



KAYA WANDJOO NGALA NOONGARPIDIA – WELCOME TO OUR NOONGARPIDIA

*Report on a research project.*¹

Jennie Buchanan^a Len Collard^a Ingrid Cumming^b David Palmer^c
Kim Scott^b and John Hartley^b

^a University of Western Australia, ^b Curtin University, ^c Independent Scholar

Genniny may may: Looking at the work from elsewhere

Introduction

This chapter offers a comparative framework for thinking about and understanding the Noongarpedia project. In particular, work in neighbouring fields helps us better to understand the complex relationship between Noongar and non-Noongar knowledge as it is shared and mediated by those involved in the Noongarpedia project. This body of work offers new ways of understanding how Noongar people and others may support a ‘Noongar knowledge network’. Rather than representing new forms of information and communication technology (ICT) as merely a threat to Indigenous knowledge and cultural forms, this work recognises that many Indigenous groups are embracing ITC. The adoption of new platforms (such as Facebook, GIS, Garageband etc.) has seen distinctly Indigenous forms of production being taken on by Indigenous groups. Our project links with others that engage with the possibilities that may emerge from digital media to support Indigenous cultural maintenance, reformation and transmission. A distinct approach to ‘media citizenship’ in the digital era, based on the activism of citizens themselves using new media affordances (Hartley et al. 2013), focuses on a ‘bottom-up’ process of knowledge-sharing. In this context, Wikipedia may be seen to provide not only a technological means to record ‘knowledge artefacts’ of the past, but also a social means to activate Noongar and others in the performance of that culture as future-facing civic action.

¹ Australian Research Council Discovery Indigenous project IN140100017 (2014-17):
Noongar kaatdijin bidi – Noongar knowledge networks; or, Why is there no Noongar Wikipedia?

Indigenous knowledge systems and new digital platforms

One contextual influence on the Noongarpedia project has been the surge in take-up of new platforms by Indigenous groups around the world and across Australia, enabling new forms of creative expression, music, art and performance by Indigenous young people. At the same time, new media forms reconfigure and respond to the knowledge needs of multiple communities.

As Kral (2010) notes, new technologies are opening up Indigenous people's social and cultural networks through the use of social networking platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Corn (2013) confirms this national uptake of use of platforms such as Facebook by Indigenous Australians. This is something that still catches many by surprise because of their assumptions about Indigenous people's poor access to hardware and the national broadband network. As Featherstone (2013) puts it:

Far from living in 'cultural museums', many people who live in remote communities are in touch with the global world and are quick to take up new technologies. In Ngaanyatjaraa Lands, many young people are now computer literate and are creating videos and slideshows, using internet banking, playing online games, downloading music and setting up Facebook accounts to communicate and share photos. Yarnango (Aboriginal people from this region) buy digital cameras, MP3 players, iPods, Playstation games and mobile phones from their community stores, and save their photos and content created in the community media centre on their personal USB flash drives.

Critical here is not simply the use of digital technologies by Indigenous groups but also the way in which they are used. Indigenous use of ICTs is shaped by Indigenous social and ontological patterns. For example, Dyson and Brady (2013) found that mobile phone use by Indigenous young people in the desert is important as a means of solidifying existing social connections and supporting the maintenance of old kin systems. Although not everyone has individual and immediate access to devices, everyone has a Facebook account, has access to hardware that is often shared within families and gets to use the platforms on a daily basis. Featherstone arrived at similar conclusions in his work with Yarnango in remote Western Australia. He said that they are actively involved with digital media technologies in very different ways than other Australians, using them in innovative and culturally specific ways, shaped by old Yarnango practices and shaping new forms and expressions that are distinctly Yarnango (Featherstone, 2013: 29). The way Indigenous people are utilising digital technology reveals the resilience of Indigenous cultural systems and the ability of Indigenous groups to use their imaginative capacities to mould new tools for their own cultural purposes (Kral, 2013).

As Featherstone (2011) remarks, the current generation of digital media users in remote Australia are not the first to take up the 'new media' of their era. Today's generations have watched their elders using broadcast media forms. We can trace this back at least to the 1970s when Eric Michaels (1986) started documenting how Walpiri people from the Western Desert took to film and television as a way of maintaining old traditions. Indeed, Kral (2013: 54) describes this involvement with new digital platforms as sitting on the shoulders of an evolving tradition of media use, calling it 'processual', enhanced and elaborated through the affordances and access to digital technologies in community settings.

