

CHAPTER 3

THE STATE OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LANGUAGES



THE STATE OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LANGUAGES

KEY FINDINGS:

- All of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are under threat.
- Less than 10 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are reported to be speaking language at home.
- The AIATSIS 2018–19 Survey of 141 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language varieties finds that at least 123 are in use or being revitalised/revived in Australia today; the 2016 Census results found 159 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages reported to still be in use.
- The AIATSIS 2018–19 Survey finds that there are at least 31 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language varieties being reawakened by communities in Australia.
- Most of these languages are highly endangered. The AIATSIS survey found only 12 relatively strong traditional languages and two strong new languages.
- New languages—particularly Kriol and Yumplatok/Torres Strait Creole—are some of the strongest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in Australia and their use is growing.



AVAILABLE DATA ON AUSTRALIA'S INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

The information for this Report has been drawn from the third National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS3) 2018–19, the ABS Census 2016 and the NATSISS 2014–15. Due to the different data collection methods there is no absolute answer to the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language varieties or to the number of speakers of these languages. This Report instead explores these issues and presents the common findings.

Table 3.1: Comparison of available data

AIATSIS SURVEY (NILS3) 2018–19

141 language varieties were surveyed. Participants self-report.

171 responses were received. Participants choose what language they report on from the AUSTLANG list of language varieties, which numbers around 1,200 names.¹⁶¹

	Is the data available?	What does the data say?	Limitations of the data
Number of languages spoken	✓	Approximately 123 language varieties have speakers. These languages are spoken to different extents. Table 4.3 provides detail on the number of language varieties spoken in each of the categories of strong, undergoing reawakening and endangered.	Responses were only received from 141 language varieties, and not all reported speakers. There are languages known to have relatively large numbers of speakers that did not respond to the survey.
Number of speakers	✓	25,647 to more than 34,620 speakers were reported for 141 language varieties. NILS3 data on speakers was collected by total number of speakers and by ages/categories (to assist respondents 'speaker' is defined in the survey). The number of speakers is one key vitality measure for a strong language.	Responses were only received for 141 language varieties. There are languages known to have relatively large numbers of speakers that did not respond to the survey. Respondents provided estimates of speaker numbers from a list of ranges. Respondents varied on counting fluent speakers only or including partial speakers.
Strength of languages	✓	Using another key vitality measure (intergenerational transmission) NILS3 identifies 12 relatively strong traditional language varieties and 2 strong new languages.	Responses were only received from 141 language varieties.
The places where languages are being spoken	✓	NILS3 uses AUSTLANG language codes, for almost all of which the homelands are geographically identified.	AUSTLANG displays centres of homeland regions where languages were traditionally spoken and is less clear when speakers now live away from traditional areas.
Proficiency	✓	171 respondents indicated that of the languages surveyed, at least 123 language varieties were reported as having some level of proficiency.	As this data is self-reported, respondents vary on how they interpreted what a 'speaker' is, from fully fluent to limited speakers. (The survey went some way to mitigate this issue by providing categories of proficiency.)

Table 3.1: Comparison of available data

CENSUS 2016

The Australian population is asked to self-report what language other than English they speak at home. The Census provides a write-in box; this response is then coded to the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL) categories. If the language spoken is not in the ASCL the response is coded to a 'not elsewhere classified' category. For the 2016 Census there were 217 Indigenous languages listed in the ASCL.¹⁶²

	Is the data available?	What does the data say?	Limitations of the data
Number of languages spoken	✓	It was reported that approximately 159 Indigenous languages are spoken.	Currently the data does not distinguish between languages spoken at home and heritage languages. Only one language can be chosen. The ASCL list of languages is smaller than that of NILS (AUSTLANG), but there are a large number (around 8,000) of speakers of 'Australian languages not further defined' in the Census.
Number of speakers	✓	In 2016 approximately 65,000 people reported speaking an Indigenous Language.	The Census provides data of the full population but does not distinguish between speaking a language fluently and speaking a few words and has a limited number of languages to choose from.
Strength of languages	✓	The proportion of child speakers varies considerably among languages	The Census provides indirect measures of the strength of languages through comparing number of child speakers and total number of speakers.
The places where languages are being spoken	✓	The Census provides data on where languages are spoken, both for people living on their traditional country and for people living away from it.	N/A
Proficiency	✗	N/A	Does not collect data on Indigenous language proficiency but has English proficiency.

