14

SUSTAINABLE PATHWAYS FOR A FLEDGLING LANGUAGE MOVEMENT

The case of Kaurna of the Adelaide Plains, South Australia

Rob Amery

14.1 Introduction

The Adelaide Plains on the eastern side of Gulf St Vincent in South Australia are the lands of the people now known as the Kaurna. Adelaide, the capital city of South Australia, is located in the heart of Kaurna country. The colony of South Australia was established in 1836 following earlier activity by sealers and whalers in preceding decades beginning perhaps as early as 1800. The Kaurna were heavily impacted by kidnapping of women, introduced diseases and the loss of their lands. They bore the brunt of colonisation in South Australia.

The Kaurna people perhaps numbered around 700 people at the time of colonisation, but men heavily outnumbered women and there were very few children represented within the population profile. Already heavily impacted by smallpox which spread from the eastern states via the river systems and Aboriginal trading networks, the population plummeted further with additional introduced diseases including influenza and typhoid. William Cawthorne, who knew the Kaurna people well, claimed that only a handful of survivors remained in the early 1860s (Cawthorne, 1865 in Hemming, 1990: 132). When Teichelmann sent his Kaurna dictionary manuscript to George Grey, then in Cape Town, South Africa, he wrote in the cover note, “Also, I do not entirely approve of the orthography of the native language as we have spelt it, but it is useless now to alter any thing in it after the Tribe has ceased to be” (Teichelmann, 1857).

From the mid-19th century, the remaining Adelaide Plains people were relocated and dispersed to the lands of neighbouring language groups. Many of their descendants have since returned to Adelaide, the ancestral lands of their forebears. See Amery (2016b) for further details.

Those who actively identify as a Kaurna person today number in the hundreds and is increasing as more and more people establish a connection to the Adelaide Plains people through historical and genealogical research. All Kaurna people also have European ancestry and most are also descendants of neighbouring
MAP 14.1 Kaurna Territory (Kaurna Native Title Claim area).

Source: Courtesy of Land Services Group, Government of South Australia.
language groups, principally Narungga to the immediate west and Ngarrindjeri to the east. Kaurna people today trace their Kaurna ancestry back to just eight apical ancestors (Amery, 2016b: 514).

14.2 Reclaiming and restoring the Kaurna language

The call to restore the Kaurna language as a spoken language came in the mid-1980s. On the one hand, Kaurna Elder Georgina Yambo Williams approached the School of Australian Linguistics (SAL) at Batchelor in the Northern Territory to hold a course in Kaurna linguistics. SAL were not in a position to accede to Georgina’s request as a course for one person was not a viable option. At around the same time, Alitya Wallara Rigney, then Principal of Kaurna Plains School (the only urban Aboriginal school in South Australia), approached David Tassel in the Aboriginal Education Unit of the South Australian Education Department to establish Kaurna language teaching programs in schools. Neither of these requests were fulfilled at that time, but the desire was there.

Just a few years later funding was obtained from the Commonwealth Government National Aboriginal Languages Program (NALP) and a songwriter’s workshop was held in early 1990 where songs were written in the three local Aboriginal languages: Ngarrindjeri, Narungga and Kaurna. Just seven of the 33 songs written included the Kaurna language, but significantly, this was the first time that novel Kaurna sentences were constructed since the language went to sleep more than half a century earlier. The songbook and accompanying cassette tape was well-received within the community and schools. Subsequent Kaurna language workshops were held over the next few years and interest in the language grew. Alitya Wallara Rigney introduced Kaurna as the school’s Language Other Than English (LOTE) program at Kaurna Plains School in 1992 and in 1994 the Kaurna language was introduced at the nearby Elizabeth City High School and Elizabeth West Adult Campus.

Early work was based entirely on Teichelmann and Schürmann (1840), henceforth T&S. In 1990, Jane Simpson made Teichelmann (1857), henceforth TMs available to supplement T&S. These sources were Kaurna to English with no English finderlist. In order to write the Kaurna songs in 1990 we had to look manually through the entire wordlist of 2,000 terms to locate the words we wanted. Later, when searchable electronic wordlists were made available the task became much easier.

