



RE-ESTABLISHING KRIOL EDUCATION IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

Circumventing a policy vacuum and
working from the ground up

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Re-establishing Kriol education in the Northern Territory

Circumventing a policy vacuum and working from the ground up



Re-establishing Kriol education in the Northern Territory

Circumventing a policy vacuum and working from the ground up

Context – Kriol and language situation in the NT

History

- Bilingual education in the NT

- Kriol and language education

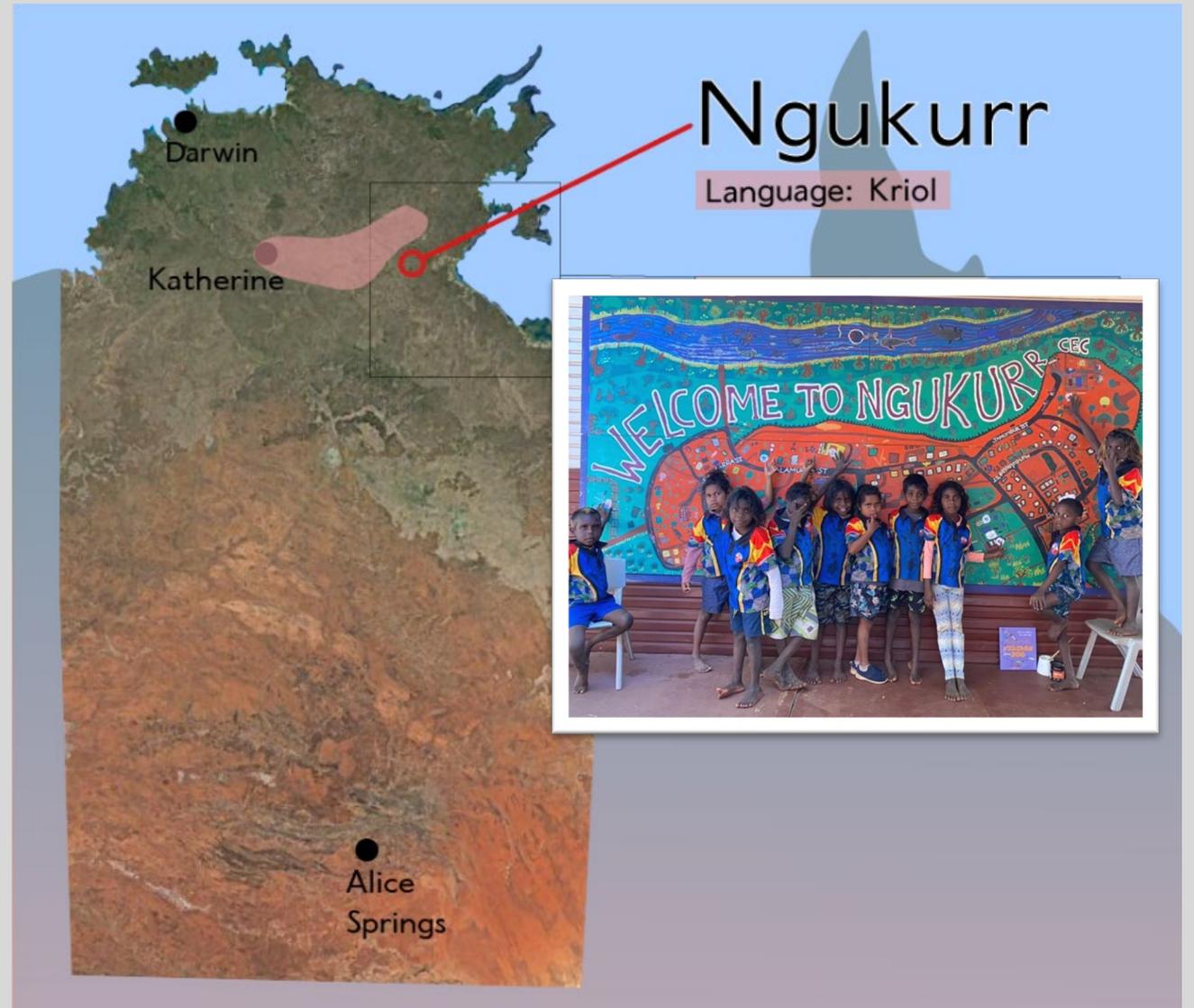
