning, and teaching in critical engagement with Western tradition.

Indigenous languages have suffered immensely from Western views of them as inferior, but in many cases, as demonstrated in this chapter, increasing efforts are being made at revitalising them. The most critical factor in maintaining languages is and will always be language transmission through the generations. As Curdt-Christiansen and Lanza (2018) point out, this involves not only explicit and deliberate decisions about language use in the home, but also reflects the unconscious and implicit decisions that parents make in the way they engage with language with their children, and the

way children themselves engage with their language input as argued so eloquently by Lanza (1997). Language choices and practices both within the family and in the educational systems, are shaped by explicit language policy, and by internalisation of values resulting from linguistics stratification. Therefore, current language practices in families and schools show consequences of assimilatory processes. In both contexts we have investigated, we also see the possibility of revitalisation efforts to reverse some of these negative effects and bring a measure of healing as Indigenous languages, cultural practices and ways of knowing are reclaimed. These languages and epistemologies are not things from the past, but as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) reminds us, reclaiming a voice is a matter of reclaiming, reconnecting and reordering Indigenous ways of knowing.

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Note

- 1 This is a ceremony which is performed by the Traditional Indigenous Owners of the land on which an event (e.g. a concert, lecture or artwork) is taking place.

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