Featherstone's work demonstrates that digital technologies do not determine cultural content, nor do they mirror dominant cultural processes. Culture shapes the use of the new digital platforms. For example, the internet is premised upon the assumption that 'information wants to be free', but in Ngaanyatjara culture, knowledge is shaped by relational processes and restricted by gender, age and status or skin groups. This means that media and culture mediate each other, producing both new media (means through which knowledge is expressed and transmitted) and content (communication forms and artefacts). For many Indigenous groups, knowledge and knowledge-sharing are not only important because of the inherent usefulness of knowledge, but also because it is tied up with maintaining relationships and links to others (it helps maintain kin systems and family ties) (Featherstone, 2013: 33). Featherstone describes this as supporting with the 'lifeblood of Yarnangu society' – relationships. This interplay among culture, knowledge, transmission of old systems and kin relationships is well demonstrated in the following exchange between Yarnangu, who were asked to talk about the take-up of new digital media in their country:

WW: before the media started, people never used to use computer. (Now) you can see all the people in the telecentre, playing different games all day, and it's not only in Irrunytju (one community), it's out in all the communities ... We like this computer, we like how the way it's going.

DW: It makes things easier. Email, internet banking and so on.

WW: Doing editing, website and recording ...

DW: Recording cultural trips. So the kids can see it, and learn from it.

WW: And that's our work, we got to keep it strong.

BD: And the people are getting very good at recording with the camera too, taking pictures. And I'm running around looking after them (making sure that cultural safety protocols are maintained) when they're taking pictures.

WW: That's part of learning, taking law and culture, and bringing it home into Ngaanyatjara Media and editing, put it into one piece, so that other people can watch it on the TV, on ICTV, and on computers over the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. And later, when we pass on, we want to see our young people running that job, on TV, computer, editing and broadcasting and all that. (cited in Featherstone, 2013: 32)

Carlson (2013) notes that although interest by academics has taken some time to grow, it is clear that the use of social media is ‘becoming an everyday, typical activity’. Indigenous people have a significant presence on social media sites, particularly Facebook. The way in which social media are used by Indigenous young people shows that they are open for negotiation. Facebook is becoming a popular vehicle ‘to build, display, and perform Aboriginal identities’ (Lumby, 2010). Interestingly, Carlson discovers that rather than social media being a ‘disembodied space’ where anonymous users can change their identities and even disavow themselves, for many Indigenous young people, social media have become a space where they can perform and embody their culture and identity (2013: 148). In other words, platforms like Facebook are new, virtual, spaces where Aboriginal cultural knowledge and cultural identity is created and performed (2013: 150).

Here, social media are a site for knowledge production, so that Indigenous young people can take a lead in shaping their own and others’ worlds. In this way, social media are more than simply a source of information for Indigenous groups; they are an active, social site of performance, sharing and negotiation. Kral (2011) notes that Facebook is being used by many in central Australia as a platform to ‘upload their multimedia productions, comment on each other’s mobile phone pics and announce the immediacy of their activities with online chat ... they are also using these channels to air their thoughts and the cultural activities and concerns of their community’. In this way, Indigenous young people use media to reshape the way others think of them and of Indigenous culture in general, challenging taken-for-granted and ideas (Glowczewski, 2013). Here the web, with its hyperlinked and multimodal connections and storylines, has something in common with Indigenous webs of signification through songs, visual arts and dances.

Describing new media ‘telecentres’ in remote communities, Kral (2010: 6) argues that these are physical and digital spaces for lifespan learning. In contrast to formal learning spaces (such as schools), insofar as these focus on turning out market-ready graduates, these new lifespan learning spaces ‘allow young people to take on a more active role in developing skills, creating media, engaging in relationships with older people in their communities’. Learning in these spaces is compatible with Indigenous systems of learning so that ‘competence is gained informally through observation, peer learning, trial and error, practice and interactions with non-Indigenous (and cultural) mentors.’

Indigenous people use media, computer and telecom technologies to mediate between old knowledge and new, global and contemporary forms of cultural production. In this space, Indigenous young people enter adulthood as bilingual, bicultural beings, drawing on the language and culture transmitted by their elders, but also transforming it. They choose to participate because the cultural production roles are in the domains

of knowledge that matter to them – culture, arts, country, and new technologies – all within a framework of social relatedness (Kral, 2010).