In 1995 Amery commenced his PhD through archival and action research, continuing to work with these school programs and with the community. Amery pursued primary and secondary Kaurna sources through archival research. Source material was located, collated and analysed. Many of the sources had already been located by Jane Simpson, then at Sydney University. Kaurna words were compared with those of neighbouring closely related languages including Nukunu, Narungga, Ngadjuri, Barngarla and Adnyamathanha. In particular, linguist Luise Hercus had made recordings of hundreds of words from the neighbouring Nukunu language as they were remembered by several elderly people in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Hercus, 1992).
14.3 Re-introducing the Kaurna language

When the first Kaurna language workshops were convened in the early 1990s, scarcely a word was remembered by members of the Kaurna community. The few Aboriginal words that were known could usually be traced back to Ngarrindjeri or Narungga, or even to Wirangu on the far west coast of South Australia. Some Kaurna words were in fact known. But these were usually words such as *mara* ‘hand’ or *mudlha* ‘nose’ that were shared with Narungga and were identified by Kaurna people at that time as Narungga words. The word *kapi* ‘cigarette’ has clearly identifiable Kaurna origins,¹ yet was identified as a Ngarrindjeri word by Kaurna people in the 1990s. It must’ve been borrowed into Ngarrindjeri from Kaurna in the early sealing and whaling era.

In the 1990s, schools were the main focus for re-introducing the Kaurna language. Nowadays the public arena has emerged as the primary location for the use of Kaurna language.

14.4 Kaurna language education

With more than 80% of South Australia’s population living in Kaurna country the demand for teachers of Kaurna is intense. A great many schools across Adelaide and its hinterland are looking for teachers of Kaurna. Few Kaurna people are trained teachers, and those that are, do not have sufficient knowledge of the language to mount a successful Kaurna language program.

The need for training and professional development of teachers of Aboriginal languages has long been identified, yet even less professional development is now provided by the South Australian Department for Education than was offered in the 1990s. This issue is discussed in more depth in Section 14.8.3.

For a decade now, the Department for Education has entered into partnership agreements with Aboriginal organisations to enhance language and culture programs in schools. In the Kaurna case funding was initially directed to KWP and transferred to KWK since 2014. In the latest round of funding in 2022, $33,333 was awarded to KWK. Under the terms of the agreement, KWK will develop an overall strategic work-plan with goals and milestones, refine and trial Kaurna content elaborations for the Australian Curriculum Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages, deliver training programs and professional learning activities, continue production of Kaurna language resources (hard copy, digital and online) and, importantly for the first time, provide support, including professional development to schools. The Department lists 21 schools offering Kaurna language programs in 2022 (https://www.education.sa.gov.au/aboriginal-language-schools-offering-program). Many of these programs are in urgent need of support. The quality of some programs is questionable and some listed programs may not actually be delivered for want of a teacher.

14.5 Kaurna language in the public domain

Kaurna now serves as an emblematic language. Speeches of welcome in the Kaurna language are now commonplace at major events such as the Festival of
Adelaide, Womadelaide world music festival, Adelaide Fringe Festival and so on. Few people in the audience will understand the speech, but the medium is the message.

Since the naming of Warriappendi Alternative School in 1980, Kaurna naming activity has mushroomed. Kaurna people are adopting Kaurna names for themselves, and are frequently naming their children and pets with Kaurna names. Kaurna names are also in demand from the wider community to name institutions, programs, projects, buildings, rooms, playgrounds, parks, ovals, walking trails, streets and localities. Even the city tram and the Adelaide City Council free solar bus bear Kaurna names Kardi Munaintya ‘emu dreaming’ and Tindo ‘sun’. The occasional business has adopted a Kaurna name. Demand for Kaurna names and translations is increasing as local governments and other organisations are developing Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs).

Kaurna language has also been incorporated into public artworks, some of which are situated in prominent locations in the heart of the city. The first such use of the Kaurna language was in the Yerrakartarta installation outside the Hyatt Hotel in 1995.

14.6 Kaurna language in the home and in the community

By contrast to use within the public domain, use of Kaurna within the home and community is limited. Whereas the home is one of the last domains of use for a receding language, it is one of the hardest domains in which to re-introduce a language. Jack Kanya Buckskin is one who has gone a long way in introducing the Kaurna language to his children who are reportedly at least semi-native speakers of the language. There are some concepts that they only know in Kaurna, others that they only know in English and others that they know in both languages (personal communication Jack Kanya Buckskin). If I talk to Jack’s eldest daughter in Kaurna, she certainly understands what I say, though she will reply in English (personal experience, Jan 2017; Jan 2021). In some households, it is the children coming home from school who are teaching the parents a few words of Kaurna.