NATSISS 2014–15

A random sample survey designed to be representative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in private dwellings (11,178 people were surveyed). Participants self-report.¹⁶³

	Is the data available?	What does the data say?	Limitations of the data
Number of languages spoken	✗	N/A	The NATSISS only distinguishes between broad categories of language spoken at home (English, Aboriginal languages, Torres Strait Islander languages, other languages).
Number of speakers	✗	N/A	Estimates of the number of language speakers at different levels of proficiency can be derived from the NATSISS, but not for individual languages.
Strength of languages	✗	N/A	This level of detail is beyond the scope of NATSISS.
The places where languages are being spoken	✗	N/A	Some geographic data is available in the NATSISS, but it is not all published. The most detailed geographical reporting available is by remoteness areas for each state and territory.
Proficiency	✓	For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, NATSISS distinguishes between levels of proficiency for speech and comprehension, and also asks if respondents are learning an Indigenous language.	N/A

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES SPOKEN IN AUSTRALIA

Today, there is still a diversity of Indigenous language varieties, but the nature of that diversity has changed. There is now a mix of traditional and new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken across Australia, along with English and foreign languages, which are being spoken to varying degrees.

Asking what languages Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are speaking should be considered in the context of how these languages are being used. This question is further complicated by fundamental issues of definition and understanding surrounding 'what is a language', who are the 'speakers' and which language varieties are being counted in large surveys and data sets (traditional and/or new languages).

2018–19 AIATSIS Survey

In 2018–19, AIATSIS conducted the National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS3) to update the information surrounding the state of Australia's Indigenous languages.^v This is the third survey in a series, which continues to provide a comprehensive overview of the state of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language varieties.

For this survey respondents are able to pick from a comprehensive list of about 1,200 language variety names in AUSTLANG. NILS3 collected information on 141 language varieties, of which between 123 and 127 were reported as being spoken.¹⁶⁴



WHAT IS AUSTLANG?

The AUSTLANG database of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language varieties has been assembled from a number of referenced sources. AUSTLANG can be searched with language names, placenames and via the codes. AUSTLANG has links to a number of online resources. AUSTLANG includes many variant forms of language names.

The NILS2 Language Activity Survey received 102 responses, covering about 79 individual languages (some languages appeared more than once).¹⁶⁵

2016 ABS Australian Census

The Census asks about languages other than English spoken in Australian homes. For Indigenous languages, answers to this question can be provided through a write in box and responses are then coded to the ASCL categories, which included 217 Indigenous languages in 2016. If the language spoken is not in the ASCL, the response is coded to a 'not elsewhere classified' category.

^{vi} It is important to note that categories and lists of Australia's Indigenous languages used by researchers vary; for example, for the AIATSIS survey series the AUSTLANG database of 1,200 language varieties is used.

In 2011, the Census reported that approximately 156 Indigenous language variety names were identified as spoken in Australian homes.¹⁶⁶ The 2016 Census reported an increase to approximately 159^{vii} Indigenous language varieties, but as indicated in Table 3.1, this does not measure proficiency.^{viii}

In order to be separately classified in the ASCL, languages must have a minimum threshold of three self-reported speakers. For the 2016 Census, a review resulted in the ASCL list having an additional traditional language (Yugambeh) added.¹⁶⁷

There are no questions in the Census about how people are using language and the contexts and depths to which language is being spoken. Nor does it easily recognise language varieties. The Census also only allows for one language other than English to be listed. This does not reflect the occurrence of multilingualism, which is common in some communities. The Census also does not capture information about people learning an Indigenous language,¹⁶⁸ who may for example use that language for cultural, spiritual or ceremonial purposes.