Current situation – policy vacuum

Circumventing the vacuum

- Our work

- Related work

Discussion



Context

Languages in the NT

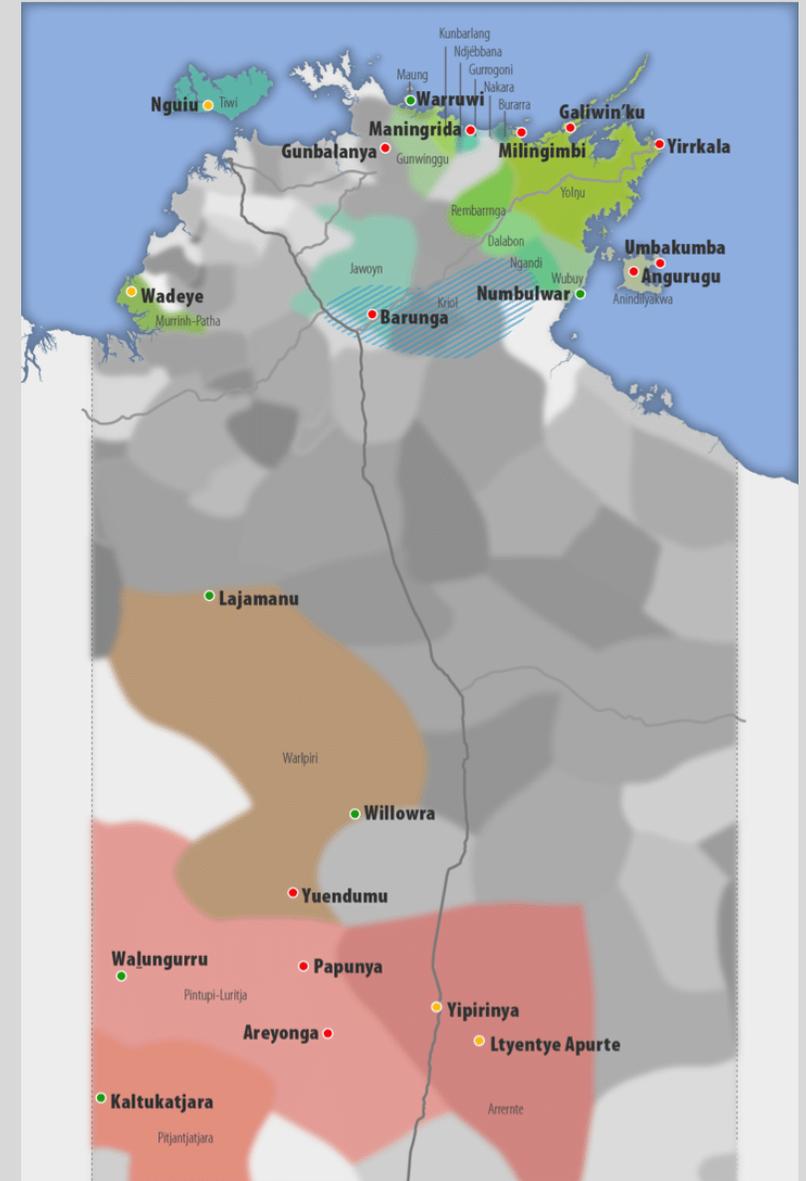
100+ Indigenous languages in total

10-15 being maintained

- From 100 to 4000+ speakers

International languages – not insignificant

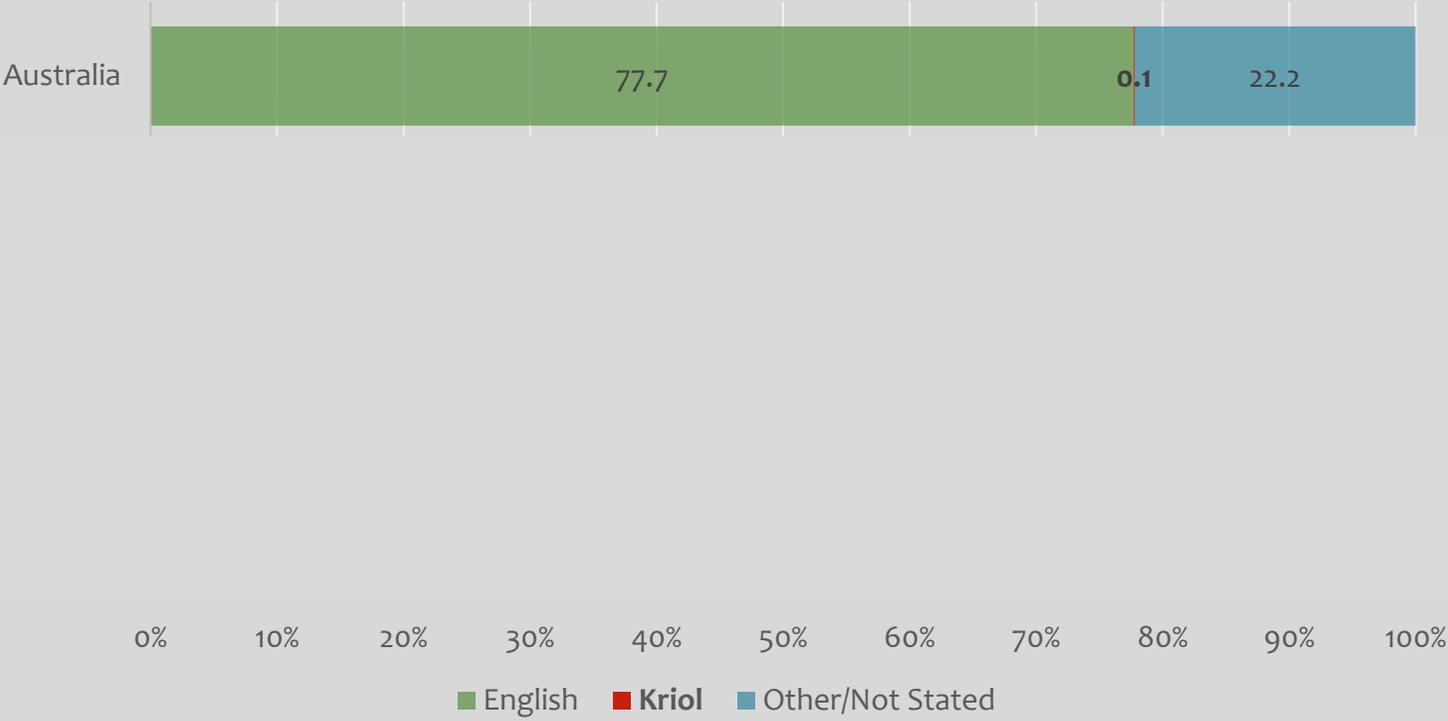
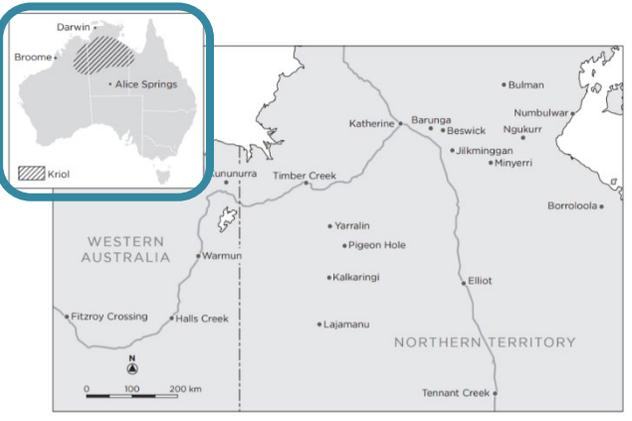
1. Filipino/Tagalog – 2.2% (spoken at home – 2016 Census)
2. Greek – 1.4% (spoken at home – 2016 Census)



Context

Languages in the NT

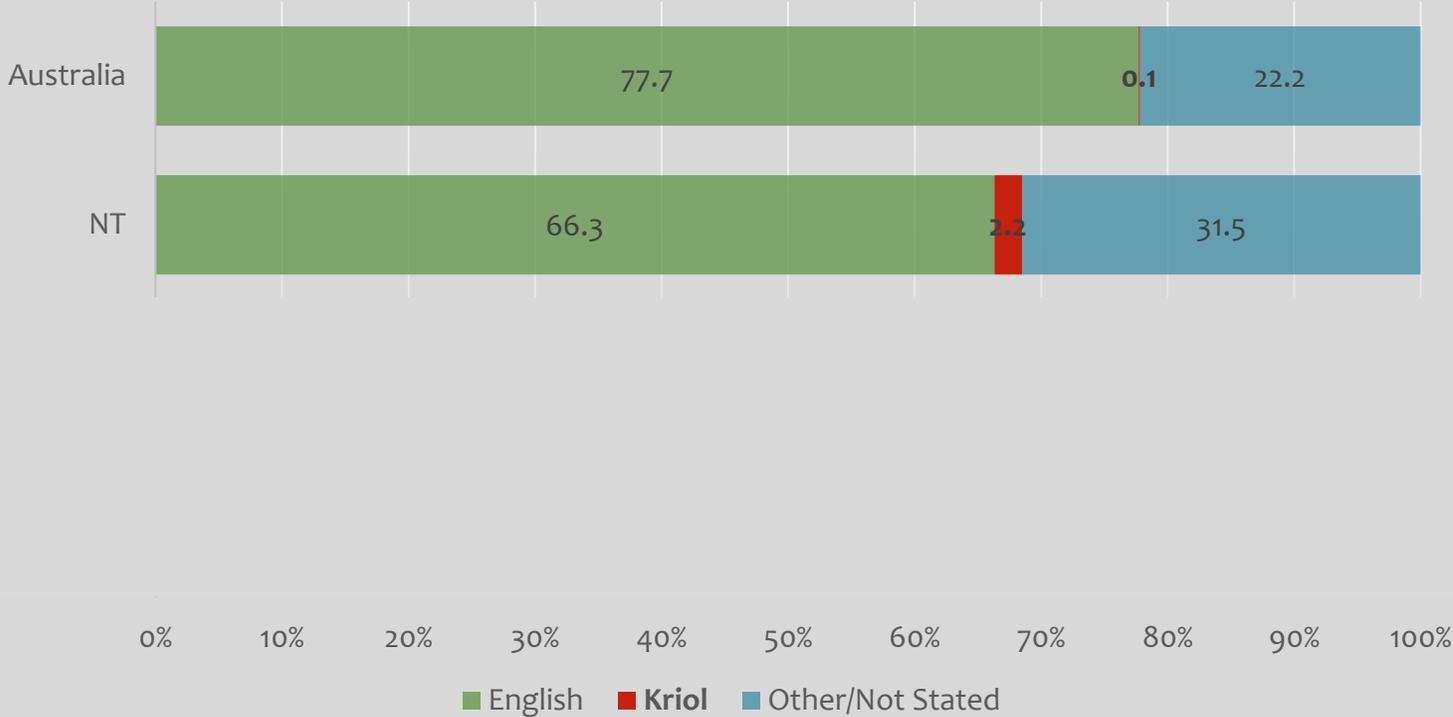
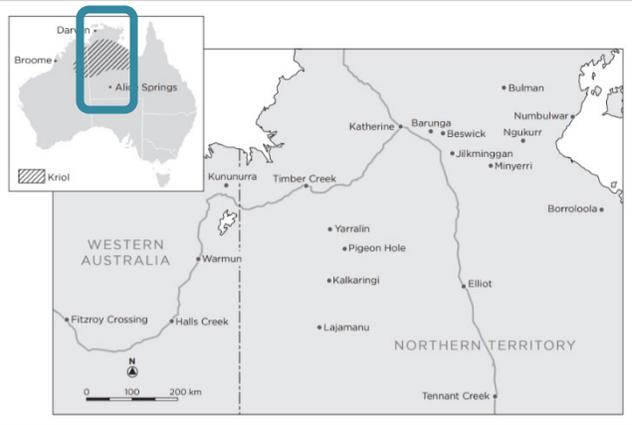
2016 Census (ABS)



