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Abstract

This chapter presents in-depth case studies that reveal the skewed nature of Census data collected or reported about the vernaculars of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote Queensland communities. It is argued that issues relating to inconsistent and inaccurate data have arisen largely due to complexities surrounding widespread language shift towards contact languages. In such contexts, collected language data can be misunderstood and miscoded, because naming and classifying a "language spoken at home" is predicated on (preexisting) language awareness and recognition, as well as standardized- or at least well-recognized- nomenclature. The chapter also shows that Census categories for contact languages- and the compilations drawing on them- require considered attention to ensure greater validity. This is particularly pertinent at the present time, as data-driven government reforms for improving Indigenous outcomes require data of the highest quality to be effective.

Keywords

anomalous, language, ecologies, islander, strait, torres, aboriginal, about, data

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

ANOMALOUS DATA ABOUT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LANGUAGE ECOLOGIES

DENISE ANGELO AND SOPHIE MCINTOSH

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Keywords: contact language demographics, language data collection, census language data, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, Australian contact languages, contact language ecologies

Abstract

This chapter presents in-depth case studies that reveal the skewed nature of Census data collected or reported about the vernaculars of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote Queensland communities. It is argued that issues relating to inconsistent and inaccurate data have arisen largely due to complexities surrounding widespread language shift towards contact languages. In such contexts, collected language data can be misunderstood and miscoded, because naming and classifying a “language spoken at home” is predicated on (pre-existing) language awareness and recognition, as well as standardized—or at least well-recognized—nomenclature. The chapter also shows that Census categories for contact languages—and the compilations drawing on them—require considered attention to ensure greater validity. This is particularly pertinent at the present time, as data-driven government reforms for improving Indigenous outcomes require data of the highest quality to be effective.

Introduction

This chapter demonstrates that languages spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland are not always recorded accurately in collected and disseminated language data, such as for the Australian Census. While Indigenous languages perhaps lack visibility in the Australian public domain in general, the “contact languages” used by many Indigenous Australians appear to have even less acknowledgement

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and status (Berry & Hudson 1997). This is despite these *newer* languages having much larger numbers of speakers than any traditional Indigenous language in Queensland (HoR 1992). The lack of recognition and awareness about these contact languages seems to allow anomalous language data into the public domain.

Reliable and valid data about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's language use is important. Information about the languages spoken by Indigenous families may be necessary for ascertaining community needs, delivering targeted services, and analyzing outcomes, especially with data-driven Government systems. The current National Indigenous Reform Agreement—otherwise known as Closing the Gap (COAG 2008)—for example, represents an intervention process aiming to reduce disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and data collection and analysis play a central role (p. A-33). Clearly, accurate data—and informed interpretations—are pivotal to the success of evidence-based models of reform. In light of this, it is especially concerning that language data may not reflect actual language use in some Indigenous communities.

Clarifying information about contact languages with students, communities, and institutions is a mediated process, influenced greatly by overlays of mutual understandings, attitudes and beliefs, and shared language(s) and terminology (Sellwood & Angelo 2013). (Potentially) misleading language data in the public domain has not assisted. Rather than being futilely critical, however, the intentions of this chapter are to compare and contrast available information to show how anomalous data about contact language situations can be revealed, and to make constructive observations and practical suggestions about issues encountered. To this end, the chapter first briefly describes the contemporary Indigenous language situation in Queensland. Case studies illustrating inaccuracies and/or inconsistencies in language data that are publicly available then follow. After summarising apparent recurring issues, the chapter finally puts forward suggestions to improve the collection and representation of language data.

Several conventions adopted throughout this chapter require explanation here. First, the term “Indigenous” is used with the intention of respectfully including Aboriginal *and* Torres Strait Islander peoples. Second, double quote marks are used to indicate that language names or data categories are exactly as they appear within source language data, as in “Torres Strait Creole.” In addition, the compilations of Census data called “Time Series Profile” provide a useful starting point for each place-based case study because they provide material across three Censuses (2001, 2006 and

2011), not because their language data displays contain *more* anomalies than other compilations. Finally, it is important to note the following differing uses of the term “other,” as employed on the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) website:

- the expression “Other Languages” denotes a diverse range of languages classified under 9000 codes, which include “African Languages” and “Oceanic Pidgins and Creoles” (see ABS 2011b, pp. 111–12)
- the phrase “speaks other language” is generally used on the ABS website to indicate a “language spoken at home” other than “English only” (e.g. ABS 2012a)
- however, in some data tables, the term “other” includes “languages not identified individually,” “inadequately described” and “non-verbal so described” (e.g. ABS 2012a, T10, footnote d).

Overview of Indigenous languages in Queensland relevant to the Case Studies

Traditional languages connected to specific lands and islands were once spoken by Indigenous peoples across the Australian continent, but the punitive, assimilatory and marginalizing practices imposed since British invasion and settlement have resulted in these languages suffering a marked loss of speakers (HoR 2012; McConvell & Thieberger 2001; Schmidt 1990). However, new languages have also emerged and developed as a result of this forced language contact. Communication niches created in post-contact multilingual speech communities (Munro 2005; Shnukal 1988) were filled by language contact varieties, some of which expanded into creoles—languages in their own right.

In Queensland there are three broad chains of creoles, although research is still required into the exact nature of the relationships between these:

- *Yumplatok* (or Torres Strait Creole) is a creole spoken throughout the Torres Strait, parts of northern Cape York and in towns with significant Torres Strait Islander populations (Crowley & Rigsby 1979; Ober 1999; Shnukal 1991)
- *Kriol* is a creole predominately linked to the spread of the cattle industry, and unnamed varieties associated with it are spoken in parts of western Cape York, of the Gulf and of far western Queensland

(Graber 1987; Munro 2000, 2005; Sandefur 1990; Sandefur et al. 1982; Schultze-Berndt et al. 2013)

- *Yarrie Lingo* is the name attributed to a creole spoken at Yarrabah (Sellwood & Angelo 2013; Yeatman et al. 2009), with related forms spoken at Palm Island, Woorabinda and Cherbourg.

Queensland has witnessed such immense language shift towards these (and other) contact languages that traditional languages are now only commonly spoken in a few remote areas (HoR 2012, p. 38). Creoles differ markedly and systematically from English across their syntactic, morphological, semantic, pragmatic and phonological systems, rendering them mutually incomprehensible with this language (Sandefur 1984; Shnukal 2002). Despite this, they can go unrecognized in language data collected for purposes such as the Census, because they can be erroneously perceived as (often substandard) versions of the mainstream language of power, Standard Australian English (SAE), due to being English-lexified (McIntosh et al. 2012, p. 451). Dialects of English resulting from language contact have also been documented in Queensland—Aboriginal English (Eades 1983) and Torres Strait English (Shnukal 2001)—but these are not a focus for the Census as they are not “a language other than English,” unlike creoles.

The significant changes in language use across Indigenous speech communities in Queensland have actually created *more* complexity in regards to the accuracy of language-related data collection and analysis, adding to issues already identified with collecting data about traditional languages (McConvell & Thieberger 2001, pp. 40–41; Morphy 2002, pp. 45–46). Indeed, the compilations of data analyzed in this chapter show difficulties encountered by many Indigenous individuals in Queensland in answering the Census question: “Does the person speak a language other than English at home?” (ABS 2011a) and/or in having their responses accurately rendered.