- v AIATSIS received 171 valid survey responses on up to 141 language varieties for this survey (140 unique AUSTLANG codes and one with no AUSTLANG code). A number of the 141 language varieties surveyed were reported as having no speakers (more than 16 language varieties). AUSTLANG codes are used as a guide for identifying the language groupings – using different criteria could produce slightly different results. No responses were received for some languages which are known to have many speakers, including Anmatyerr, Burarra and Tiwi.
- vi The ASCL is used in the collection, aggregation and dissemination of data relating to languages usage in Australia and to classify the following language variables: first language spoken, languages spoken at home, main language spoken, and main language other than English spoken at home. The ASCL was last revised in 2011. (ABS, 2016)
- vii These languages were reported as being spoken by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, non-Indigenous and individuals that did not specifically identify.
- viii The ABS 2016 Census recorded 171 language labels with speakers, including 10 'nec' (not elsewhere classified) and 13 'nfd' (not further defined). 4 nec and 4 nfd language labels are excluded to arrive at 163 named 'language varieties' that the 2016 Census recorded as having speakers. Based on mutual intelligibility and other linguistic factors, AIATSIS considers this number can be rounded down to at least 112 languages. Refer to NILS3 and ABS Census data for further details.

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE SPEAKERS IN AUSTRALIA

2018–19 AIATSIS Survey

The answer to the question “How many speakers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are there?” is not straightforward.

The AIATSIS Survey provides some insight into the language varieties where responses were submitted. Although absolute numbers are not provided through the survey, respondents were provided a multiple-choice list with ranges of numbers of speakers (more than 1,000, 501–1,000, 251–500, 51–250, 11–50, 1–10, 0, and don’t know). Respondents were also asked to give a confidence rating on how accurate they felt their estimate was. The differences in responses could be seen with, for example, languages for which there were multiple survey responses, which sometimes had very different answers, depending on the respondent.

The AIATSIS Survey findings on numbers of speakers per language variety and total numbers of speakers of all language varieties are presented in Table 3.2. This table shows that there are around 20 language varieties said to have more than 1,000 speakers. This includes some languages that are being revived by 1,000+ learners, along with some strong languages that have large numbers of speakers.

This category also includes some language varieties for which, while they have substantial numbers of speakers, intergenerational language transmission has ceased.

At the other extreme, there are 17 language varieties reported as having no speakers. There are also 67 language varieties reported as having fairly small numbers of speakers, probably mostly elderly, meaning these languages are under great threat.

As this data is self-reported, respondents vary on how they interpret what a ‘speaker’ is. Some count only fully fluent speakers, while others count limited speakers or learners. The AIATSIS Survey dealt with the question of variable understandings of the term ‘speaker’ by providing proficiency categories (in Question 5 of NILS3). These included:

- Can only say some words and simple sentences.
- Can have a conversation in limited situations. Cannot express everything in the language (part speakers).
- Can have a conversation in all situations. Can express almost everything in the language (fluent speakers).

The AIATSIS Survey asked for numbers of speakers by age ranges—this information is presented in Table 3.3. This table shows the speaker number range for each age group, and the number of language varieties reported; thus there are seven language varieties with more than 1,000 speakers in the 0–19 age group.

Table 3.2: NILS3 question 3: How many people do you think speak this language?¹⁶⁹

Range of estimated speaker numbers	Number of surveyed language varieties in each range	Total number of speakers (for all languages in this range)
More than 1000	20	More than 20,000
501-1000	3	1,503 to 3,000
251-500	12	3,012 to 6,000
51-250	15	765 to 3,750
11-50	30	330 to 1,500
1-10	37	37 to 370
0	17	0
Don't know	7	0
Total	141 language varieties	25,647 to more than 34,620 speakers

Table 3.3: NILS3 Question 4: How many people in each age group do you think speak this language?¹⁷⁰

Range of estimated speaker numbers	Ages 0-19	Ages 20-39	Ages 40-59	Ages 60+
More than 1000 speakers	7	4	2	3
501-1000 speakers	5	2	2	1
251-500 speakers	6	7	6	2
51-250 speakers	10	16	16	17
11-50 speakers	15	23	31	30
1-10 speakers	17	28	36	51
0 speakers	60	41	28	18
Don't know/no response	21	20	20	19
Total number of language varieties	141	141	141	141

Table 3.4: 2016 Census (ABS) Indigenous language labels recorded with more than 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander speakers.