Context

Languages in the NT

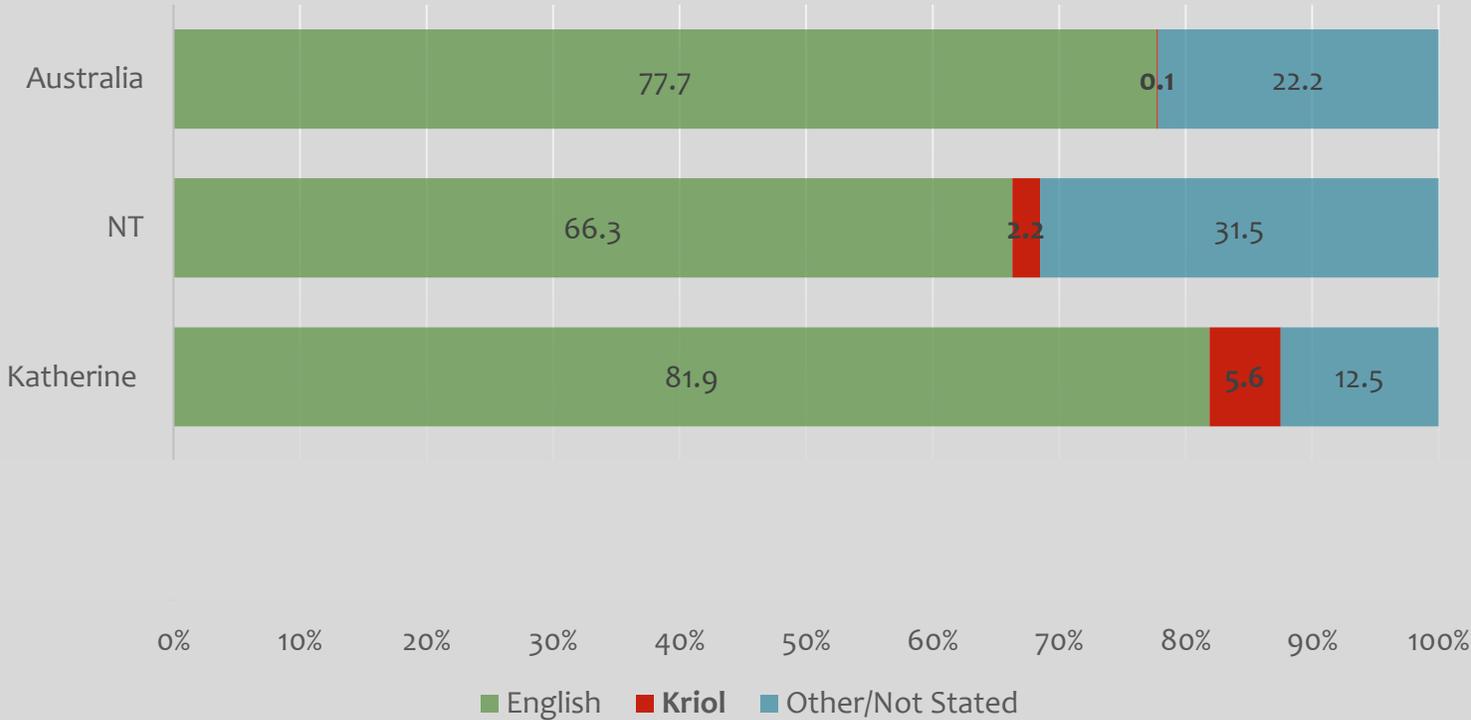
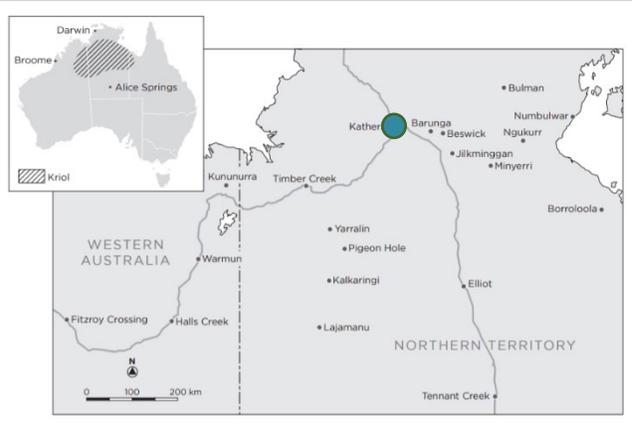
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Context

Languages in the NT

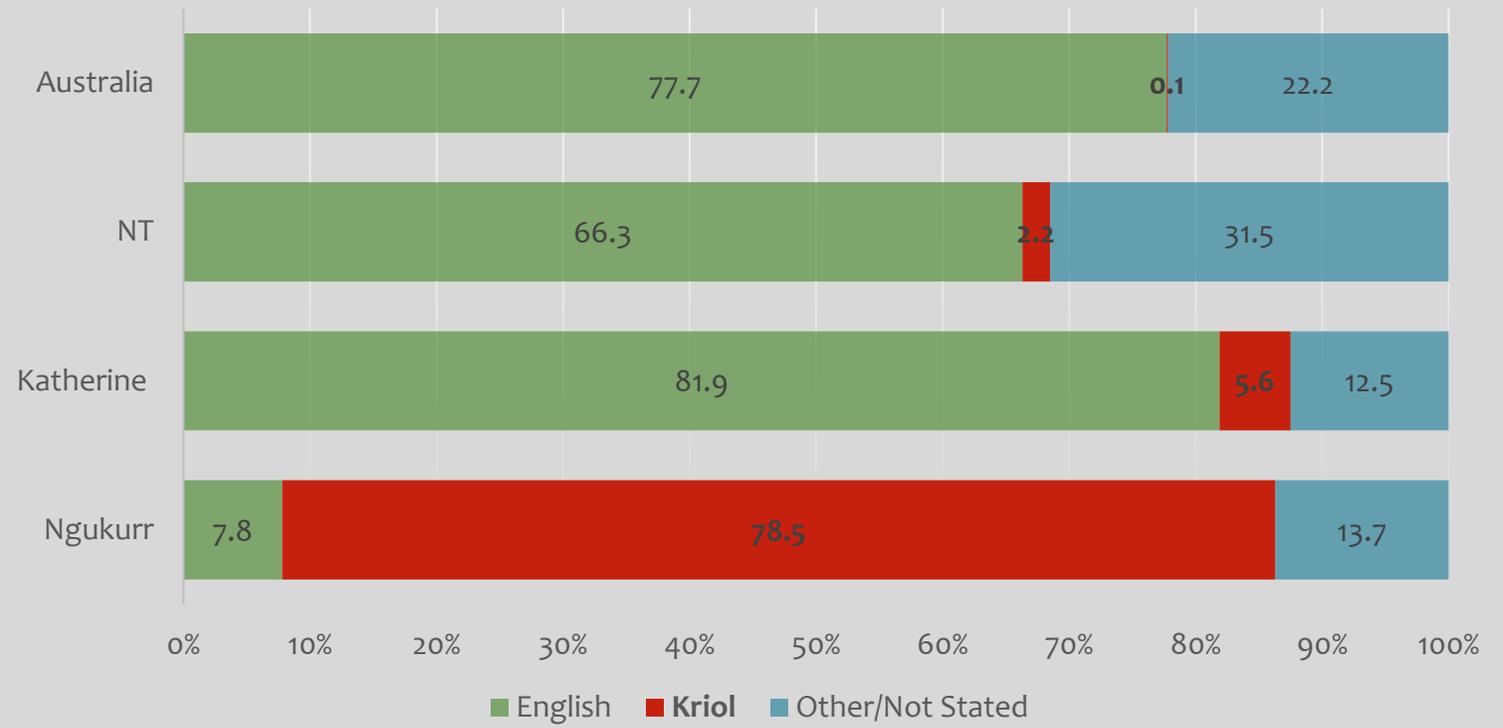
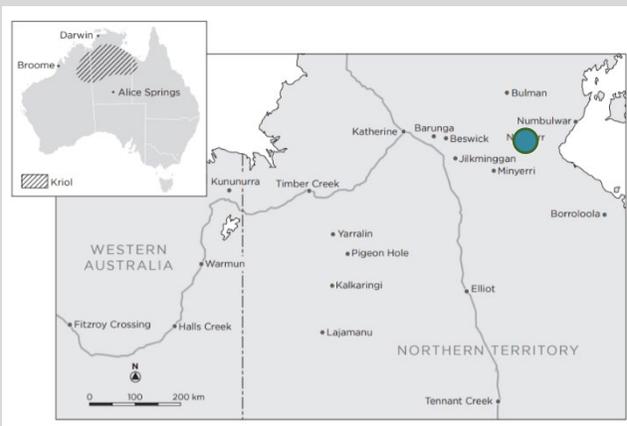
2016 Census (ABS)