In order to try to increase the use of Kaurna in the home and in the community, the KWP project holds occasional Kaurna language immersion activities based around manufacture of artefacts, traditional dance workshops, card games and so on. Whilst these language immersion weekends have been good in terms of building community and friendships and in terms of teaching people how to make clubs, possum skin footballs, kardiwapa (an emu feather shuttlecock) and so on, they have not yet been a resounding success in terms of increasing the amount of spoken Kaurna language.

14.7 Language planning considerations

The Kaurna language movement grew in a somewhat ad hoc manner. Whilst “linguistic wellbeing” was specifically mentioned in the Kaurna Aboriginal Community and Heritage Association (KACHA) constitution formed in the mid-1980s (see Amery, 2016a: 10), Amery never received an invite or response to
several letters he had written to KACHA in the early 1990s. During the course of researching and writing a PhD whilst concurrently working with Kaurna language programs in schools, Amery received many requests for Kaurna names and translations, both from members of the Kaurna community, but also from wider society. Amery often provided the information, but advised that the requestor should consult with Kaurna Elders. He was never sure if they did. In 2002, together with Kaurna Elders Dr Alitya Wallara Rigney and Dr Lewis Yerloburka O’Brien, he formed Kaurna Warra Pintyanthi (KWP) which met monthly to provide oversight of and direction for the Kaurna language movement. Requests for Kaurna names, translations and information were added to the agenda, discussed at the monthly meeting and followed up afterwards with the sending of the relevant section of the minutes and a sound file to the requestor. The requestor was invited to attend to discuss their request face-to-face. In 2013 Kaurna Warra Karrpanthi (KWK), a sister organisation to KWP was formed as an incorporated Aboriginal organisation. KWK now deals with the requests, whilst KWP, based at the University of Adelaide, focusses more on research and resource production. The volume of requests for names and translations has placed a considerable and unrelenting workload on the Kaurna language movement.

14.7.1 Codification of the Kaurna language

In 2010, at the insistence of Jack Kanya Buckskin, KWP adopted a phonemically inspired spelling system. Up until that time Teichelmann and Schürmann (1840) spellings had been used and the spelling of words taken from other sources such as Wyatt (1879), Williams (1840), Gaimard (1833) and so on were adapted to adhere to T&S conventions. T&S spelling was reasonable, but there were a number of obvious shortcomings. It did not clearly distinguish between interdental, alveolar and retroflex consonants; it did not adequately distinguish between the three phonemic rhetics, between long and short vowels or between the velar nasal /ŋ/ and the velar nasal + stop sequence /ŋk/. T&S often unnecessarily wrote double consonants. They also wrote both voiced and unvoiced stops when there is no phonemic voicing distinction and they over-represented the vowels using the letters a, e, i, o and u when there are only three phonemic vowel qualities /a/, /i/ and /u/. The adoption of revised spelling has been well-received by new learners of Kaurna and certainly makes the teaching of Kaurna much more straightforward. Once the system has been internalised, the teacher knows exactly how any word should be pronounced, at least according to the phonemic forms adopted by KWP that appear in the Kaurna dictionary, learner’s guide and all resources produced and revised since 2010. Adelaide City Council has embraced the revised spelling system and undertook to use it in all website postings and to adopt revised spelling whenever a sign needed to be replaced.

However, not everyone has accepted the spelling reform. Many Kaurna people continue to use old spelling in their names, which KWP/KWK accepts. Some flatly refuse to embrace the revised spelling, claiming that it has changed the language. According to Karl Telfer in 2014, changing the spellings used by T&S means “you’re cutting away the original and replacing it with something that
isn’t authentic. It doesn’t sound right and it doesn’t connect to the land itself” (in Chaudry, 2015: 38). Karl has been the curator of many public art installations, murals and signage that incorporate Kaurna text. He prefers to use words from William Williams (1840) and their original spelling. But the Williams (1840) wordlist is brief, so Karl is forced to turn to T&S and TM whereupon he uses their original spellings. This sometimes results in a text with mixed spellings. Karl believes that Williams (1840) is a more authentic source:

The way he [Williams] wrote down the language was the way it sounded phonetically. I think Teichman <sic> and Sherman <sic> tried to do the same but a lot of things were missed. William Williams wasn’t here as a missionary to bring the people into a different religious way of thinking, to colonise and Christianise and homogenise the people. Teichman <sic> and Sherman <sic> – they were just here to use our language against us. Mr Williams who recorded that other list, he was walking over Country and talking to people – I’m your friend, you’re my friend, how do we understand each other you know?