ABS language label	No. of speakers ^x
Australian Indigenous Languages, nfd	8,627
Kriol	7,105
Yumplatok (Torres Strait Creole)	6,000
Djambarrpuynu [a variety of Yolŋu Matha]	4,267
Pitjantjatjara [a variety of Western Desert]	3,049
Warlpiri	2,275
Tiwi	2,019
Murrinh Patha	1,968
Kunwinjku [a variety of Bininj Kunwok]	1,705
Alyawarr	1,551
Anindilyakwa	1,478
Ngaanyatjarra [a variety of Western Desert]	1,089

2016 ABS Census

The 2016 Census indicates that approximately 64,000^{ix} Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reported that they speak an Australian Indigenous language at home.¹⁷¹

A limitation of the Census is that it collects respondents' self-reported 'main language other than English spoken at home' without collecting any information on the proficiency of the language spoken, so part-speakers or learners are counted the same way as fluent speakers.

Most of these languages with over 1,000 speakers identified through the Census are considered relatively strong in the NILS3 – Kriol, Yumplatok, Yolŋu Matha, Western Desert language (includes Pitjantjatjara and Ngaanyatjarra), Warlpiri, Murrinh-Patha, Bininj Kunwok languages (Kunwinjku), Alyawarr and Anindilyakwa.

NILS3 notes that the category 'Australian Indigenous Languages nfd [not further defined]' is not a language but a group of possibly unrelated languages that the ABS calls a 'residual category'. This is excluded from NILS3.^{xi} This residual category contains a large number of speakers, for whom it is not possible to identify whether specific new or traditional languages are being used. Tiwi is not classed as a strong language in NILS3 because of rapid and radical language change between traditional and modern Tiwi, which are not currently differentiated in AUSTLANG. This is further discussed in the full NILS3 Report (forthcoming at time of publication).

ix The actual numbers from the 2016 Census are: 64,763 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, non-Indigenous and people who did not provide their Indigenous status reported speaking an Australian Indigenous language. Of this, 63,754 people who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reported speaking an Indigenous language.

x The ABS introduces a random error to small cells to protect confidentiality, so exact numbers may vary each time data is retrieved from the ABS.

xi There is a large number of speakers in this category, and existing data collection methods do not describe if speakers in this category are speaking new languages that do not have names, or traditional languages that have not been recognised or have been written down inaccurately and are therefore unable to be identified.

Table 3.5: Relatively strong languages by category – new or traditional

Language	
New languages	Kriol
	Yumplatok/Torres Strait Creole
Traditional languages	Western Desert languages (includes Pitjantjatjara and many other Western Desert varieties) ^{xii}
	Yolŋu Matha (includes Djambarrpuynu and many other Yolŋu varieties) ^{xiii}
	Warlpiri
	Arrernte
	Alyawarr
	Anmatyerr
	Murrinh-Patha
	Bininj Gun-Wok/ Bininj Kunwok (includes Kunwinjku; Kune; Mayali; Kuninjku; Gundjeihmi)
	Anindilyakwa
	Burarra (includes Burarra; Gun-nartpa and Gurr-goni)
	Wik Mungkan
	Mawng

THE STRENGTH OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LANGUAGES

2018–19 AIATSIS Survey

Given the intricacies surrounding how language varieties are counted, the question of the strength or vitality of Australia's Indigenous languages is even more complex.

There are a number of ways to assess the vitality of a language. The answer to this question will vary depending on the indicators used.

AIATSIS analysis of NILS3 data, the 2016 Census, and other sources found that 14 Indigenous languages can be identified as relatively strong. Of these:

- 12 are traditional languages; one fewer than the 13 reported as strong in NILS2.¹⁷² All generations speak these 12 languages as their first language, including all children (intergenerational transmission is unbroken). Some of these languages include more than one well-known variety.
- Two new Indigenous languages have the most speakers – Kriol and Yumplatok/Torres Strait Creole.¹⁷³

xii Pitjantjatjara is a language variety that is mutually intelligible with a number of other Western Desert language varieties, including Kartujarra; Kokatha; Kukatja; Luritja; Manyilyjarra; Martu Wangka; Ngaanyatjarra; Pintupi; Wangkajunga; Wangkatha; Yankunytjatjara; Yulparija; Tjupany (ABS names have been used here).