Context

Languages in the NT

2016 Census (ABS)



Context

Kriol

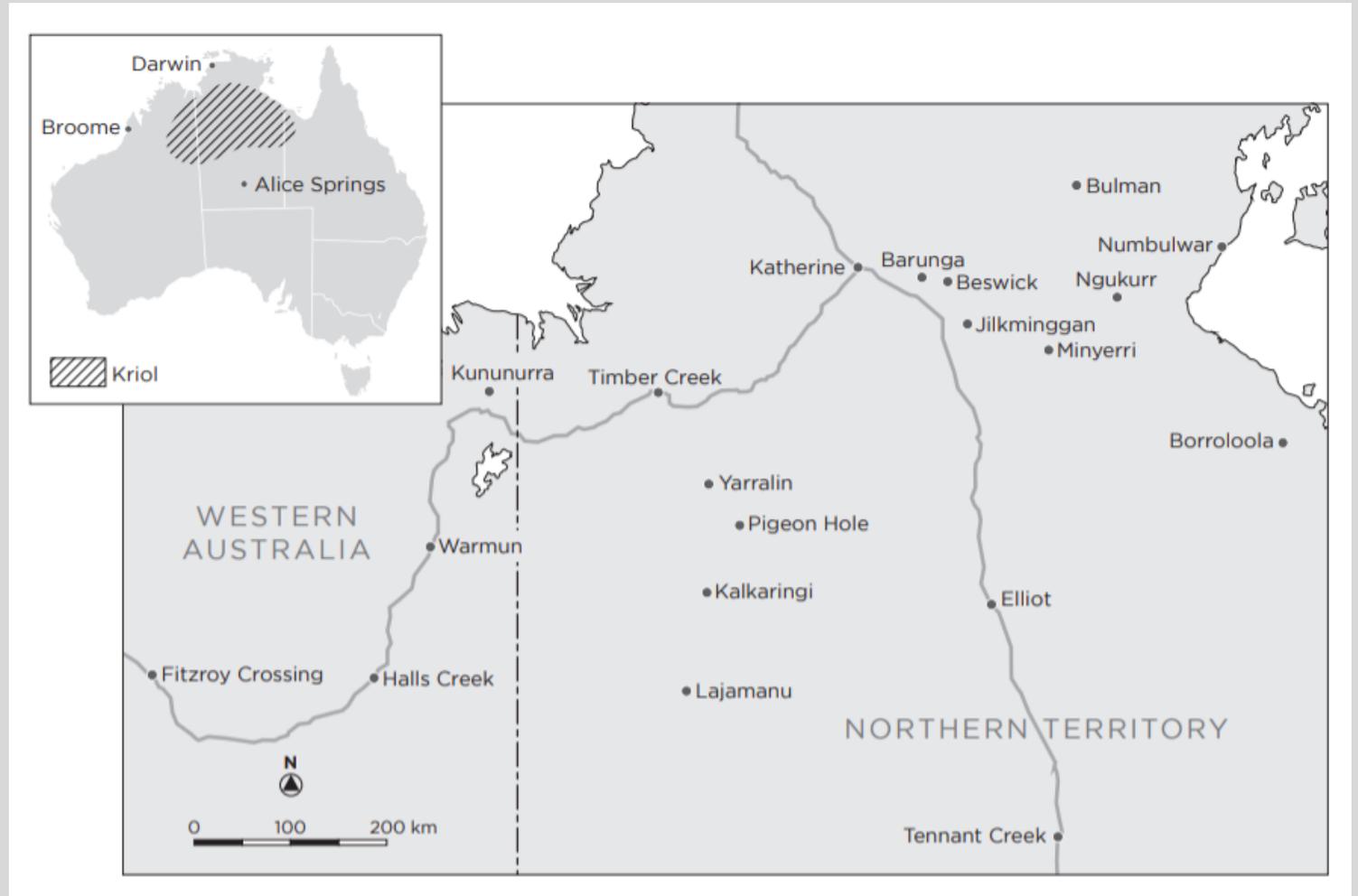
Product of colonisation

100+ years old

Recognised around 50 years ago

Creole language

Systematic innovations on English,
influenced by Indigenous languages

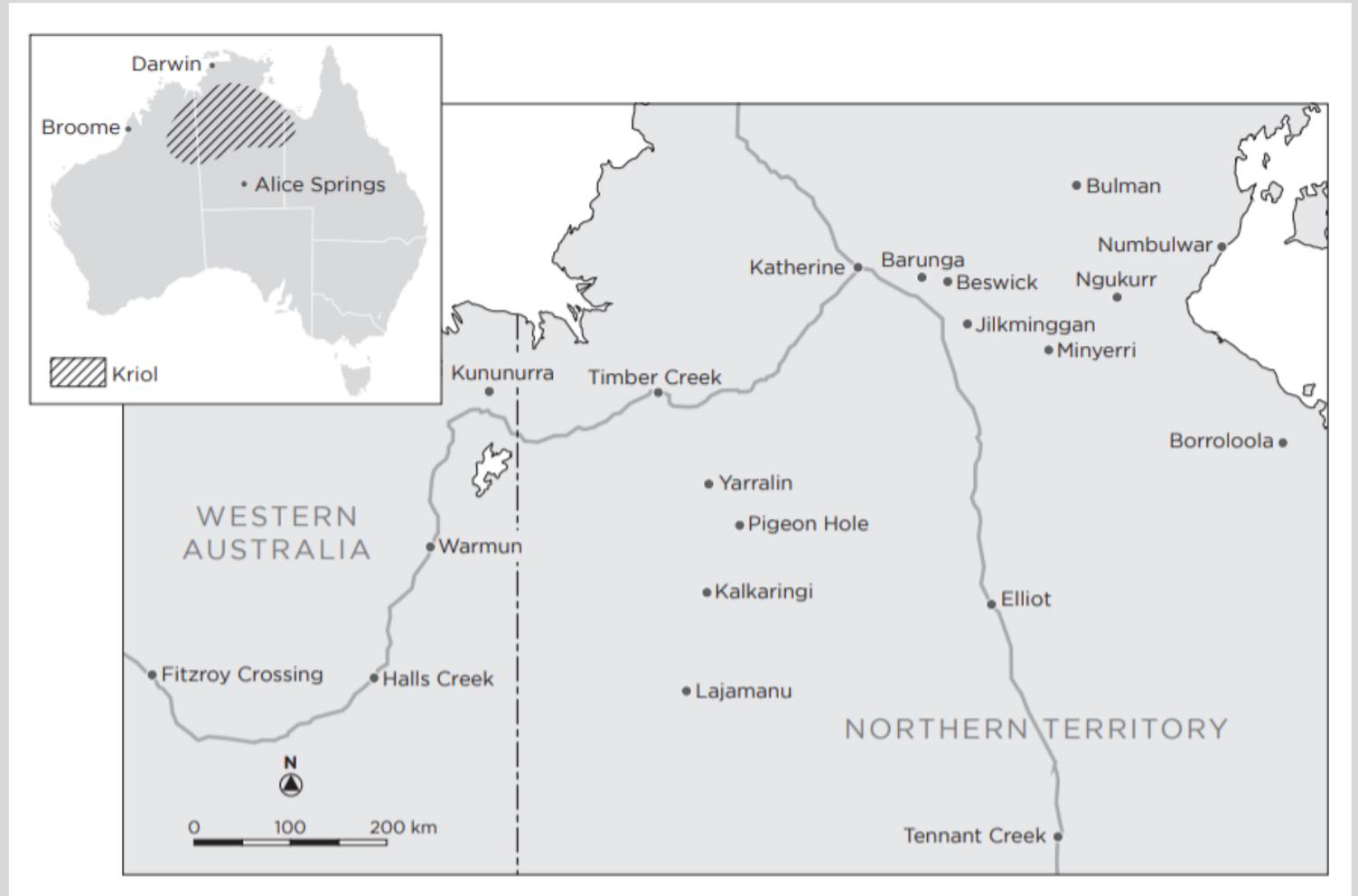


Context

Kriol

Systematic relationship with English and Indigenous languages

- Lexicon – English dominant forms, semantics mixed
- Sounds – systematic mix
- Grammar – English dominant but notable exceptions
- Pragmatics – Indigenous language dominant



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Context

Social context: Kriol in Ngukurr

First language of almost all residents (~1000)

Traditional languages endangered or no longer spoken

Diglossia

English – dominant in government institutions (including education), media

Kriol – dominant in social and home domains

Literacy level low, need and desire for Kriol literacy increasing (social media)

Creole languages suffer from a prestige and power asymmetry with standard languages which marginalises them and privileges the others in education, economic and political systems. (Angelo 2021: 287)



History

Prior to European colonisation

Multilingualism was the norm

On the coast - positive cultural and linguistic exchange with Macassans

From European colonisation to 1970s

Indigenous languages largely disparaged, misunderstood, discriminated against, ridiculed

Some exceptions in some missions – Christianising focus

History

1970s - Development phase of bilingual education

Mission-based programs as exemplars (e.g. Hermannsburg)

- Western Arrarnta program at Lutheran Mission school in Hermannsburg:

*“nobody swung around and looked at me.
Their focus was on what the teacher was saying“*

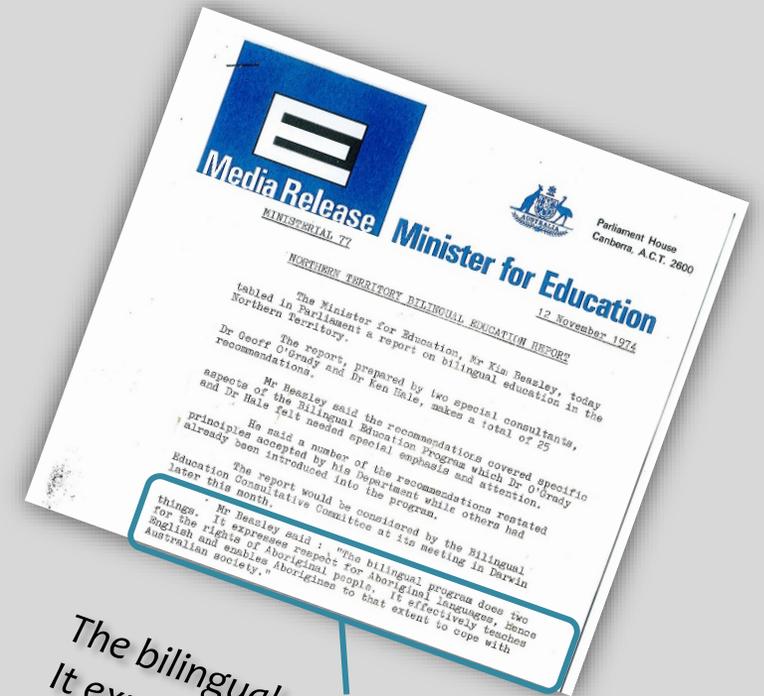
- Kim Beazley Sr visit (late 1960s)

Reports and recommendations, rollout begins in mid-late 1970s

By 1979...

- approximately 20 remote school had bilingual programs
- one Kriol-English program at Barunga community (from 1977)

WATCH: Not To Lose You My Language (1975, 25mins) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ic4lC4GyyhQ>



The bilingual program does two things. It expresses respect for Aboriginal languages, hence English and enables Aborigines to that extent to cope with Australian society.
- Kim Beazley, Minister for Education, 12/11/1974

History

1980s – wins and losses

- General continuation of bilingual education
- “shift of focus from maintenance of language and culture to a transition to English” (4 Corners/ABC, 2009)
- Aboriginal teacher training and numbers boosted
- Some new programs added
- “Some staff reductions and decline in funding support” (4 Corners/ABC, 2009)



Barunga School, early 1980s

History

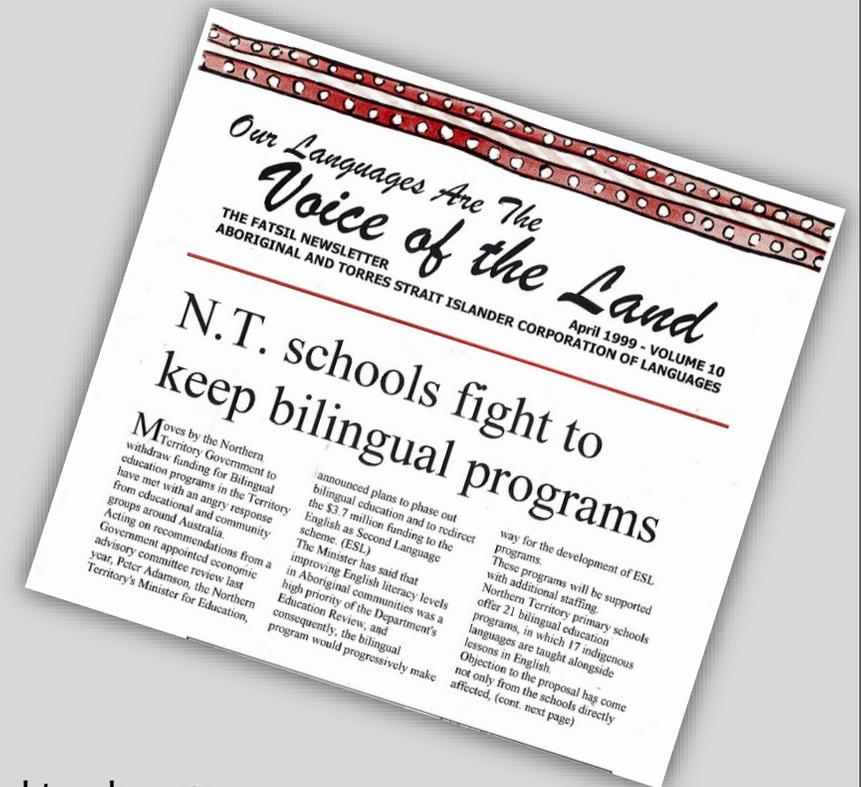
1999 cuts

21 bilingual programs – including Kriol-English program at Barunga School

Policy change and department cuts

Changes to teacher education

“A new focus on academic achievement and national standardised testing led to changes in policy. Over time funding for bilingual programs was slowly reduced, and there was a swing back to English as the medium of instruction and the language for initial literacy” – Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages (Christie et al. 2014: 8)