(Karl Telfer, 2014 in Chaudry, 2015: 38)

Objectively, the Williams (1840) wordlist is far inferior to T&S. The wordlist is short and few senses of words are recorded. The definitions are sometimes wrong. The initial velar nasal is often omitted, or else it is spelt with h. The letter u is inconsistent and used for both /u/ and /a/. The sentence examples exhibit Pidgin Kaurna features and so on.

Others are constructing words by wrongly applying word-forming processes or that are simply nonsense (Amery, 2013). Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) have been releasing posters and a calendar since 2009 with nonsense forms supposedly meaning Recognition, Respecting, Righting, Reforming, Reciprocating, Responsibility, Reparations, Looking, Learning, Lore, Life, Legacy, Loyalty, Language, Literature, Legitimacy, Leadership and Liberation.

### 14.7.2 Kaurna language resources

A good suite of Kaurna language resources has been produced including the essential alphabet book, learner’s guide (Amery & Simpson, 2013, 2021), phrasebook (Gale et al., 2021), wordlist and dictionary as well as songbooks (Schultz et al., 1999), funeral protocols book (Amery & Rigney, 2006, 2020), playing cards, postcards and greeting cards. Since 2012 innovative online resources have also been produced to supplement the print-based resources and engage the younger generations. Foremost amongst these is the Pirltawardli Puppet Show (Figure 14.1) where 21 short episodes ranging from one to four minutes long appear on a dedicated playlist. Jack Kanya Buckskin has used the Tarnta (male red kangaroo puppet) to interview Aboriginal identities around Adelaide from a range of occupations for his Friends of Pirltawardli series. In these interviews, Jack is able to introduce Kaurna expressions, the terms for various occupations and so on in an engaging and informative manner. A series of eight Kaurna language lessons
with Jack Kanya Buckskin have also been produced plus some Kaurna conversations. As at 30 June 2021, a total of 87 videos have been produced by KWP. The Kaurna for Kids YouTube channel currently has 432 subscribers. KWP video clips have been screened on National Indigenous Television (NITV), Indigenous Community Television (ICTV) and Indigitube thus giving them a wider circulation beyond Adelaide and beyond Kaurna country. ICTV, for instance, serves remote Aboriginal communities throughout Australia and features more than 100 video clips in and about the Kaurna language. The majority of these video clips were produced by the KWP Team. A detailed discussion of the Kaurna language resources is found in Amery et al. (2022).

Despite the arguably impressive array of Kaurna language resources that have been developed for a reawakening language, it is still a challenge to provide meaningful reading material for learners of Kaurna. The National Library of Australia worked together with KWK to produce a Kaurna children’s book *Ngana ngai? (Who am I?)* which includes wonderful illustrations of Australian animals and birds with a short text in Kaurna and English about each (Figure 14.2).

The KWP Team produced a short video clip for the National Library of Kira Yaltu Bain reading *Ngana ngai?* to her niece. This is a good start, but much, much more of this kind of material needs to be produced. The KWP Team is planning to produce a children’s book or perhaps a series of books featuring the Pirltawardli puppet characters which already have a profile and are familiar to many children who are likely to make use of the Kaurna resources.

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*FIGURE 14.1 Pirltawardli Puppet Show postcard.*

*Source: Courtesy of KWP Team, University of Adelaide.*
14.7.3 Future projects

Kaurna language worker Taylor Tipu Power-Smith has put forward the idea of producing a Kaurna Teacher’s Kit comprising the published language resources (learner’s guide, dictionary and so on) together with flash cards, posters, ideas and resources for language games and classroom activities so that the teacher has at her/his fingertips the resources they need. This kit will be produced in the very near future.

