

Wigglesworth & Oliver, AILA Symposium

Symposium title: Loss of Indigenous languages and challenges for children

Coordinator 1 Jill Wigglesworth, Department Linguistics and Applied Linguistics, The University of Melbourne, Australia.

Coordinator 2 Rhonda Oliver, School of Education, Curtin University, Australia.

Symposium format (one choice - delete the others)

- **On-the-ground Symposium**

Symposium mode (one choice - delete the others):

- **100% in-person (only for on-the-ground symposia)**

Sub-themes (multiple choices - delete the others):

- ☐ (MINORITY) LANGUAGES IN THE WORLD: Lingua Franca, Global language, Academic Language, dialects
- ☐ LANGUAGES IN SOCIETY: bilingualism, multilingualism, plurilingualism, multilingual classroom, translanguaging, literacy & literacies, heritage language, home language, migrants, deaf, sign/gesture

Symposium Abstract (15 lines)

Loss of Indigenous languages and challenges for children

It is predicted that by the end of the century 90% of the world's Indigenous languages will be lost, impacting humanity's linguistic and cultural diversity. In the first year of the Decade of Indigenous Languages it seems appropriate to reflect upon this, especially as it relates to children from such backgrounds. It is important to understand the effect it has on their cultural understandings, familial relationships, personal identity and wellbeing. Furthermore, given "the foundational purpose that language serves in our schools" (Oliver, Angelo, Steele & Wigglesworth, 2021, p.136), it is vital to understand the consequence of this language loss for these children's education and especially their literacy development – what challenges will they also face and what measures can be put in place to address this? Therefore, in this colloquium we seek to address the questions: When language loss occurs, what happens to those children who no longer have full access to home language, but who are also not able to fully access the language of school because it is not the traditional language of their families? What can be done to ensure multilingual learners are able to access and use their full linguistic repertoire for communicative and functional reasons in everyday life - enhancing an individual's access to resources and support - physical, social and emotional?

Argument (2 pages maximum, i.e. about 500 words or 3000 characters including bibliography):

On-the-ground symposium: the scientific framework relating to this practical proposal should be described precisely. The proposal should also describe how the symposium will be organized.

It is predicted that by the end of the century 90% of the world's Indigenous language will be lost. Not only is this enormous loss in terms humanity's linguistic diversity and traditions, but the impact for those who would normally be speakers of such languages is immense. As Oliver & Exell (2020, p.820) indicate "Language is the vehicle for cultural transmission and the repository of cultural knowledge and this is particularly the case for those from diverse language and cultural backgrounds." Hence the repercussions reverberate within the affected communities with respect to cultural understandings, to familial relationships, personal identity and wellbeing. This is especially the case for children, increasing the challenges they can face, especially educational ones.

Supporting multilingual learners to use their full linguistic repertoire in productive ways is important both for communicative and functional reasons in everyday life - enhancing an individual's access to resources and support - physical, social and emotional. For a considerable period of time we have also known that for children the strength of home language is vital for success in second language learning (Cummins, 1976), particularly for minority language speakers. As Oliver, Angelo, Steele & Wigglesworth (2021, p.136) note: "This is particularly important given the foundational purpose that language serves in our schools, including with regard to the development of literacy." The question then arises, within the process of language loss, what happens to those children who no longer have full access to home language, but are also not able to fully access the language of school because it is not the traditional language of their families?

In the first year of the Decade of Indigenous languages it is appropriate to reflect on the circumstances of the children from backgrounds in which Indigenous languages are learned as a first language. As first language speakers, the children are the custodians of these languages. In this symposium we explore their learning, and also the impact of potential language loss, and examine what measures can be put in place to enable these languages to survive.

Organisation of presentation:

One of the organisers (Wigglesworth) will introduce the symposium and each of the speakers. The speakers will each present in turn. The speakers will be asked to present about the impact of Indigenous language loss, the impact of this, but also describe innovations and measures that are going towards addressing this. The second of the organisers (Oliver) will then act as discussant for the symposium, before the question time begins.

Cummins, J. (1976). The influence of bilingualism on cognitive growth: A synthesis of research findings and explanatory hypotheses. *Working Papers on Bilingualism*, 9, 1–43.

Oliver, R., Angelo, D., Steele, C., & Wigglesworth, J., (2021). Translanguaging possibilities and pitfalls for language teaching – *Language Teaching Research* 2021, Vol. 25(1) 134–150. DOI: 10.1177/1362168820938822

Oliver, R. & Exell, M. (2020). Identity, Translanguaging, Linguicism and racism: the experience of Aboriginal people living in a remote community. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 23, 819-832.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2020.1713722>