Slater's (2010) description of this process of digital production in Aurukun offers a sense of how Indigenous young people move from passive consumer of global culture to active producer of distinctly (but nonetheless reconfigured) Indigenous forms of knowledge. Posting film online, as a way of framing culture, is used to combat old stereotypes. Perceptions of Aboriginal dysfunction are countered by young people's use of film (Martin, 2006), which allows young people like those living in Aurukun to become active citizens.

In the Pilbara region of Western Australia, Indigenous young people are involved in the Yijala Yala and iCampfire projects. They create digital content to help manage, protect, conserve, and transmit the heritage values of a place that boasts possibly the largest quantity of ancient rock art in the world. There are an estimated one to two million petroglyphs on the Burrup Archipelago (27 km long by 5 km wide). Standard heritage practice would be to have skilled technicians and researchers capture the history of senior people before they die, by recording oral history, carrying out archaeological site-surveys or commissioning anthropological work. Local Ngarluma man Tyson Mowarin calls this the 'sleeping archive' approach to heritage conservation. He points out that this contrasts with how local Indigenous groups Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi carry out heritage work. Like McCoy (2008), he notes that heritage is protected when young people are carried by their elders through a process where they sing and dance the stories. In this case new and interesting digital technologies are being drawn into the ancient relationships of spiritual practice, not only stimulating young people's involvement but also acting as a 'fourth partner' in the mentoring relationship between young people, elders, and the spirit world (Campbell and Palmer, 2015).

In another example from a project based in Central Australia, Indigenous young people acted as online guides and mediators for outsiders visiting a language website. They participated in the design and hosting of a language maintenance project, a digital music-recording project, film work and an internationally touring stage production, as part of a larger Ngapartji Ngapartji project. Anangu young people created and edited short video tutorials as part of the *ninti ngapartji* Pitjantjatjara language training course. They also featured on-screen as tutors and language speakers, sometimes acting as translators, occasionally acting out scenarios.² In this way they played a central role in helping non-Indigenous Australians learn language, come to understand the history of their country, and have a deep spiritual and cultural experience of the Pitjantjatjara world (Palmer, 2011).

² Ninti Njapartji. <http://ninti.ngapartji.org/splash.php?welcome=you>.

International interest in things Indigenous has always outpaced international interest in modern Australia (Miller, 1994; Myers 2002). Responding to that interest has been a catalyst for Indigenous people's take-up of digital platforms (such as iCampfire, Vimeo channels and YouTube), as well as film and video. Consequently, Indigenous people create part of Australia's international identity. Through actors such as David Gulpilil and characters such as Nullah (*Australia*), Molly, Daisy, and Gracie (*Rabbit Proof Fence*), Willie (*Bran Nue Dae*), Pete (*Satellite Boy*) and many others, Indigenous people act as teachers, guides, and active knowledge agents (Palmer and Gillard, 2004).

It is instructive to see how Indigenous young people take up the affordances of new media. Glowczewski (2013) finds analogous features shared between the structures and movements associated with the internet and the those that Indigenous groups use in 'cognitive mapping' and forms of 'desert Dreamings'. According to Kral (2013):

Through regular interactions with affordable small media devices, young people are becoming fearless of technology, and even those with low levels of literacy are quickly able to grasp the intuitive problem-solving logic of digital cameras and MP3 players and transfer this logic to computers and editing software like iMovie, Final Cut or GarageBand. Individuals are in control of the technology and it is this control factor that is allowing expertise to develop and productive processes to take place.

Describing the take-up of the Indigenous-designed knowledge database *Ara Iritja*, Scales et al (2013) point to the social nature of web-based and digital use in remote communities. They say that Anangu learn from each other how to navigate computers:

Often one person will manoeuvre the mouse while another controls the keyboard. In other cases, young Anangu operate computers for their older relatives ... and a respect is generated for the growing ability of the young operators.

New forms of digital knowledge-creation share characteristics with traditional modes of Indigenous learning. Both rely on group work and group learning, immersed in the experience and context of the knowledge to be learned. Both offer learning environments that make new structures and knowledge available in stages, when learners are ready. Both systems also embrace narrative as a mode of knowledge exchange. Much like traditional Indigenous knowledge transmission, the new digital platforms provide many opportunities for people to share ways of coming to knowledge through story, song or performance (Kutay and Mundine, 2013).