Katrina Karlapina Power is working through KWP with the Women’s and Children’s Hospital on an initiative to bestow a Kaurna birth-order name on every child, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, that is born at the hospital. The mother might be presented with a possum-skin ankle bracelet, or some other vegan-friendly alternative, that is etched with the name. This is a generous gift by Kaurna people that the individual can accept or reject as the case may be, but has the potential of greatly increasing awareness of Kaurna language and culture amongst both present and future generations. The beauty of birth-order names is that they are a given once we have some information about the existence of siblings, thus there is no need to ponder over the choice of the name. Kaurna has distinct names for the first up to the ninth born and distinguished further for male and female (see Amery & Simpson, 2013: 15–16).

Katrina is also working through KWP with funeral directors to give an acknowledgement of Kaurna country at the beginning of every funeral ceremony held on Kaurna country. Furthermore, we are providing them with a copy of Kaurna Palti Wanga (Amery & Rigney, 2006/2020), the Kaurna funeral protocol resource booklet and CD so that they can discuss options with Kaurna families for inclusion of Kaurna liturgy and Kaurna hymns.
Towards a Sustainable Kaurna language movement

Some 30 years on since those initial efforts to write Kaurna songs, the Kaurna language movement still faces many challenges. Some aspects have become easier. For instance, advances in technology have made quality resource production a much easier task and we now have a good set of basic Kaurna language resources.

A number of Kaurna people now have considerable knowledge of the Kaurna language including phonology, lexicon and grammar. Jack Kanya Bucks has developed a reasonably high level of fluency and spontaneity and, as discussed earlier, his children are emerging as semi-native speakers of Kaurna.

On the other hand, factional differences and jealousies within the Kaurna community have grown. Some reject the leadership of KWP/KWK in language matters and prefer to pursue their own version of the language. The South Australian Department for Education has become much more difficult to work with and little progress has been made in that direction.

The demand for Kaurna Welcome to Country speeches, for Kaurna dance and cultural performances, for Kaurna translations, for teachers of Kaurna language, for involvement in cultural programs in schools, for the establishment of Kaurna language programs and so on has placed a heavy burden on Kaurna language activists, who at times feel totally overwhelmed.

Generational change

The Kaurna language movement has sadly lost some of its strongest advocates. Ngarrpadla (Auntie) Josie Agius, co-convener of the Ngarrindjeri, Narrunga and Kaurna Songs project passed away in 2015 (New Daily, Dec. 31 2015). It was Ngarrpadla Josie who insisted on including the writing of Kaurna songs in this project. Less than two years later, Ngarrpadla Dr Alitya Wallara Rigney, co-founder of KWP, passed away on 13th May 2017. Ngarrpadla Alitya hosted the early Kaurna language workshops at Kaurna Plains School and introduced Kaurna as the school’s language program in 1992 against departmental advice at the time. She was an ardent supporter and advocate for the language. Kevin Duigan, a non-Aboriginal teacher at Kaurna Plains School who coordinated the school choir, wrote several Kaurna songs and performed many others, passed in 2014 whilst Cherie Warrara Watkins, teacher of Kaurna language at Kaurna Plains School and Freemont-Elizabeth High School passed in November 2019. Kauwanu Stevie Gadlabarti Goldsmith also died suddenly in July 2017. Gadlabarti had just turned 60 and was really enjoying life and the work he was doing with the KWP Team at the University of Adelaide. Gadlabarti was skilled both in front of and behind the camera and was a wonderful role model for the younger members of the team. Gadlabarti’s death hit the other members of the KWP Team hard as, unlike the others, his death from a sudden heart attack was so unexpected. His departure left a massive gap, both in terms of the work he was doing with the KWP Team, but also emotionally. It was very difficult for others to pick up the pieces after Gadlabarti’s passing.
Kauwanu Lewis O’Brien is now in his 90s and whilst still very active for his age, he has withdrawn from running the affairs of KWP/KWK and makes far fewer public appearances than he used to. Others have also effectively withdrawn from the Kaurna language movement and have moved on to other things. Some have moved interstate to live, study and work. At the end of 2022, Amery will retire from his position at the University of Adelaide where he teaches a course in Kaurna linguistics and is currently exploring options to ensure that the course continues after his departure.

The challenge has been to recruit younger members of the community to fill the gaps and to grow the Kaurna language movement. The movement has had some success in recruiting some wonderful younger Kaurna language workers and teachers of Kaurna language (see Amery & Buckskin, 2012). But many, many more are needed.