xiii Yolŋu Matha is the name for a number of language varieties including Yolngu Matha, nfd; Dhangu, nfd; Galpu; Wangurri; Dhangu, nec; Dhay'yi, nfd; Dhalwangu; Dhuwal, nfd; Djambarrpuynu; Djapu; Daatiwuy; Marrangu; Liyagalawumirr; Liyagawumirr; Dhuwal, nec; Dhuwala, nfd; Gumatj; Gupapuyngu; Guyamirillili; Wubulkarra; Djinang, nfd; Wurlaki; Djinang, nec; Djinba, nfd; Ganalbingu; Manyjalpingu; Ritharrngu; Wagilak; Nhangu, nec; Dhuwaya; Madarrpa; Warramiri; Rirratjingu (ABS names have been used here).

Table 3.6: Indigenous language vitality measures

UNESCO	AIATSIS NILS3
1. Intergenerational transmission	1. Intergenerational transmission
2. Absolute number of speakers	2. Absolute number of speakers
3. Proportion of speakers	3. Proportion of speakers
4. Trends in existing language domains	4. Domains and functions of a language
5. Response to new domains and media	5. Response to new domains and media
6. Materials for language education and literacy	6. Materials for language education and literacy
7. Government and institutional language education and literacy	7. Type and quality of documentation
8. Community members’ attitudes towards their own language	8. Language programs
9. Amount and quality of documentation	

Measuring the strength of Indigenous languages

For the purposes of this Report, the indicators used to assess the survey results of NILS3 and identify the state of Australia’s Indigenous languages are based on the UNESCO Language Vitality indicators.¹⁷⁴ These indicators are outlined in Table 3.6 along with the corresponding measures used in the NILS3 analysis.

When measuring Australia’s Indigenous languages against the UNESCO vitality indicators none of Australia’s Indigenous language varieties meet the thresholds across all the indicators and as such, they are all considered under threat.¹⁷⁵

These indicators are not weighted equally, meaning that certain indicators hold more value as an indication of a language variety’s strength or vitality.

The two most important (or weighty) of the vitality indicators are **intergenerational language transmission** (indicator 1) and **absolute number of speakers** (indicator 2).

The importance of intergenerational transmission is also discussed in relation to reawakening languages in Chapter 4.

Table 3.7: The importance of intergenerational transmission to language vitality

Degree of Vitality	Description
STRONG/SAFE	The language is used by all age groups, including all children. People in all age groups are fluent speakers.
UNSAFE	The language is used by many age groups, but not all children are fluent speakers.
DEFINITELY ENDANGERED	The language is used mostly by the parental generation and older. Only people in the parental generation and older are fluent speakers.
SEVERELY ENDANGERED	The language is used mostly by the grandparental generation and older. Only people in the grandparental generation and older may still understand the language.
CRITICALLY ENDANGERED	The language is used mostly by the great-grandparental generation and older. Only people in the great-grandparental generation and older may remember some of the language and may not use it very often.
REVIVING/REVITALISING/ REAWAKENING	The language has not been used as an everyday language for some time, but some people are now learning and speaking the language.
NO LONGER SPOKEN [SLEEPING]	There is no one who can speak or remember the language.

HOW PEOPLE ARE USING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LANGUAGES

2018–19 AIATSIS Survey

The NILS3 survey results provide a good insight into how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language varieties are being used around the nation.

The survey found that the state of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages is diverse and multi-layered, with signs of reawakening but also continued threat.

It also found that some traditional language varieties (some high on the endangered scale and also some sleeping) that have not been naturally passed on to children for some time are now being reawakened or revitalised and gaining new speakers.

In some cases, non-Indigenous community members are also encouraged to learn the language. NILS3 asked respondents about the local non-Indigenous community's involvement with their language, especially in relation to resources and activities.¹⁷⁶ Responses to this question fell into two categories: those who talked about the limited engagement with the languages by the local non-Indigenous community; and those who talked about the recognition of language by the broader community.

Responses also reflected the varied geographies and language ecologies of the respondents. For example – mostly in locations where the local language is strong and non-Indigenous people are a minority – 38 per cent of those who responded to the question on non-Indigenous involvement with the language commented on low or limited engagement with the languages by the local non-Indigenous community,^{xiv} and tended to lament this lack of engagement.

^{xiv} There were 119 (out of a total 171 surveys) responses to this question in NILS3, that is, 38 per cent of 119 responses.