History

2008 First Four Hours of English policy

Only 9 (government school) programs remained

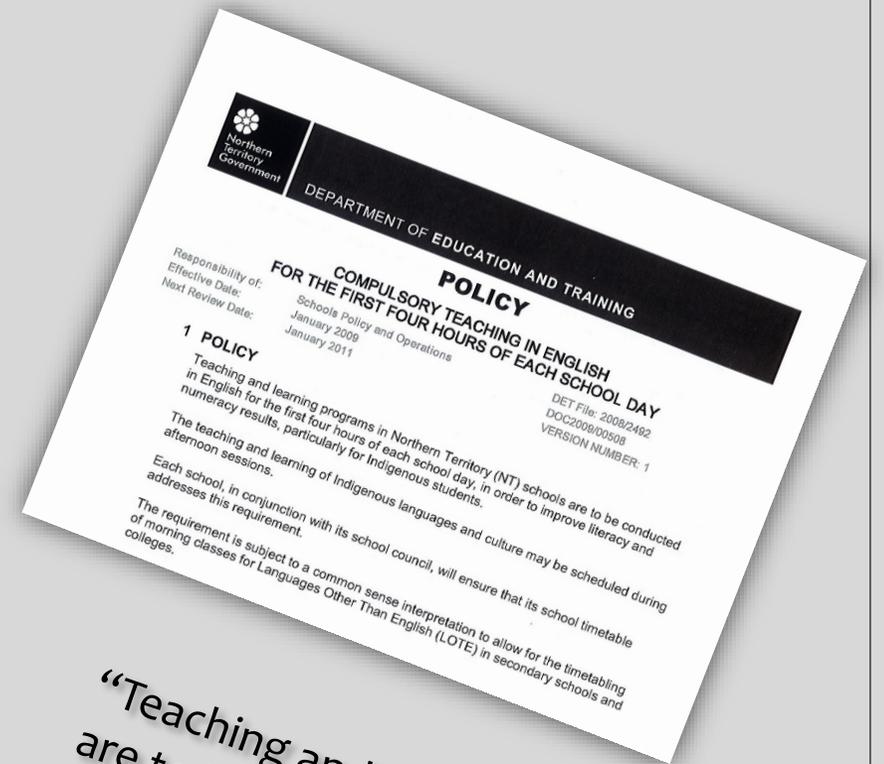
Kriol program at Barunga School ended in early 1990s.

Snap decision with major backlash, department dug heels in.

General effects of NAPLAN and reduced teacher training

The word “bilingual” became taboo

Policy quietly removed in 2012, leaving vacuum.



“Teaching and learning programs are to be conducted in English for the first four hours of each school day” (NT Department of Education and Training, 2008)

READ: *History of Bilingual Education in the Northern Territory* (Devlin, Disbray & Devlin, 2017)

WATCH: *Going Back To Lajamanu* (ABC 4 Corners 2009): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oc6owHJSo_Y

History

Kriol - education and language policy

Creolisation in early 1900s – ridiculed, misunderstood, disparaged, ignored

1970s – recognition (linguistics, church, education)

- Spelling system devised, bible translation commenced
- 1976 – Teacher-linguist position at Barunga School. Program starts in 1977 (Meehan 2017)

1980s-2000s

- Acceptance and understanding slowly builds. Bilingual program ends at Barunga

Today

- ~12-18 schools in NT where Kriol is main language of student population
- No specific funding or policy, still largely misunderstood or under-appreciated. Vacuum persists

Policy vacuum

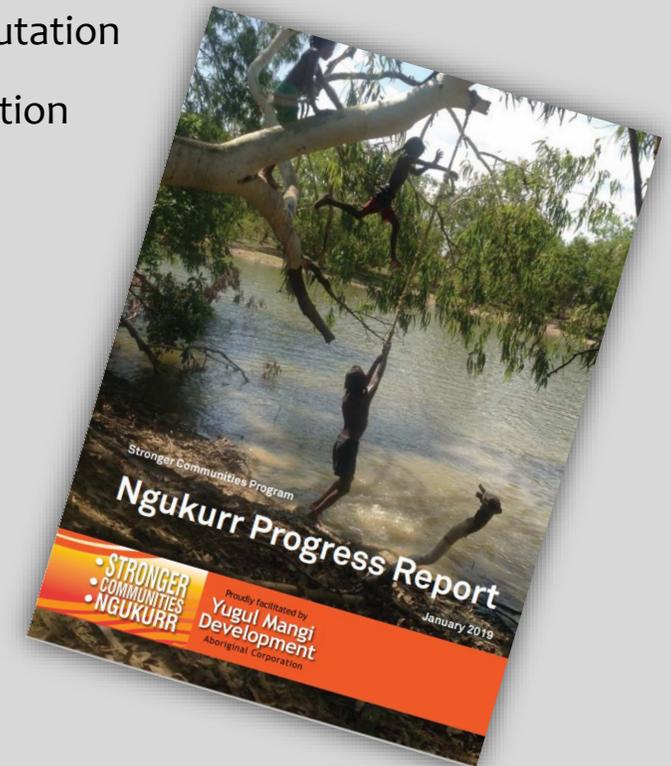
“*Laissez-faire* policies mean that the languages of power and prestige will eventually take over in all situations of contact.”
(Wright 2004: 184)

Ngukurr in late 2010s

Poor attendance (around 50%), limited community engagement, poor community reputation

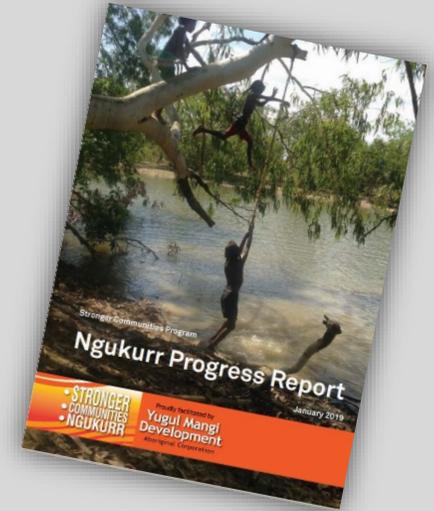
2018 Community Engagement Study by Yugul Mangi Development Aboriginal Corporation

- 82 interviews, 113 residents
- Education topics included:
 - Adult education, school education
 - Attendance issues
 - Culture, traditional languages and Kriol

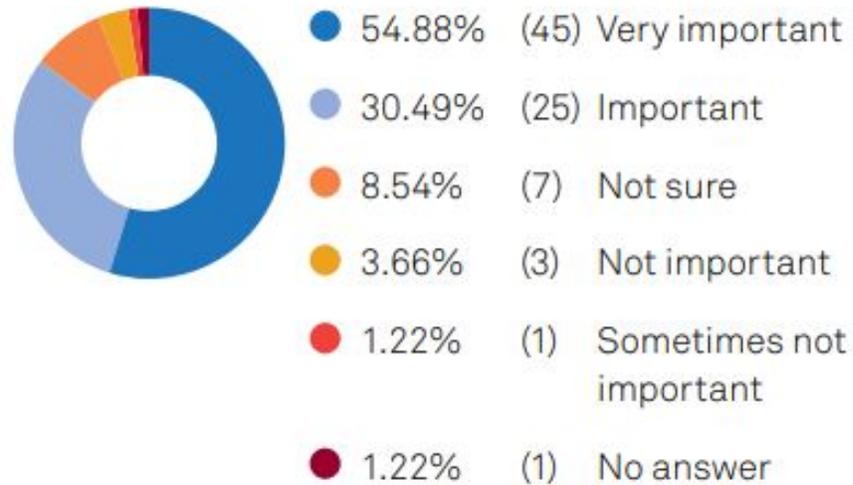


Policy vacuum

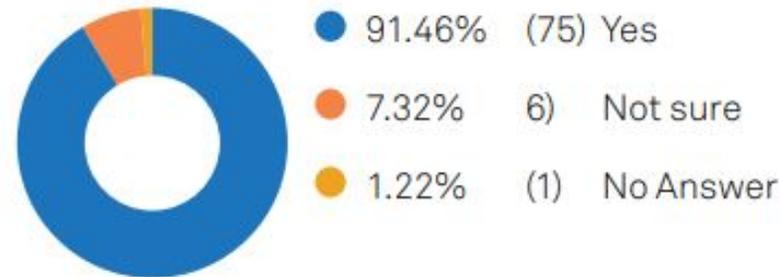
Ngukurr Progress Report (2019)



How important is learning how to read and write in Kriol for children?