### 14.8.2 Need for leadership and direction

KWK was formed to enable Kaurna people to have more control and oversight over the Kaurna language movement and the decisions made (see Amery & Buckskin, 2013). All directors of KWK are Kaurna people. Whilst several non-Indigenous people attend meetings, they do so only in an advisory capacity. If a vote is taken, only Kaurna people may vote. Since its formation in 2013, KWK has had five chairpersons. KWK has struggled to find its feet. The loss of key personalities as discussed earlier has not helped. Attending to the paperwork and administration has been a constant challenge. To date the activity of KWK has been largely reactive rather than proactive and many requests have not been dealt with in a timely fashion. Some members of KWK have expressed their dissatisfaction and frustration at recent performance of the organisation and its leadership. Some feel that KWK has been doing little more than trying to survive and that the time has come to move forward.

In many respects, the Kaurna language movement is a victim of its own success. Interest in and demand for the Kaurna language has grown remarkably and it is exceedingly difficult to meet that demand. All involved with KWK lead busy lives. Most have other work or study commitments and their effort within KWK is voluntary. When family, sports and social commitments are added in, KWK can seem like yet another burden. Many of the requests and tasks that KWK is presented with are exceedingly difficult to address and people often feel that they do not have sufficient knowledge to fulfil the request or even to make a meaningful contribution to the discussion.

### 14.8.3 Training and mentoring

Capacity building is key to building a sustainable language movement and collaboration has been a constant since the outset. Cherie Warrara Watkins and Nelson Varcoe, the first teachers of the Kaurna language at Elizabeth City High School and Elizabeth West Adult Campus worked in a team alongside a trained teacher and a linguist. They also participated in periodic workshops with other teachers.
of Aboriginal languages where they had the opportunity to share their experiences and their teaching methods, strategies and resources and discuss the challenges they faced. These professional development workshops were highly motivating. Unfortunately, professional development opportunities within the Department for Education ceased many years ago. With the introduction of the Kaurna linguistics course at the University of Adelaide in 1997, some teachers were supported to attend in the late 1990s. Kaurna language workers were mentored and trained on the job. When Jack Kanya Buckskin taught Kaurna to adults with the School of Languages, at first he co-taught the course with Amery in 2006. In subsequent years he was mentored by Karmen Petric, an experienced language teacher and Deputy Principal of the School of Languages. Similarly Taylor Power-Smith was mentored by Alicia Alfaro, the Spanish teacher, when she taught Kaurna at Gilles Street Primary School. Such mentor-mentee relationships are essential.

Acutely aware of the gap in training opportunities for teachers of Aboriginal languages, Mary-Anne Gale sought Commonwealth government funding to develop TAFE training courses. In 2012–13 a Certificate III course ‘Learning an Endangered Aboriginal Language (Kaurna)’ was offered in one-week intensive blocks over five mid-term, mid-year and end-of-year breaks (Figure 14.3). Ten Kaurna people completed the Certificate III in 2013 whilst several others had undertaken part of the course. Several went on to study the Certificate IV course ‘Teaching an Endangered Aboriginal Language (Kaurna)’ and two Kaurna students, Jack Kanya Buckskin and Taylor Tipu Power-Smith, completed all course requirements.

FIGURE 14.3 Kaurna Certificate III participants, 2012.

Source: Courtesy of Paul Finlay, KWP Team, University of Adelaide.
Jack Kanya Buckskin himself went on to offer the Certificate III course through Tauondi College where another four completed over the next few years. In 2020 a new day-time Certificate III class and an evening Certificate III class were offered at Tauondi College. Despite the COVID-19 lockdown lasting several months, 12 students graduated and a number of others completed some units. Several of these graduates are already working in schools and two were supported by their schools to undertake the training.

A number of the Certificate III graduates went on to complete a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment enabling them to teach certificate level courses. Several plan to offer a new Certificate II course in the near future. A new Certificate II course is offered at Aldinga Payinthi College and Tauondi College in 2022, whilst the Wednesday evening class at Tauondi College has continued for those who have completed their Certificate III and others who wish to consolidate their Kaurna language skills.

Training and professional development is absolutely key to building a sustainable language movement. What is needed is the establishment of a clear career path where the training is recognised and made a precondition of employment as a teacher of Kaurna and is rewarded by an increase in remuneration. Unfortunately, the Department for Education is yet to recognise the Certificate III and IV but this will hopefully be addressed in due course.