*"Schools between Port Augusta to Leigh Creek have incorporated Adnyamathanha language classes into their program which increases non-Indigenous staff and students to engage with the community, outside of these few select schools, non-Indigenous community involvement is limited."*¹⁷⁷

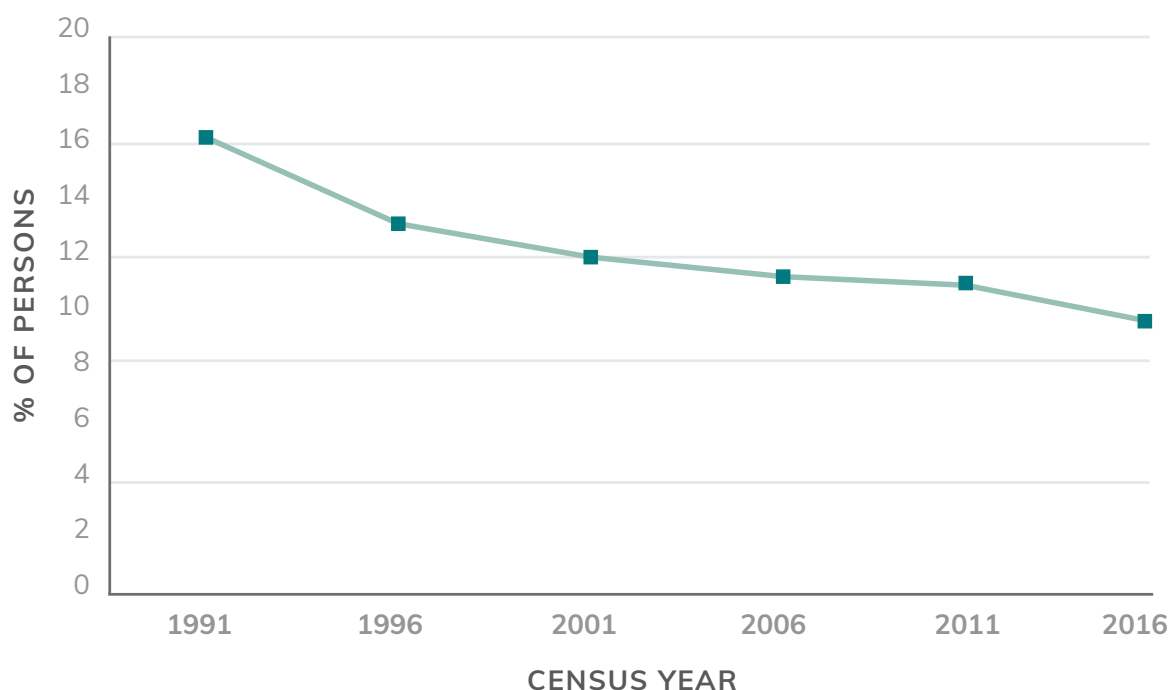
*"Some local non-Indigenous community members have made an effort to learn some Bininj Kunwok, but many do not. In Kunbarlanja, most non-Indigenous people have a few words of Bininj Kunwok, but in Jabiru, many do not engage at any level with the Traditional Owners and their culture/language."*¹⁷⁸

How the way languages are spoken has changed over time

Today, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' language repertoires can include a mix of traditional language varieties, new languages and Englishes. However, since 1991 there has been a decrease from 16 per cent to 10 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reporting speaking an Australian Indigenous language (whether traditional or new) at home, and a corresponding increase in the proportion saying they spoke English at home.¹⁷⁹