Data

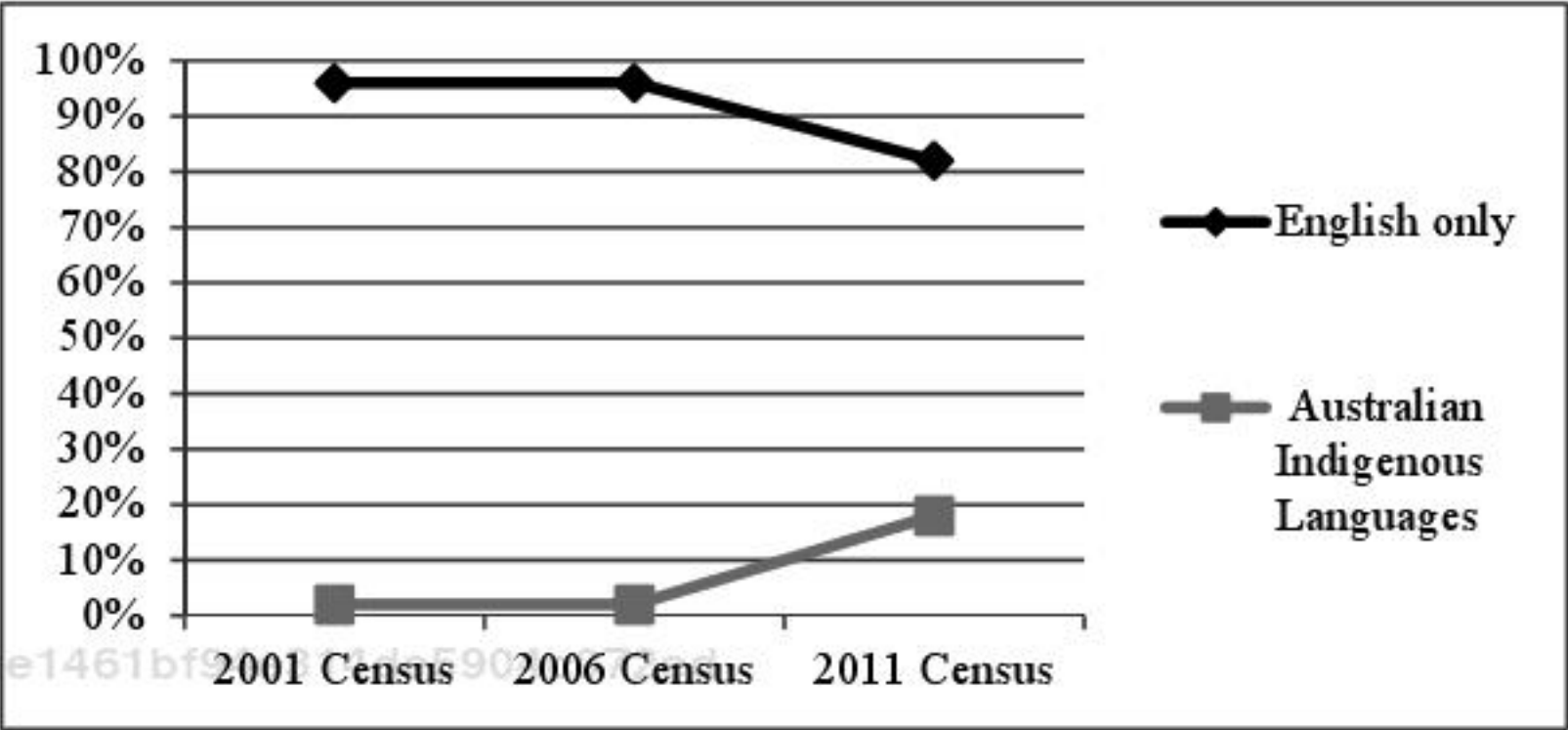
The following case studies examine language data relevant to specific locations and/or specific languages. The methodology employed combines discussion of selected language data issues alongside explanations of local language ecologies.

Case Study One: A gentle glide?

At Yarrabah, an Aboriginal community in far north Queensland, data available on the ABS website as a *Time Series Profile* (ABS 2012a, shown in Fig. 14-1) shows a decline in the number of people reporting that they speak “English only” between the 2006 and 2011 Censuses and a corresponding increase in those indicating that they speak “Australian Indigenous Languages.” These changes mirror each other (shifting 14 percent respectively), which seems to suggest that there has been a gentle glide towards a situation where more residents apparently speak “Australian Indigenous Languages.”

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Fig. 14-1: Responses categorized as “Australian Indigenous Languages” and “English only” to “language spoken at home” at Yarrabah, as a percentage of total residents



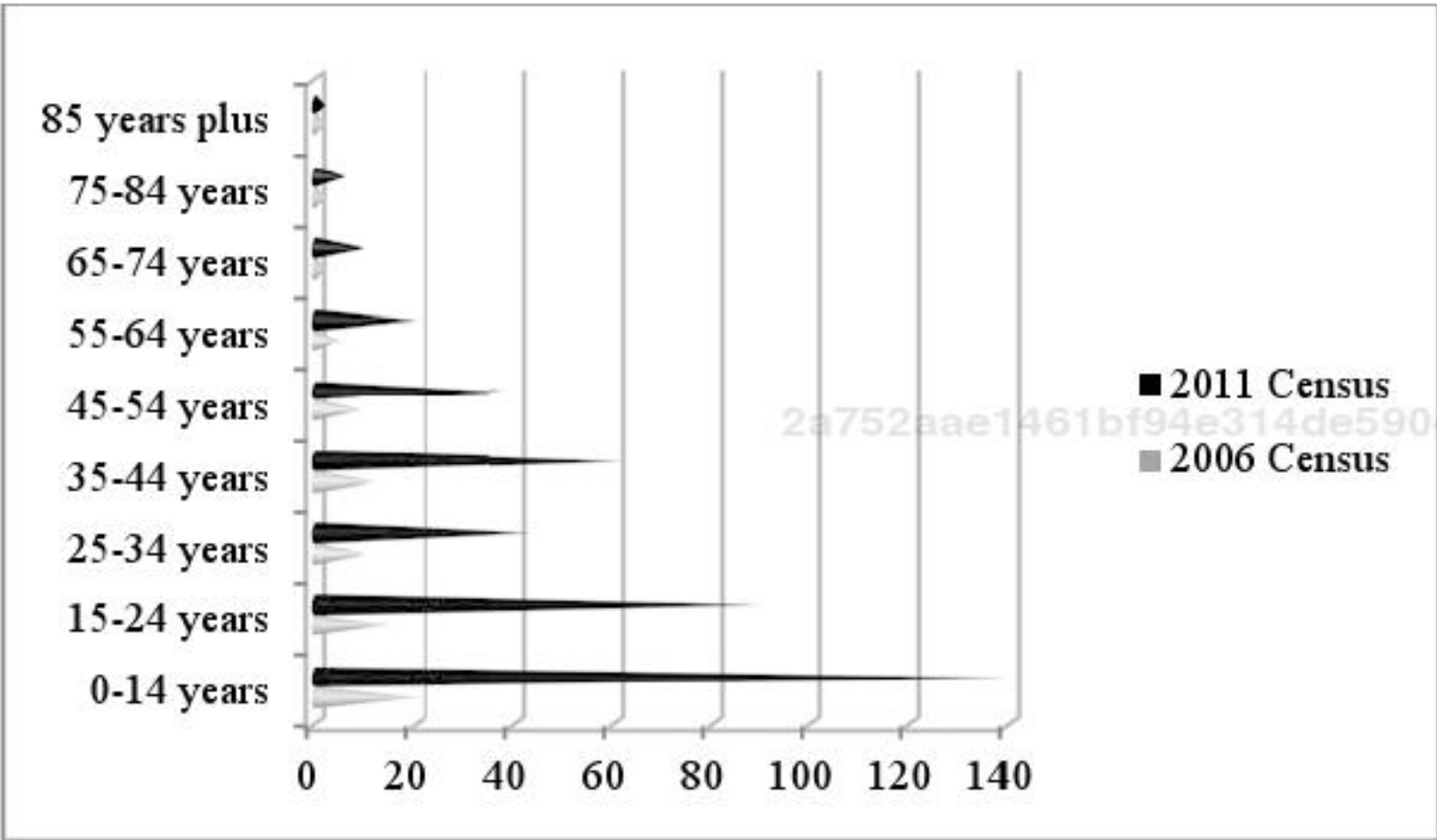
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Data source: ABS, 2012a, “T01 Selected person characteristics”, “T10 Language spoken at home (a) by sex”.