Indigenous people work across a range of media modalities such as speech, writing, image, gesture and music. Multimodal literacy has much in common with Indigenous

knowledge systems and modes of transmission. Kral reflects on the special relevance of digital media use in Central Australia. She points out that:

In the desert region of Central Australia, Aboriginal people have for thousands of years used a complex of multimodal communication forms and semiotic systems to convey meaning through language, sign, gesture and gaze; special speech styles and registers; non-verbal communication; and the iconic representations found in body painting, carved designs and sand drawings. These relevant meaning-making systems have been deployed in the manipulation of these symbols and resources over generations, and are now manifest in the current wave of (Indigenous) youth multimedia productions. (Green, cited in Kral, 2013: 60)

Digital technologies lend themselves to ‘visual/spatial’ thinking. Indigenous young people who previously found text-only processes inaccessible are taking up applications such as Garageband, animation software, GIS and Googlemaps, the new 3D software and games. They are able to read and to manipulate culturally important knowledge that is grounded in spatial contexts, while understanding the intersubjective relationship among family, country and story (Kral, 2013: 62). This suits the participatory mode that is characteristic of social media, where the industrial division between producer and consumer is erased. Meanings are co-created in context, not supplied as ready-made commodities.

Indigenous young people find ways to take on leadership roles in recording, learning and producing Indigenous knowledge. Although in the early stages of this work their actions can be controversial, young people are able to take up a more central role as mediators and facilitators. Other generations cherish young people’s take-up of this role, particularly when they help elders to negotiate the gaps between old knowledge and new technology. As they say themselves:

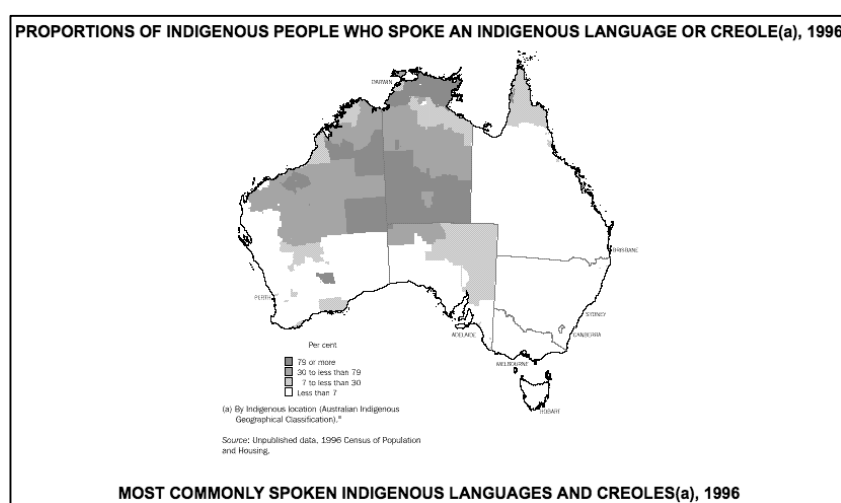
Old people are singing the stories telling the story about our self and this country. Now we’re telling a story through media that should be the way to go. Through using media is somehow a connection to the community and I find it connects to the whole world. (Maxwell Tasman, youth media worker from Lajamanu, cited in Kral, 2013: 64)

Just like the old people, we are dreaming. We have a new dream with technology. (Curtis Taylor, youth media worker, Martu Media, cited in Kral, 2013: 61)

Wikipedia and the Noongarpedia project

As discussed in Chapter 1 (p. 11), Wikipedia is the largest encyclopaedia ever created (but see Simonite, 2013). Out of nearly 300 language-versions, many belong to the

languages of non-sovereign nations, e.g. Welsh, Upper Sorbian, Northern Sami, Latin, etc., and some ‘nations’ are featured whose communities number fewer people than Noongar, including several American Indian tongues. Thus, Wikipedia encompasses not just the English version, with 5.3 million articles across 41 million pages (as of December 2016), but also Mvskoke/Muscogee, with just one article.³ There are currently *no* Aboriginal-language versions of Wikipedia in Australia,⁴ despite the existence of several hundred different languages across the continent at European settlement, and the continuing strength of some of them, especially in the northern part of the continent (see below). As the map indicates, the proportion of speakers of Indigenous languages is lowest in the most densely settled SE and SW regions of the continent.