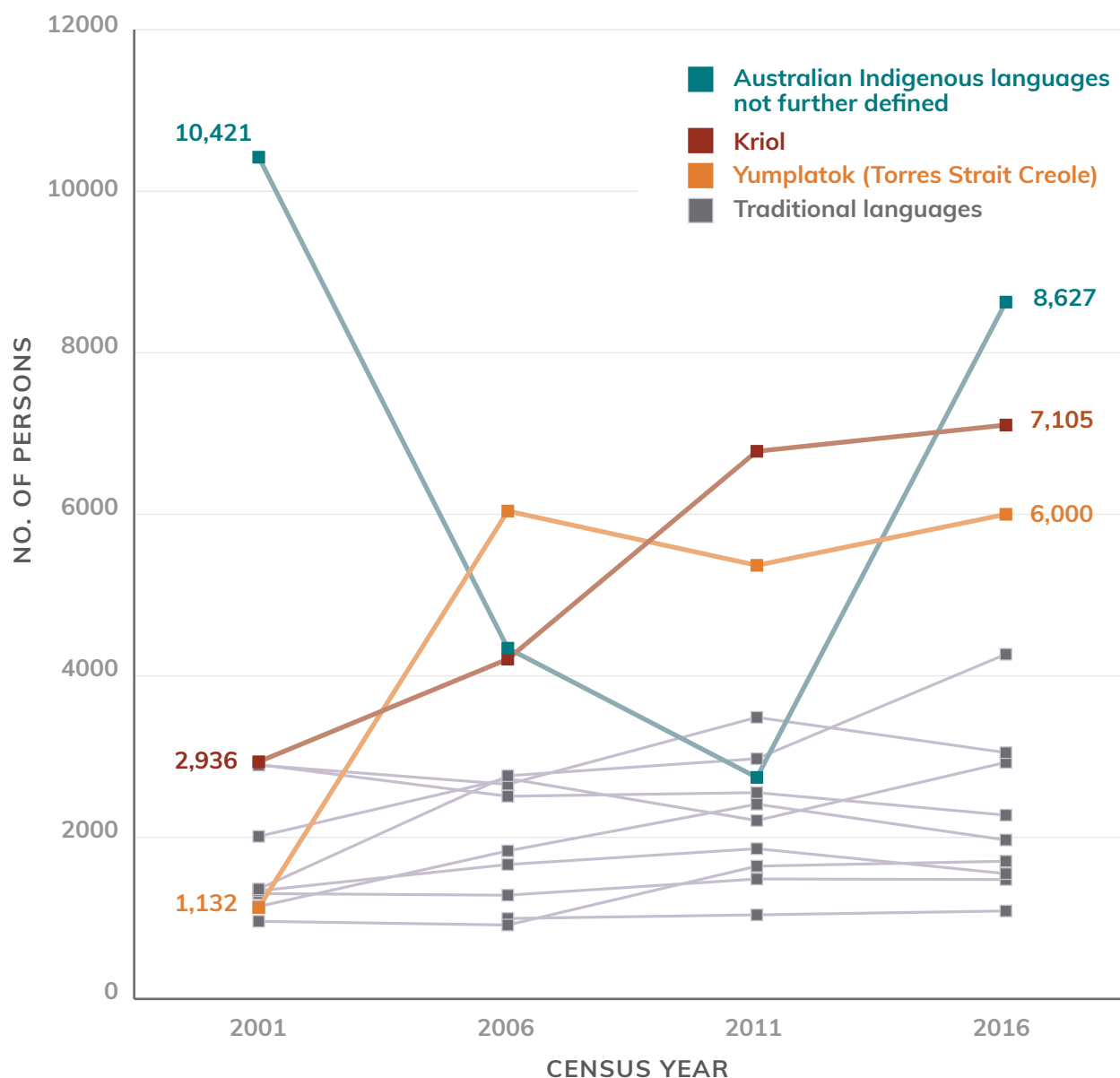
Figure 3.8: Australian Indigenous languages spoken at home by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Australia, 1991 to 2016. Source(s): ABS Census of Population and Housing 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016.

Percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people speaking Australian Indigenous language at home, Australia, 1991 to 2016



When looking at both traditional languages and new languages together, further analysis indicates that since 2001, reported speakers of some new languages has been increasing, while reported speakers of some traditional languages has been declining.

Figure 3.9: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language speaker numbers 2001-2006-2011-2016 for new languages, traditional languages and languages not further defined.^{180 xv}



^{xv} Graph adapted from Simpson et al. (2018), p. 118.

NEW LANGUAGES

'New' or 'mixed' languages arise from contact between traditional Indigenous language varieties and English. As far back as 1788, a simplified version of English started to develop (often called a pidgin), as did (occasionally) simplified versions of Indigenous languages.¹⁸²

These pidgins spread across the country and were expanded and developed into different full new languages spoken by children as their first languages. This happened at least as early as 1908 in the Roper River Valley,¹⁸³ and almost certainly many decades earlier in NSW.