The number of children born to residents of Yarrabah between 2006 and 2011 make up 13 percent of the total 2011 population, very close to this percentage of shifted language use. Yet additional language data, displayed by age in the same *Time Series Profile* (ABS 2012a, T11), shows that children born between these Censuses are not the sole source of the apparent shift in language. Fig. 14-2 depicts (only) people reporting proficient use of “other language” to show how numbers increased markedly across all age groups between these Censuses.

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Fig. 14-2: Responses to “Speaks other language” at Yarrabah, as numbers of residents, by age (in 2006 and 2011)



Data source: ABS, 2012a, “T11. Proficiency in spoken English/language by age”.

The 2011 Census *QuickStats* for Yarrabah (ABS 2012b) provides a further public source of information about residents’ language use. This includes a table titled “Language, top responses (other than English),” which are listed as: “Kriol,” 15.4%; “Other Australian Indigenous languages, nec” (i.e. not elsewhere classified), 0.7%; “Yumplatok (Torres Strait Creole),” 0.2%; and “Guugu Yimidhirr,” 0.1%. All of these languages would be termed “Australian Indigenous languages” according to the ABS. And all the named languages except “Guugu Yimidhirr” (a traditional language) could be described as contact languages by linguists. Small variations due to different data compilations are a likely reason that the total percentage of collective Indigenous language responses is 16% here as opposed to 14% above. (This *QuickStats* display is compiled from Census data included by “place of usual residence,” not “place of enumeration” as for the *Time Series Profile* cited above.)

Problems

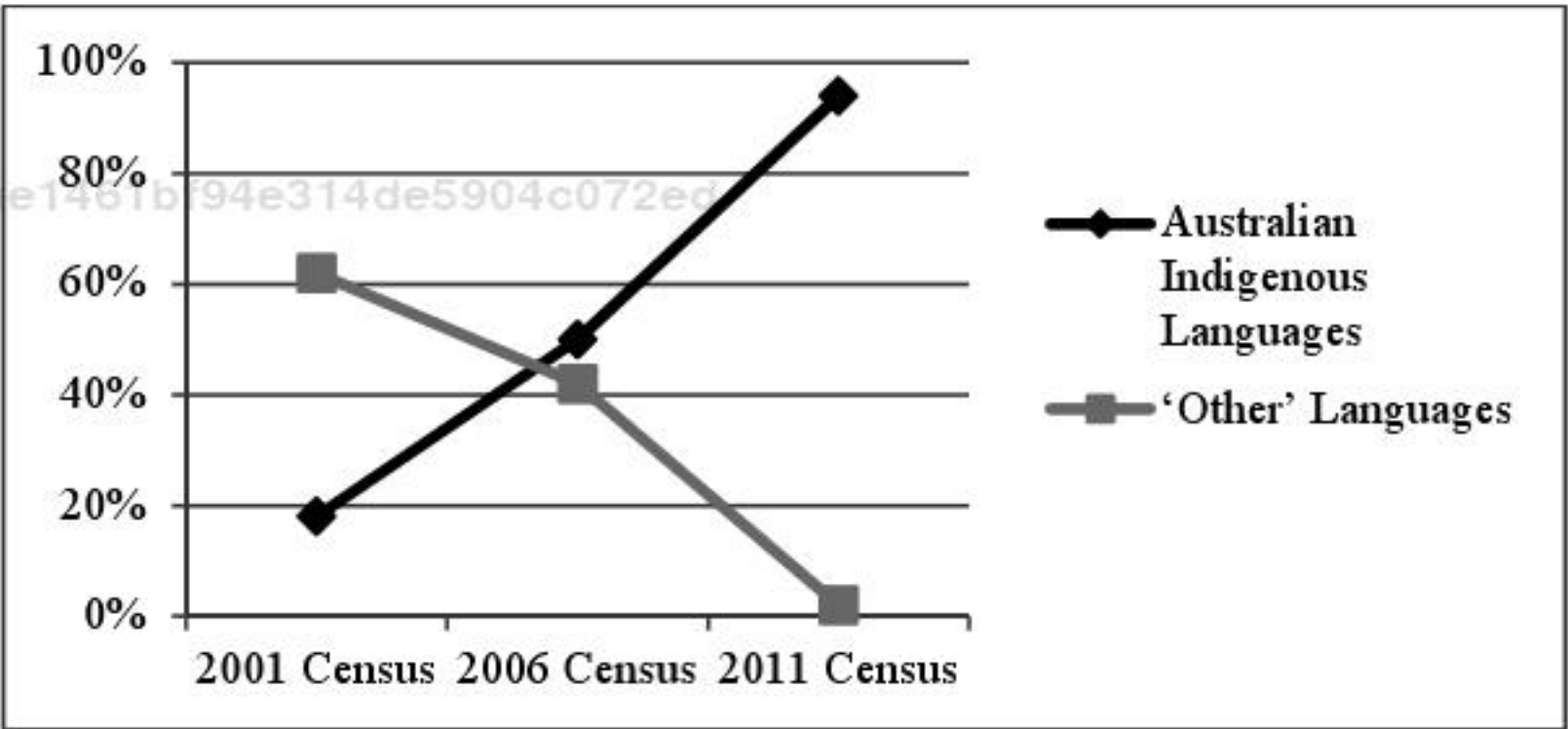
These publicly available datasets would lead most viewers to assume—erroneously—that a small but significant proportion of the Yarrabah community changed from speaking “English only” to speaking “Australian

Indigenous Languages” (predominantly “Kriol”), between 2006 and 2011. In actual fact, language usage in Yarrabah was shifting from traditional languages to a contact language a century ago. The resulting local creole, increasingly called “Yarrie Lingo,” is, however, not Kriol (see Sellwood & Angelo 2013; Yeatman et al. 2009).