14.8.4 The teaching of Kaurna

A major dilemma for the Kaurna language movement revolves around the question of who should be allowed to teach the language. Should non-Indigenous people be allowed to teach Kaurna? Should non-Kaurna people be allowed to teach Kaurna, and if so, under what conditions? The consensus amongst those in the Kaurna language movement is that in an ideal world, the Kaurna language should be taught by Kaurna people. But the Kaurna community is small, and despite the training and mentoring efforts discussed earlier, there are very few Kaurna people in a position to teach Kaurna. Not all of the 26 Certificate III graduates are Kaurna people, others have since died or retired, many are working full-time in other occupations and others may not wish to be teachers. Under these circumstances, some see it essential for the future of the Kaurna language, that the teaching of Kaurna not be restricted to Kaurna people. During the Certificate IV course offered in 2013, the idea was put forward that a Kaurna Teachers Registration Board be established whereby prospective teachers of Kaurna could be assessed as to their suitability. This would give the Kaurna language movement a measure of control so that they could be assured that the teacher had sufficient knowledge of the language, was aware of the resources available, was in touch with and responsive to the Kaurna language community and understood their position as an interim measure. Those non-Kaurna people who teach Kaurna should be trying to work themselves out of a job and make every effort to support and empower Kaurna people to teach their own language (personal communication Taylor Power-Smith, July 2021). The Kaurna Teachers Registration Board has not yet
been formally instituted for want of resources, but the idea is gaining strong traction with KWK.

The teaching of Kaurna by non-Kaurna people is a vexed issue. On the one hand, if the teaching of Kaurna is tightly restricted to Kaurna people only, then the teaching of Kaurna will be stifled. A hard line on this issue calls into question my own role as a non-Indigenous linguist in teaching Kaurna linguistics at university and teaching the Kaurna Certificate III at Tauondi College and the roles of a number of other non-Indigenous and non-Kaurna people within the movement. Those Kaurna people with the strongest Kaurna language skills are not currently teaching Kaurna language courses, though they are engaged in developing Kaurna language resources, running one-off Kaurna language awareness raising sessions, delivering Kaurna welcome to country speeches and Kaurna dance performance and so on.

On the other hand, if the teaching of Kaurna were opened up and non-Kaurna, especially non-Indigenous people, were encouraged to teach the language, then the language could quickly lose any connection to the community. This would defeat the purpose for the existence of the Kaurna language. Even now there are instances being brought to my attention of teachers with little knowledge of the language who are introducing dreadful mispronunciations of common Kaurna words despite the availability of good models on YouTube. The way this question of who teaches Kaurna plays out will have huge bearing on the future of the teaching and learning of the Kaurna language and ultimately its use and vitality within the Kaurna community and the wider community.

14.9 Conclusion

The Kaurna language is certainly a much more vibrant language than it was 30 or so years ago. There is a much greater awareness of the existence of the language and the language is certainly much more visible in signage and public artworks. Welcome to country or acknowledgement of country speeches in Kaurna are becoming accepted protocol at public events both large and small and Kaurna cultural performance is now a feature of many large events. There is now strong interest within schools to mount and deliver Kaurna language programs, though the demand for teachers of Kaurna cannot be met. A good set of basic Kaurna language resources has been developed.

Despite the impressive advances for a language that just a few decades ago was regarded as extinct and irretrievable, Kaurna is still highly vulnerable. The Kaurna language movement depends on a small number of individuals and struggles to meet the demands placed upon it. Over the past few years, several key individuals have passed on or retired and have been difficult to replace. The Kaurna language movement is in need of strong leadership and a clear vision for the future.

There are, however, several reasons to be optimistic. Several young Kaurna language workers are gaining a good knowledge of the Kaurna language, are gaining a wide range of skills and are developing a strong commitment to the future. Their children are involved and engaged. Even though the Kaurna community is small, every now and then someone new emerges with talent and potential for development. In time I believe that the leadership will come.
Acknowledgements

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Notes

1 T&S (1840: 9): “Kappi, s. tobacco. This word is derived from the foregoing [i.e. kap-pendi: ‘to vomit’], probably on account of the effect which smoking at first produced upon the natives.”

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