Many words in these new languages are originally from English but they may be pronounced differently. New languages may have different grammar or create words in different ways to English.

Some of the new languages, such as Kriol and Yumplatok, have a long history of official recognition. They are estimated to have a relatively large number of speakers (20,000-30,000 people),¹⁸⁴ and are thought to have increasing speaker numbers across a growing area of the country. Over successive Census surveys, more people have been self-reporting to be speakers of new Indigenous languages,¹⁸⁵ a sign of growing recognition, pride and confidence in these languages. It is unclear whether, if at all, the growth of new languages influences the use of traditional languages.

Counting the numbers of speakers of new languages is not simple, as numerous issues affect how new languages are declared and counted. Not all speakers refer to languages by the same term that the Census lists and so might not be counted. Further, only one language can be declared in the Census, but people might prefer to claim other languages which they speak, such as a traditional language or English. For example, Gurindji Kriol is a new language which had emerged by the 1970s in the Victoria River District in the NT.¹⁸⁶ Meakins' survey of pidgin and creole languages suggests that there are around 1,000 speakers,¹⁸⁷ although in the 2016 Census, even though the name 'Gurindji Kriol' was available, only three people reported themselves as speaking it, whereas 400 people reported themselves as speaking Gurindji. These Census numbers include people who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, non-Indigenous and 'not stated' respondents.¹⁸⁸

It is very common for new languages to be misrecognised as other creoles. For example, 'Yarrie Lingo' from far north Queensland is not listed for Census purposes.¹⁸⁹ A proportion of Yarrie Lingo speakers are showing up incorrectly as speakers of 'Kriol' from the other side of the continent, but most as speakers of English.



MYTH: NEW LANGUAGES LIKE KRIOL AND YUMPLATOK ARE JUST SIMPLIFIED VERSIONS OF ENGLISH

Speakers of what come to be new languages are endlessly creative in their drive to communicate in changed language conditions, but to do this efficiently they need shared ways of talking. Over the centuries, English speakers have settled on ways of talking which include a shared set of rules for forming sentences: for example, "My brother found Molly in the bush", or "Molly was found by my brother in the bush". Much more recently people in the north of Australia and the Torres Strait have settled on shared ways of talking, which are systematic, and different from English.

Here's a Kriol example from the Northern Territory¹⁸¹

Main braja bin faindim Moli jeya la bush

[My brother found Molly in the bush]

Kriol speakers use:

main where English speakers use 'my'.

bin faindim where English speakers use 'found'.

la where English speakers might use 'in' or 'at' or 'on'.

These are systematic grammatical rules, as are the English rules for the use of 'my' for 'my book' but 'mine' for 'this book is mine'. These apparently small differences between Standard Australian English and the new languages mean that speakers of one language cannot automatically understand and speak the other.

Figure 3.10: Showing new and mixed languages¹⁹⁰



TRADITIONAL LANGUAGES

The 2016 Census results show that less than 10 per cent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is currently speaking a traditional Indigenous language at home.^{191,192} The findings of the NILS3 further demonstrate that only 12 traditional languages can be considered relatively strong.¹⁹³ It is unclear the extent to which, if at all, the growth of new languages influences the use of traditional languages.

AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGES NOT FURTHER DEFINED

The Census question on languages spoken in the home is a combination of the most common responses in the previous Census (all non-Indigenous languages) and a text box that allows individuals to enter Indigenous languages. These written responses are then coded to the ASCL categories, and only if the language spoken is not in the ASCL is the response then coded to a 'not elsewhere classified' category or otherwise known as a 'supplementary code'.

The index for coding responses clearly states that a response should be coded to a residual category only when it is clear that it is a distinct language or dialect which cannot be placed in a specific language category.¹⁹⁴ Responses which are not precise enough to be coded to any category should be assigned the appropriate supplementary code. The review of the ASCL is based on individual text responses to the question in the previous Census.

This chapter has outlined the range of data available on the numbers of both speakers and languages, including analysis on their vitality and/or relative strength. The following chapter explores in more detail how languages are being kept strong and in some cases being brought back after a period of no use.