Case Study Two: A rapid cross over?

At Kubin, on Moa Island in the western Torres Strait, selected Census data available in a *Time Series Profile* (ABS 2012d) appears to show a steep rise in residents declaring that they speak “Australian Indigenous Languages” as their “language spoken at home.” This seems to correspond closely to a dramatic fall in the responses compiled under “Other” languages (see Fig. 14-3), in contrast to the decreasing “English only” responses at Yarrabah. (In fact, the percentage of total residents at Kubin who declared they spoke “English only” was just 8% in both 2001 and 2006, and 5% in 2011.)

Fig. 14-3: Responses categorized as “Australian Indigenous Languages” and “Other” languages to “language spoken at home” at Kubin Village, as a percentage of the total number of residents



Data source: ABS, 2012d, “T01 Selected person characteristics” and “T10 Language spoken at home (a) by sex”.

Considering that responses categorized as “Other” languages are displayed separately to “Australian Indigenous Languages,” the data displayed in Fig.14-3 raises questions about the possible identity of the formerly widely-claimed “Other” language(s). Indeed, despite the fact that Kubin residents are primarily Indigenous (comprising 86%, 94%, 99% of Kubin’s total population in 2001, 2006, 2011 respectively), data from this *Time Series Profile* suggests that many Kubin residents were, until recently, declaring they spoke a language (at least one) which was categorized as neither an “Australian Indigenous Language” nor “English only.”

In the 2011 Census *QuickStats* for the statistical local area of Kubin (ABS 2012e), a table displaying “Language, top responses (other than English)” shows that the local traditional language—“Kalaw Kawaw Ya/Kala Lagaw Ya”—and the contact languages—“Yumplatok (Torres Strait Creole)” and “Kriol”—were the only responses for “language spoken at home” (see the right column in Table 14-1). This data represents a language ecology consistent with this part of the western Torres Strait (Shnukal 1989).

Moving to the 2006 Census *QuickStats* for Kubin (Indigenous Community) (ABS 2007a), there is a significant gap in language data. Other than “English only” (8.4%), just “Kalaw Kawaw Ya/Kala Lagaw Ya” (31.7%) and “Torres Strait Creole” (16.8%) are displayed (see the center column in Table 14-1). The blurb beneath this data also declares they are “the only two languages other than English spoken at home.” Taken together, the responses total only 56.9 percent of residents, so it is clear that just under half the population of Kubin is not even visible in this source of “language spoken at home” data. The “missing” proportion is very similar to that categorized as speaking “Other” languages (again not including “Australian Indigenous Languages”) in 2006, as reproduced in Fig. 14-3.

An alternate public source of 2006 Census data for the Local Government Area of Kubin is in *The People of Queensland* (Dept. I & C 2008, p. 304), which seems to have compiled more extensive information on “languages other than English spoken at home” and presents more (labeled) categories than the portrayals of 2006 Census data on the ABS website. In addition to the traditional language “Kalaw Kawaw Ya/Kala Lagaw Ya” and the contact language “Torres Strait Creole,” it reports responses of Kubin residents categorized under “Creole, nfd” (i.e. not further defined) (see the left column in Table 14-1).

Table 14-1: Responses to “language spoken at home” (other than “English only”) at Kubin Village, as a percentage of the total number of residents, in 2006 and 2011, languages identified

| Language designation | 2006 Census <i>People of Queensland</i> (Dept. I & C, 2008) | 2006 Census <i>QuickStats</i> (ABS, 2007a) | 2011 Census <i>QuickStats</i> (ABS, 2012e) |
|------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| <i>Traditional language</i> | | | |
| ‘Kalaw Kawaw Ya/Kalaw Lagaw Ya’ | 34.5 | 31.7 | 34.6 |
| <i>Contact languages</i> | | | |
| ‘Yumplatok (Torres Strait Creole)’ | 17.8 | 16.8 | 56.2 |
| ‘Creole, nfd’ | 42.5 | - | - |
| ‘Kriol’ | - | - | 1.9 |
| Total | 94.8% | 48.5% | 92.7% |

Data sources: Dept. I & C (2008, p. 303) Table 2.75.5 “Languages Other than English Spoken at Home by Gender”; ABS (2007a) “Language spoken at home”; ABS (2012e) “Language, top responses (other than English)”.

Overall, it is evident that a very similar percentage of Kubin residents are classified as speaking “Creole, nfd” in one public source of 2006 Census language data (Dept. I & C 2008), as are missing from language data reported in another (ABS 2007a), and as are categorized as speaking “Other” languages in another (ABS 2012d) (in Fig. 14-3). So it seems highly probable that the treatment of the responses classified as “Creole, nfd” (in 2006) has caused these glitches. To date, other publicly available compilations of 2001 Census data about “language spoken at home” at Kubin have not been located and, without the ability to cross-reference, it can only be surmised that a problematic handling of “Creole, nfd” pertained to an even greater extent at that time (see Fig. 14-3).

Problems

Despite an appearance of people in Kubin shifting away from speaking what are classed as “Other” languages (Fig. 14-3), no such languages have been in widespread use. The language shift underway is actually *between* different “Australian Indigenous Languages.” Areas of the western region

of the Torres Strait, such as Kubin, have seen a shift away from exclusively using Kalaw Lagaw Ya (KLY), the local traditional language, towards Yumplatok, the lingua franca of the Torres Strait. Indeed, this creole has been reported in the language repertoires of students from the western Torres Strait islands since the 1980s, along with KLY and English (Shnukal 1989, p. 43). As in Yarrabah, then, the language shift at Kubin did not begin this decade, nor has it accelerated as rapidly as might be interpreted from Fig. 14-3.