Should Ngukurr School be bilingual?



2019 initiative

Yugul Mangi Development Ab Corp sets aside funding for Kriol education and resourcing programs

Circumventing the vacuum

2019 start

- modest funding, clean slate, general aims of education and resourcing
- Staff recruited, program named

Education

- Gentle approach to Ngukurr School, organic growth
- Semester 2, 2019 – started with 1 class (weekly sessions)
- By end of Semester 2 – 4 classes (of 12)
- New experiences for all, learning curve
- But positive feedback, no opposition!

Meigim Kriol
Strongbala

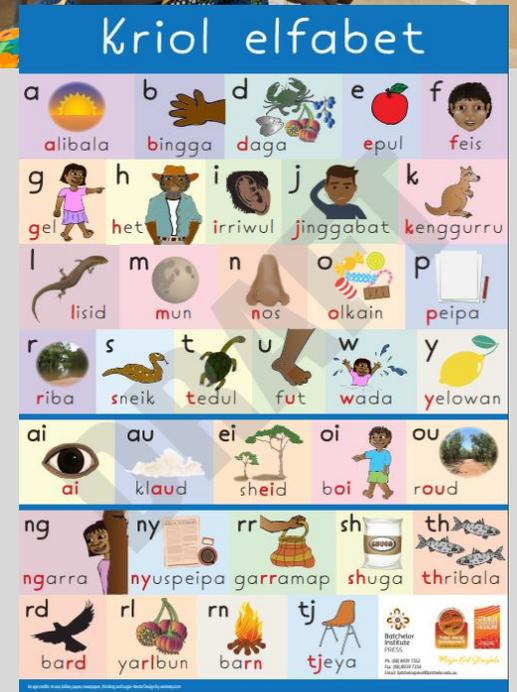


Circumventing the vacuum

2019 start

Resources

- Few! (Old bilingual readers outdated and different dialect)
- New alphabet poster developed (Batchelor Press)
- Bilingual website and monolingual social media
- New books in development



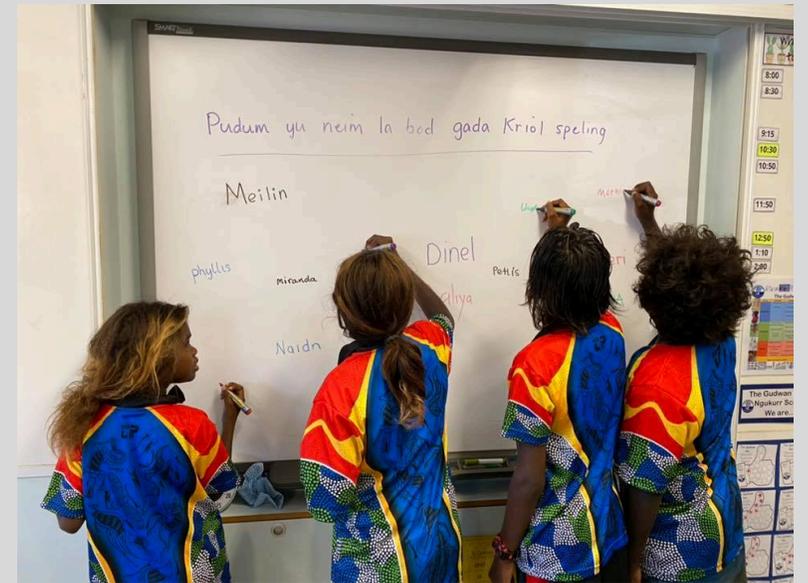
Circumventing the vacuum

2020 progress

- Office space provided in Ngukurr School

Education

- School leadership acceptance and promotion
- By Semester 2 – weekly session in almost all classes
- Assessed and reported (NT Indigenous Language & Culture curriculum – First Language Maintenance stream)
- Developing skills and capacity (for all involved)

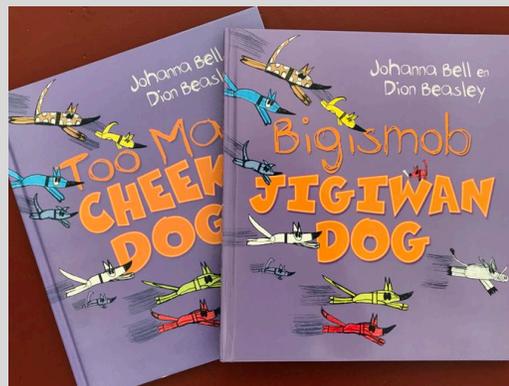


Circumventing the vacuum

2020 progress (despite Covid!)

Resources

- Use of website and social media to disseminate Covid info
- Publication of *Bigismob Jigiwan Dog* (Allen & Unwin)
- Kriol translation of English original by major publisher
 - a first for Indigenous languages



Circumventing the vacuum

2021 Progress

Education

- School supportive, but ...
- policy vacuum means still no tangible support from NT Ed Dept
- Relying on external org: burnout setting in, fewer classes
- But – school and student capabilities already increased
- Focus on
 - training assistant teachers to co-plan and team teach
 - special projects (e.g. Stage 1 in Australian Languages for senior students)
- Included in NT Bilingual Education workshop

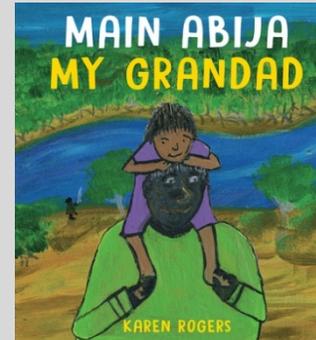


Circumventing the vacuum

2021 Progress

Resources

- Supported new bilingual commercial publication
 - *Main Abija (My Granddad)* by Karen Rogers (Allen & Unwin)
- Production of two Kriol episodes of cartoon Little J & Big Cuz
 - Script translation done as school project with expert student working group
- More Kriol commercial childrens books ready for 2022:
 - New original title with ILF
 - Translation of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*
- Animation of *Bigismob Jigiwan Dog*, also now in Pitjantjatjara!



Evaluation

Independent evaluation in late 2020 (Ninti One, 2021)

Interviews with families, students, school staff

Questions revisited re: importance Kriol literacy and should Ngukurr School be bilingual

- 91% (n=23) said Ngukurr School should be bilingual - 1 said 'no'
- 86% (n=28) said Kriol literacy skills are important/very important – no-one said 'not important'
- 82% of families have seen a change in the children due to the Meigim Kriol Strongbala program

“Kriol makes [the] community strong”

“Hearing and learning their own language – makes me feel proud”

“Several families mentioned noticing their child feeling more confident and happier. Two families noted that learning to read and write in Kriol has helped their children stay out of trouble.”