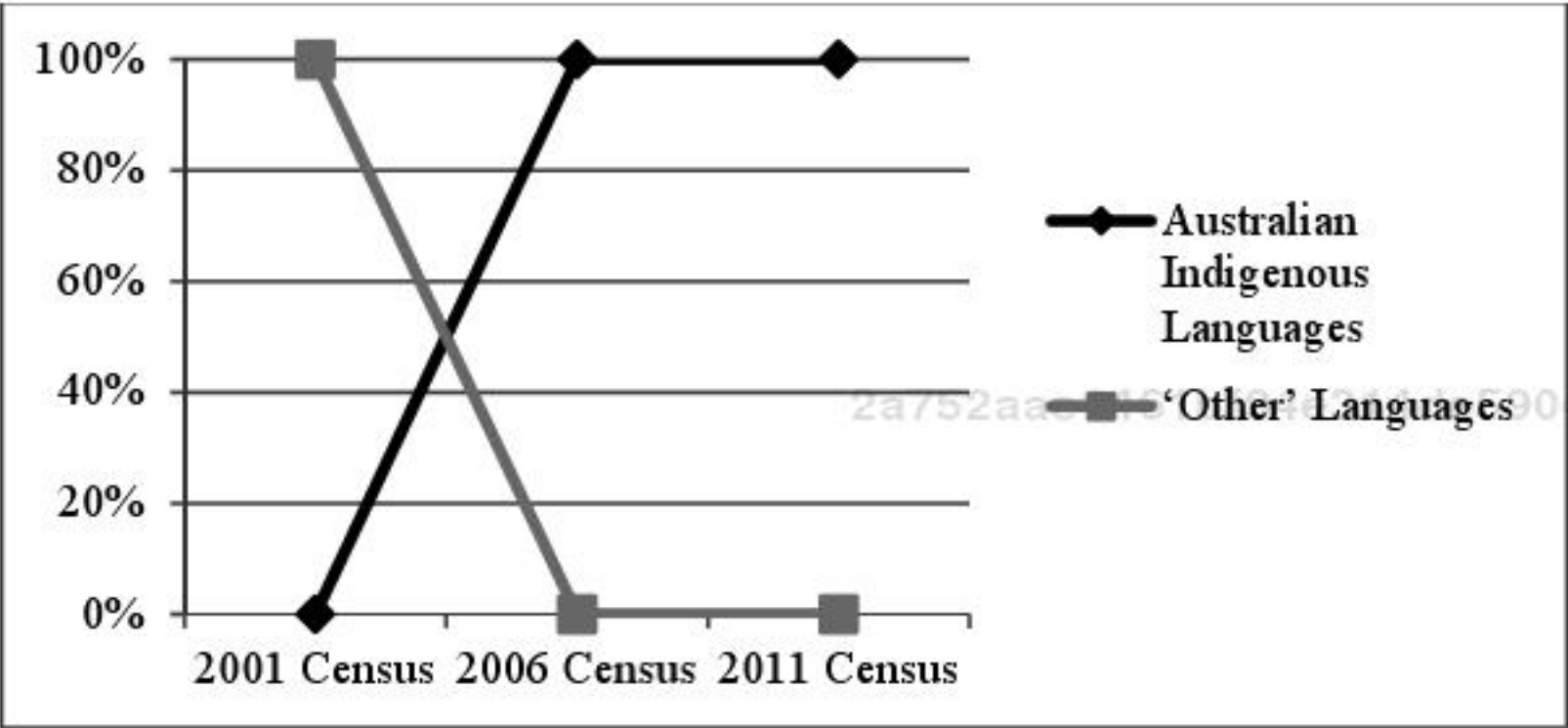
As nomenclature for Yumplatok is not standardized, expressions denoting it vary, including “Broken,” “Pizin,” “Ailan Tok,” and “Creole” (e.g. Shnukal 1988, p. 3). It is quite possible, then, that the source of these anomalies is a misinterpretation of the labels that Kubin residents were using to report their use of Yumplatok. In other words, the alternate names were likely not understood and/or not classified under “Australian Indigenous Languages” in these ABS website compilations of 2001 and 2006 Census data. Further, while “Australian Indigenous Languages” are coded in the 8000s and “Other Languages” are coded in the 9000s, “Creole, nfd” appears as 0005 under the “Supplementary codes” (ABS 2006a, pp. 100–106). This coding probably renders it less likely to be included in data compilations drawing on “Australian Indigenous Languages.”

Although the data in Table 14-1 above could be interpreted as depicting a stable proportion of KLY speakers at Kubin, this assumption too could be flawed. The Census question about speaking “a language other than English at home” allows only a single response, so, where KLY, Yumplatok and English are all spoken—for example—it is unknown how residents select which language to declare.

Case Study Three: A flip?

On Poruma Island, in the central Torres Strait, Census data displayed in the *Time Series Profile* (ABS 2012f) about residents’ declared “language spoken at home” appears to indicate a complete community-wide flip between 2001 and 2006. Excluding responses of “English only,” “not stated” and “overseas visitor,” 100 percent of responses in 2001 were classed as “Other” languages, while, in 2006 and 2011, 100 percent were classed as “Australian Indigenous Languages” (see Fig. 14-4). On first impressions, this suggests that the language used by an entire speech community shifted within the space of 5 years—a shift even more dramatic than that depicted for Kubin.

Fig. 14-4: Responses categorized as “Indigenous languages” and “Other” languages to “language spoken at home” on Poruma Island, from 2001 to 2011, as relative percentages



Data source: ABS (2012f) “T10 Language spoken at home (a) by sex”.

It is striking that no Poruma residents’ responses were classified as “Other” languages in Censuses after 2001. An *Indigenous Profile* (ABS 2007c) for Poruma, one of the many compilations of 2006 Census data, classifies all responses to “language spoken at home” as “Torres Strait Island Languages.” In contrast, many responses contained in Kubin’s *Indigenous Profile* (ABS 2007d) show up as “Speaks ‘other’ language” (as per the final definition of “other” listed in this chapter’s Introduction) and not as “Australian Indigenous Languages,” nor as any of its subcategories, such as “Australian Indigenous Languages, nfd,” “Torres Strait Island Languages,” or even “Other Australian Indigenous Languages.”

QuickStats displays of Census data available for Poruma (ABS 2007b, 2012g) also contrast with Kubin’s Census data. Poruma residents’ language responses align with population figures (i.e. language responses are not missing as in Table 14-1), and they consistently indicate the regional creole—“Torres Strait Creole” (in 2006) or “Yumplatok (Torres Strait Creole)” (in 2011)—as the only “language[s] spoken at home” apart from English. At the level of publicly available information, it might not be possible to clarify why Poruma’s data provides such a contrast to Kubin’s data. Were Poruma residents’ responses in 2006 and 2011 somehow clearer (perhaps using recognizable nomenclature), or were their responses classified more appropriately? Either way, the more cuts, displays and compilations of the 2006 Census data that are examined for

Kubin and for Poruma, the more it becomes clear that the nature of residents' responses and/or their interpretation led to different classifications of the same linguistic entity.

Problems

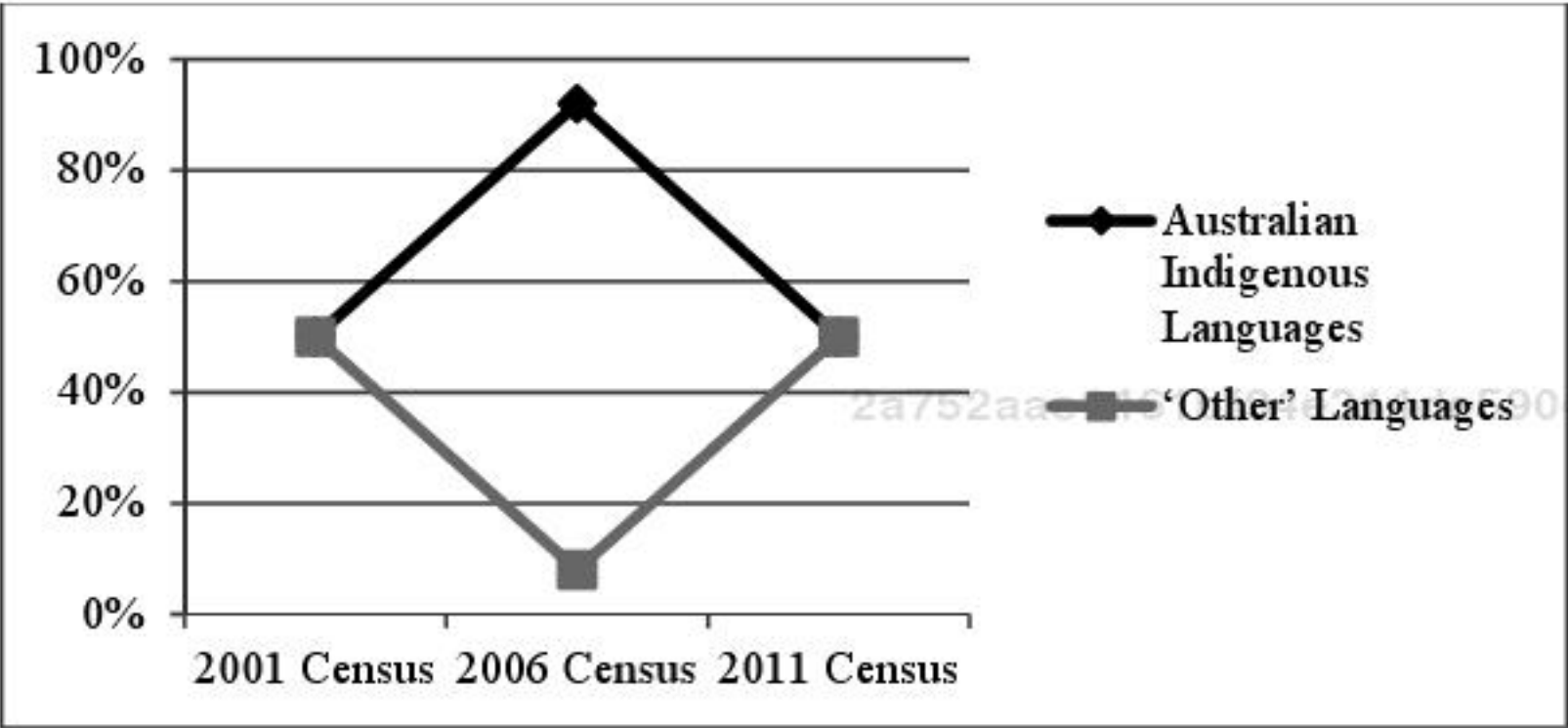
The language data about Poruma available in the public domain (in Fig. 14-4) could lead viewers to assume that, after 2001, a dramatic change in language use occurred, involving almost the entire population on the island. The only record of widespread language shift actually recorded on Poruma, however, was when children were noted to be speaking "Broken"—nowadays also known as Yumplatok or Torres Strait Creole—in the 1930s (Shnukal 1988).

Classification of responses indicating "Torres Strait Creole" appears to have been absolute in 2006 in the case of Poruma, but not of Kubin. Perhaps the greater time depth of the language shift away from traditional language(s) and over to Yumplatok (over 80 years on Poruma) generated different levels of awareness and acceptance of this contact language at a community level. Conceivably, as a result, Poruma residents might have labeled Yumplatok more consistently or recognizably in their Census responses.

Case Study Four: A back flip?

In the far northwest of the Torres Strait, on Saibai, the proportion of the 2006 Census responses for "language spoken at home" that are categorized under "Other" languages appears to shrink considerably compared to 2001, but bounces back again in 2011 (ABS 2012h, *Time Series Profile*). Concurrently, the number of speakers of "Australian Indigenous languages" appears to increase significantly in 2006, but actually recedes in 2011 to a level similar to the 2001 Census (see Fig. 14-5), which runs counter to the trend in cases previously outlined (see Figs. 14-1, 14-3 and 14-4).

Fig. 14-5: Responses categorized as “Indigenous languages” and “Other” languages to “language spoken at home” on Saibai Island, from 2001 to 2011, as relative percentages



Data source: ABS (2012h) “T10 Language spoken at home (a) by sex”.

The 2006 *QuickStats* data (see left-hand column in Table 14-2) shows a similar proportion of people declaring to speak “Australian Indigenous languages” as in the 2006 *Time Series Profile* data (Fig. 14-5), with *Kiwai*—a Papuan language—presumably the source of “Other” language speakers. The data from this year is relatively reflective of the expected language ecology for this part of the Torres Strait, where Yumplatok is reportedly gaining speakers (Ober 2008). However, the 2011 *QuickStats* “language spoken at home” data (see the right column in Table 14-2) does not align with 2011 Census data from the *Time Series Profile*. The 2011 Census data shows a considerable proportion of “Other” languages responses. As with Kubin’s *QuickStats*, languages categorized as “Other” appear to have gone missing from Saibai’s 2011 display (the responses show only 38.5 percent), although the accompanying explanatory note gives no indication of this:

3.8% of people only spoke English at home. The only other responses for language spoken at home were Kalaw Kawaw Ya/Kalaw Lagaw Ya 28.3%, Kriol 3.1%, Yumplatok (Torres Strait Creole) 2.7% and Kiwai 0.6%.

Further, the 2011 *QuickStats* data for Saibai appears illogical considering almost 90 percent of households are said to be multilingual.

An examination of Table 14-2 also indicates a decrease in reported speakers of Contact language(s) generally, and Yumplatok specifically, in

2011. Such figures are unlikely, given that Ober (2008) describes how Saibai Island, over the past four decades, has developed into a multilingual speech community inclusive of Yumplatok (to such an extent that action is required to maintain the local traditional language, Kalaw Kawaw Ya (KKY)). This means that, if anything, *more* Yumplatok speakers would be expected in 2011—certainly more than Kriol speakers. It can only be hypothesized that, as with Yarrabah, responses classified under “Kriol” might instead indicate an alternate designation for the regional creole on Saibai, Yumplatok. Other non-standard, unrecognized responses might have been categorized as “Other” languages and, on account of this, not displayed in the 2011 *QuickStats* data at all.

Table 14-2: Responses to “language spoken at home” on Saibai Island, as percentages of the total number of residents, in 2006 and 2011, languages identified

| Language designation | 2006 Census <i>QuickStats</i> (ABS, 2007e) | 2011 Census <i>QuickStats</i> (ABS, 2012i) |
|---|---|---|
| <i>Traditional language</i> | | |
| ‘Kalaw Kawaw Ya/Kalaw Lagaw Ya’ | 58.5 | 28.3 |
| <i>Contact language</i> | | |
| ‘Kriol’ | | 3.1 |
| ‘Yumplatok (Torres Strait Creole)’ | 12.8 | 2.7 |
| <i>Papuan language</i> | | |
| ‘Kiwai’ | 4.5 | 0.6 |
| ‘English only spoken at home’ | 9.5 | 3.8 |
| Total | 85.9% | 38.5% |
| Households where two or more languages are spoken | no indication | 89.2% |

Data sources: ABS (2007e) “Language spoken at home”; ABS (2012i) “Language, top responses (other than English)”.