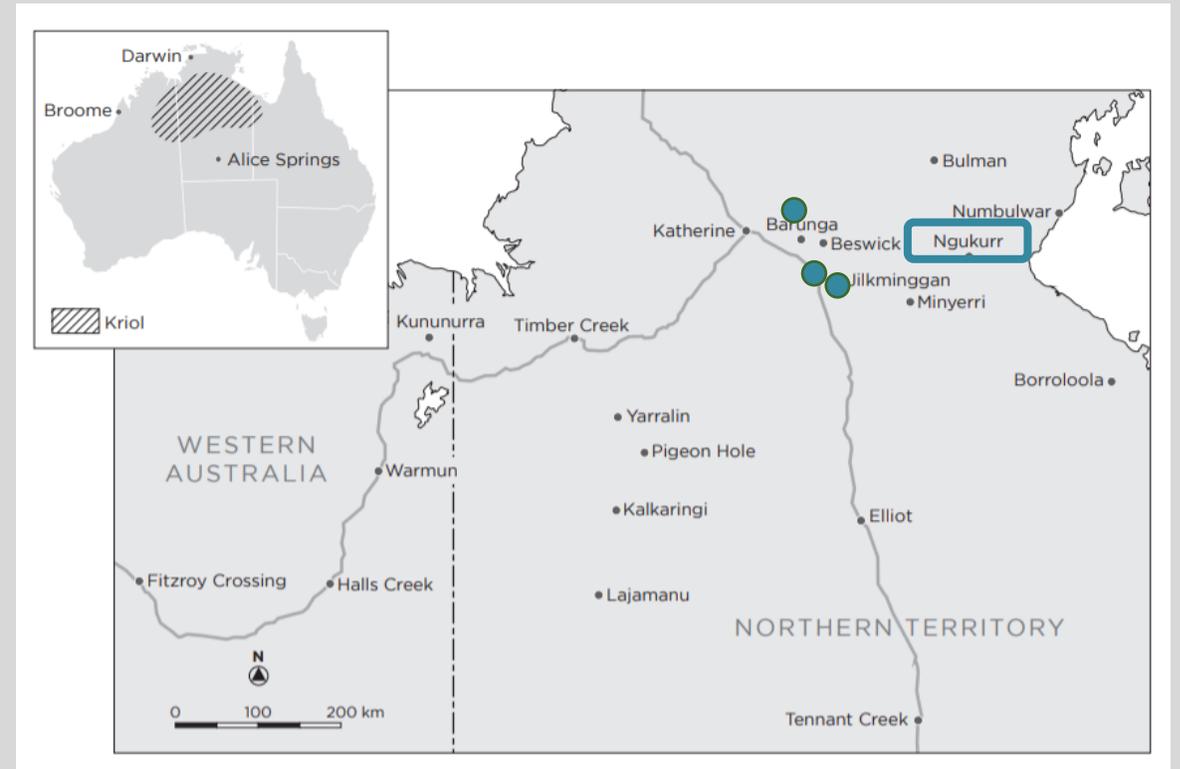
Kriol in other schools

Despite the policy vacuum, the need and benefit for Kriol programs in schools has sprung up elsewhere

A key reason Ngukurr has advanced further is that Yugul Mangi Corporation has been able to create/fund the Meigim Kriol Strongbala program

Under their own local initiatives, small programs have or are delivered in a handful of other schools with Kriol-speaking cohorts:

- Manyallaluk School
- Jilkminggan School
- Mataranka/Jilkminggan Playgroup (FaFT)



Larger movement towards L1 education

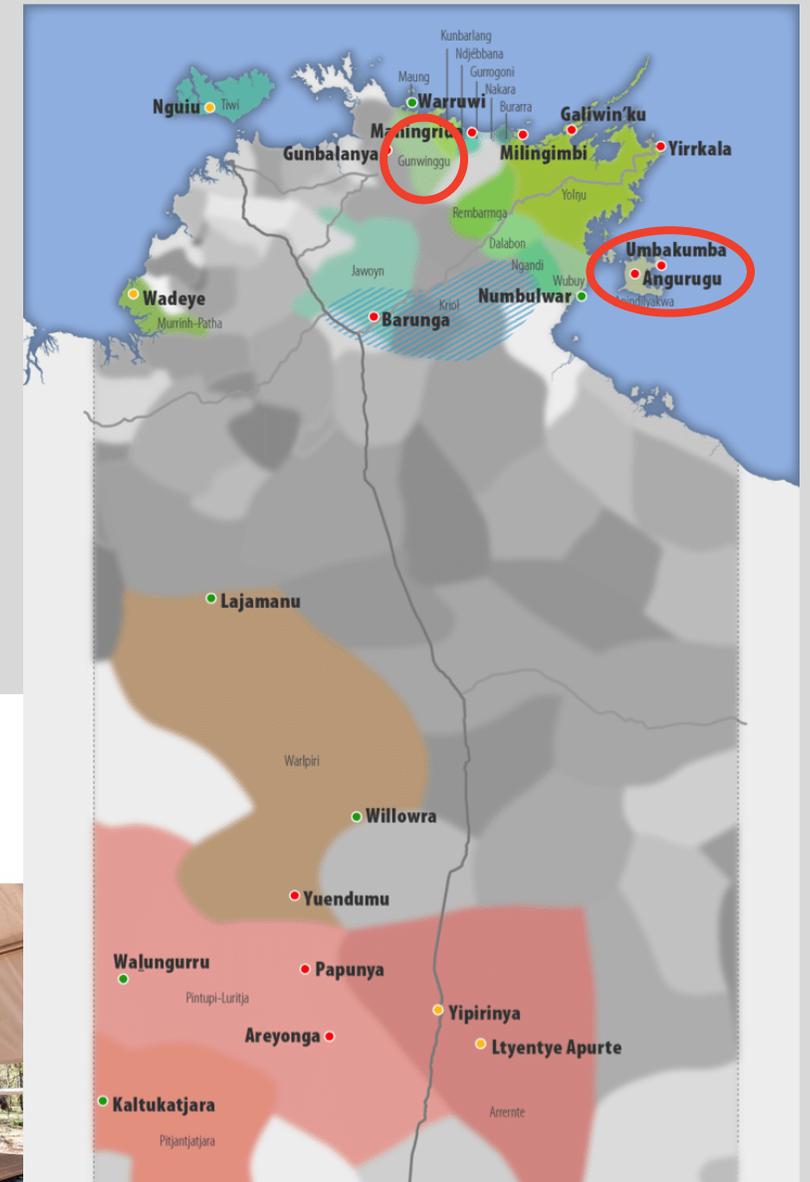
The policy vacuum is Territory-wide

However, like Ngukurr, other locations are finding ways to circumvent the vacuum and establish L1 education programs

- Groote Eylandt communities working with NT Education to re-introduce L1 education in Anindilyakwa (supported by local Land Council)
- Independent school Nawarddeken Academy established in recent years now running 3 outstation schools in West Arnhem land, set to develop bilingual education for its Kunwinjku speaking students

Remote Indigenous outstation rejects Federal Government policy and opens own school

ABC Radio Darwin / By Emma Masters
Posted Wed 22 Jul 2015 at 2:07pm, updated Fri 24 Jul 2015 at 3:47pm



Discussion

Northern Territory and its history of bilingual education is one of the most innovative yet fraught initiatives in Indigenous education

After an initial period of growth, cuts followed and now the current *laissez-faire* policy vacuum

Kriol, despite being the most widely spoken language in the NT after English, has rarely been formally included in the education system

In Ngukurr, an identified community need led to external funding dedicated to Kriol education and resourcing

In 2 years, significant progress has been made, circumventing the policy vacuum

Despite widespread in-principle support at local level, policy vacuum remains, stunting the growth of Kriol-medium education

Note: New NT Education Engagement Strategy (NT Education Department, 2021) affirms place of Indigenous languages. Yet to see 'meat on the bones' in terms of tangible support

Ngukurr's example is not isolated with other schools and language groups similarly finding routes to circumvent the policy vacuum

Thanks!

Yugul Mangi Development Aboriginal Corporation
Ngukurr School CEC

Contact:

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Meigim Kriol Strongbala website: <https://meigimkriolstrongbala.org.au/>

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