Problems

Publicly available language data about Saibai Island might incline viewers to believe—incorrectly—that a shift to Yumplatok is *not* occurring, despite its increasing use on the island over the past four decades (Ober 2008). Viewers might well note that the greatest number of responses is consistently assigned to KKY, while contact languages seem to represent only a relatively small proportion of residents' responses. Depending on the data display, viewers might even assume “Kriol” (the creole spoken from western Queensland through to the Kimberley region) has more speakers on Saibai than “Yumplatok,” the lingua franca of the Torres Strait.

In contrast, other publicly available language data, the *Time Series Profile* (ABS 2012h), could be interpreted as showing *two* dramatic shifts in language use within the past decade on Saibai Island: the use of “Australian Indigenous Languages” apparently almost doubling from 2001–2006, then almost halving from 2006–2011. Ironically, 2006 Census language data for Saibai (see Fig. 14-5 and Table 14-2) more closely approximates the expected language ecology for this part of the Torres Strait, yet viewers might—erroneously—assume this year's data is anomalous in comparison with 2001 and 2011.

Case Study Five: A mistaken identity?

Across Australia in 2001, 199 people recorded their “Main language spoken at home” as Mauritian Creole (ABS 2006b), a French-lexified contact language from the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. The 2001 Census figures reveal 65 putative speakers of Mauritian Creole in Queensland, on the Torres Strait islands of Badu (48), Iama (5) and Mer (3), and at Bamaga on northern Cape York (9) (ABS 2006b, c, d, e). Such figures appear to indicate more than one-third of all people speaking Mauritian Creole lived in remote parts of Queensland. As with Yarrabah, Kubin and Saibai, it is proposed that responses of “Creole,” attempts at indicating the local contact language, have been miscoded, this time to a specific overseas creole.

As speakers of Mauritian Creole would have represented 7 percent of the Badu population in 2001 (if accurate), some indication from other reported personal characteristics would be expected to confirm their backgrounds, such as “Countries of birth.” But this is not the case. Through just such a process of cross-referencing, the ABS diagnosed and reported on a reverse situation in the 2006 Census, with 1,755 people who were born overseas coded to “Australian Indigenous Languages.” Of those

codes confirmed as errors, “199 persons who reported that they spoke ‘Creol’ or ‘Kriol’ at home were miscoded to Aboriginal Creol which is included in the language group Kriol (8924)” (ABS 2006f). It is noteworthy that nomenclature of creoles caused the topmost miscoding error in this document. Indeed, it is openly acknowledged that a variation of the term “creole” could be used to designate a number of different *overseas* creoles (ABS 2006f).

Problems

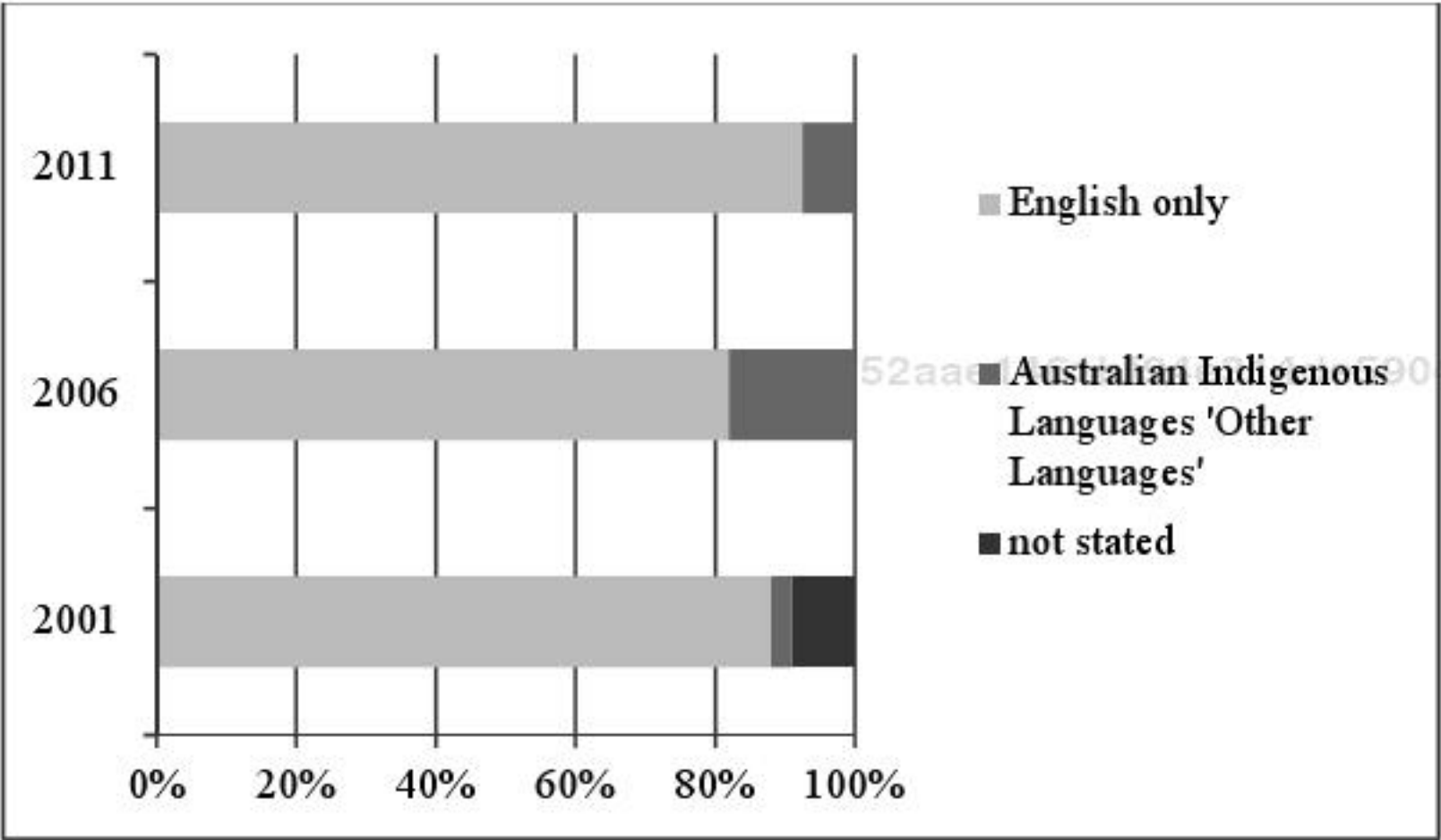
Some language data in the public domain might cause viewers to believe that a particular overseas language, Mauritian Creole, is spoken in several Indigenous communities when, in fact, it is not. Viewers who are not informed about local language contact ecologies and creoles may not be able to critically interpret Census data, nor the sometimes anomalous results of non-standardized nomenclature interacting with data collection processes.

Case Study Six: A flutter?

At Kowanyama, on the lower western coast of Cape York, the *Time Series Profile* (ABS 2012j) indicates that most of the community report speaking “English only.” There is also a discernible “flutter” of between 9 percent and 18 percent of other responses, the composition of which varies at each Census (see Fig. 14-6): Responses categorized as “not stated” are highest in 2001, while those recorded as “Australian Indigenous Languages” are most noticeable in 2006, but reduced in 2011.

QuickStats displays of these Censuses for Kowanyama (ABS 2006g, 2007f, 2012k) reveal that “Australian Indigenous Languages” responses consist either of a small percentage of speakers ($\leq 5\%$) of individual traditional languages from the region, or of languages that have been classed as “Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal, nec” (i.e. not elsewhere classified) (see Table 14-3). No mention is made of any contact language.

Fig. 14-6: All responses to “language spoken at home” at Kowanyama, excluding overseas languages (apart from English), shown as relative percentages, from 2001 to 2011



Data source: ABS (2012j) “T10 Language spoken at home (a) by sex”.

Table 14-3: Responses to “language spoken at home” at Kowanyama categorized as “Australian Indigenous Languages,” as a percentage of total number of residents, from 2001 to 2011

| Language designation | 2001 Census <i>QuickStats</i> (ABS, 2006g) | 2006 Census <i>QuickStats</i> (ABS, 2007f) | 2011 Census <i>QuickStats</i> (ABS, 2012k) |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| <i>Traditional language</i> | | | |
| ‘Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal, nec’ | 0.9 | 4.8 | 2.9 |
| ‘Kok(o)-Bera’ | - | 5.7 | 2.7 |
| ‘Guugu Yimidhirr’ | - | 5.2 | 0.3 |
| ‘Kuk Thayorre’ | - | 0.6 | - |
| Total | 0.9 | 16.3 | 5.9 |

Data sources: ABS (2006g) “Main language spoken at home”; ABS (2007f) “Language spoken at home”; ABS (2012k) “Language, top responses (other than English)”.

To date, no Census data reflects Kowanyama's actual contact language ecology (see Mühlhäusler 1996; Sandefur et al. 1982). However, there is an alternative (though general) public source of language data which draws on a different dataset than the ABS Census: the *MySchool* website. School principals are responsible for ensuring this student information is accurate (ACARA 2012, p. 49). On the *MySchool* website for 2011, Kowanyama State School (the only school in the community) reports that 98 percent of the students sitting the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) had a "Language Background Other Than English" (LBOTE) (ACARA 2011). This category is not the exact equivalent of an individual claiming a "language spoken at home," because a student can be identified as having a LBOTE "if either the student, or the student's parents or carers, speaks a language other than English at home" (ACARA 2011, Glossary). So, assuming that up to 98 percent of Kowanyama students and/or their parents/carers have a "language spoken at home" other than English (extrapolating that the 2011 NAPLAN cohort's language backgrounds would not differ substantially to other students), this is a language situation certainly not reflected in the ABS data.

Problems

Viewers of the Census data presented in this case study would assume—incorrectly—that most of Kowanyama's residents speak "English only." They might also infer a shift away from traditional languages. However, they will not be alerted to the contact language ecology here, where a local creolized variety has been reported for decades. Moreover, this creole is mutually comprehensible with Kriol (Mühlhäusler 1996; Sandefur et al. 1982). *MySchool* LBOTE data for Kowanyama indicates that a language other than English is spoken by at least one person in almost all students' homes, but contains no more details. So while a comparison of ABS data with ACARA data for Kowanyama shows a huge discrepancy, neither captures the language contact ecology nor the actual contact varieties that residents speak.

Summary of issues

In the above case studies, naming and classifying contact languages appears to have been highly and consistently problematic. This is hardly surprising considering that new languages generated by language contact do not come with standardized names (Simpson & Wigglesworth 2008). Sometimes, terms such as "pidgin" or "creole" are used to refer to a

particular contact language. However, other descriptive ways of referring to contact languages are also common, such as their speakers (e.g. Murri, meaning ‘Queensland Aboriginal’), their location (e.g. Yarrie Lingo, meaning ‘the local Yarrabah way of talking’) or their non-standard nature (e.g. Broken, Slang, Creole) (DET 2011). Apparently, such responses can be construed and coded in numerous ways.

Of course, any response to a “language spoken at home” requires that a language first be recognized, acknowledged and claimed. Due to the existence of some apparently shared linguistic material, creoles are liable to be considered “poor” versions of their lexifier, thereby generating responses of “English only.”

Responses to Census language questions denoting contact languages have apparently been categorized differently at different times and in different locations, leading to the many inconsistencies illustrated in the case studies. Inconsistencies occur at very broad category levels, such as whether a response belongs to “Australian Indigenous Languages” (8000s), “Other Languages” (9000s) or “Supplementary codes” (0000s), down to specific language codings “Kriol,” “Yumplatok (Torres Strait Creole),” “Mauritian Creole,” “Creole, nfd,” and so on (ABS 2012c, 2006a).

In the Queensland context, a tension possibly exists about perceived purposes for enumerating traditional languages versus (mostly contact language) vernaculars: language maintenance and revival on one hand; communication needs and service delivery on the other. In any case, some selection process is involved where a single language response is required from a speaker with complex multilingual resources. Recommendations addressing both issues appear in McConvell and Thieberger (2001, p. 7). Although focusing on data collection for traditional languages, these particular points pertain to contact languages too.

Classification of language responses can impact greatly on any subsequent use of data. Whether contact languages are included—or omitted—in totals of “Australian Indigenous Languages” has *serious* ramifications on the validity of correlations and claims that can be made with these data. By way of illustration, the ABS (2011c) media release titled *Speaking an Indigenous language linked to youth wellbeing* addresses a serious issue, and the quality of its Indigenous language data will affect the reliability of its findings.

Unrecognized and/or misclassified languages in data in the public domain have real-world implications for language planning for Indigenous communities. Decision-making related to the provision of interpreting and translating, the need for English as an Additional Language/Dialect curriculum and pedagogy in schools, and targeted employment of local,

like-language speaking community workers depends on the clear and consistent visibility of languages other than English.

Ways forward

As the data inaccuracy can partly be attributed to the public invisibility of rich and complex contemporary Indigenous language ecologies, including contact languages, the way forward clearly requires carefully targeted public education. This would aim to change social attitudes towards embracing contact languages as acceptable, useful and, appropriately, even a prestigious expression of identity.

The collectors and analysts of language information also need an awareness of the language contact contexts being described. If no standardized name exists for a contact language, then its existence should be described to an audience able to understand and interpret the context. The ABS is already supporting people with local expertise and relationships in the role of Census collectors (HoR 2012, p. 41), so relevant (site-specific) training would optimize language data.

In addition, the contact language categories require considered and specialist attention. At the very least, a generic creole code such as “Creole, nfd” is required within the category of “Australian Indigenous Languages,” but consideration should also be given to the relative merits of generic codes at regional levels. Methodology for effectively capturing non-standard language designations must be trialled and developed, at both the point of collection and during analysis and quality control procedures. Further, the various compilations and displays of language data should undergo cross-comparisons to assist consistency. External points of reference, such as linguistic research or other data sources, would also provide useful cross-checking mechanisms.

Finally, the speech community, with its on-the-ground experiences and specialist insider knowledge, is integral to any process aiming to obtain quality responses to “language spoken at home.” The field of applied linguistics can help by providing the conceptual underpinnings to foster language awareness, critically interpret language data, undertake community-based or academic research and communicate linguistic findings. The authors of this chapter have tried to meet these professional responsibilities in ways that will hopefully help to ensure the visibility of contact languages and the increased validity of the language data that is drawn upon in evidence-based service provision.

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