*Most commonly spoken Indigenous languages of Australia (1996)*⁵

Clearly a project such as this is confronted with a series of powerful challenges, starting with how an endangered minority language, immersed as it is in one of the world’s big-three languages, can make a ‘semiosphere’ (Lotman, 1990) of its own, and how can that Noongar sphere of culture, meaning and knowledge intersect not only with English but also with the many technical and software affordances of the internet that operate overwhelmingly in the English language? How can these global networks be used for the distribution of *Noongar* knowledge? And can Noongar be a world language too?

³ For the full list see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Wikipediass. For Mvskoke/Muscogee, an American Indian language, whose own-language Wikipedia is now closed, although the domain remains, see: <https://mus.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mvskoke> and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muscogee_language.

⁴ Australasia is a different matter – see the Māori Wikipedia: http://mi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reo_Māori.

⁵ Source – Australian Bureau of Statistics: <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/AADB12E0BBEC2820CA2570EC001117A5>.

The influential evolutionary biologist and scientific thought-leader Mark Pagel (2012), in a much-viewed TED talk (2011), poses a blunt question about the chances for minority languages in the future. He asks: ‘*Can we afford to have all these different languages?*’ ... ‘*Is our destiny to be one world with one language?*’⁶ The implication would be that some languages have evolved as a means of carrying and sharing the knowledge and connectivity of post-Enlightenment world culture and science, while others – and their speakers – are confined to the premodern past. Is it the case that the accelerating globalisation of technology, trade and mediated communication necessitates a move towards ‘one language’?

The universalist and expansionist view of the growth of knowledge has grave implications for small languages, and poses a familiar threat. It can be seen as an updated version of Victorian (imperial) progressivism (Leerssen 2006: 65). The idea that our species is ‘destined’ towards a single language (a master-language, in fact) too easily authorises the neglect or suppression of Indigenous, regional and minority languages in favour of imperial ones, on the grounds that modernity can only be experienced and completed in Enlightenment tongues. That exterminatory view was accepted as no more than educated common sense, espoused by no less a cultural critic than Matthew Arnold (1867). For Arnold, Welsh was valuable only as a literary language, a manifestation of mystical ‘Celtic’ spirit. It was not wanted (thought Arnold) as an everyday language of public affairs and business. Thus, he looked forward to its extinction in the marketplace and in schools, while arguing for its preservation in universities and ‘culture’ (Potts and Hartley, 2014: 52-4).

Critiquing that view is the centrepiece of Jean-François Lyotard’s influential ‘report on knowledge’ (1984), published more than a century later. Lyotard sees the future of both culture and science to lie in the rule-generating and thus choice-enhancing potential of ‘micronarratives’ (Lyotard 1984). He argues that the routine reproduction of rule-hardened ‘metanarratives’ (an imperial language, for example, or established scientific method) leads to entropy. Thus, the interests of culture and science – and justice – can best be served by the proliferation of *difference* (Lucy, 2016). The invention of new rules, not the repetition of existing ones, may lead to greater knowledge; a view that is also axiomatic in evolutionary economics (Potts 2011).

Since part of the objective of this project is to understand the circulation of *knowledge* (i.e. cultural content not simply language code), we seek to understand the problems and opportunities that ‘language *communities*’ (Laitin 2000) face in the era of digital, online, mobile and other forms of ‘new media’; and how such communities can use ‘digitally equipped’ culture (Papacharissi 2010a; b), including identity tools, to face the future.

⁶ See: https://www.ted.com/talks/mark_pagel_how_language_transformed_humanity. The talk has attracted over 1.3 million views (December 2016).

In that context, it is necessary to treat visions of a one-language global future with caution. But Mark Pagel’s questions are not mere Silicon-valley universalism, but are driven by his compelling account of the *evolution of culture*, which he calls the ‘survival vehicle’ through which human cooperation is sustained:

Like our physical body, this cultural body wraps us in a protective layer, not of muscles and skin but of knowledge and technologies, and ... it gives us our language, cooperation, and a shared identity. (Pagel 2012: 12-13)

Pagel sees knowledge and technology (e.g. Wikipedia) as the ‘protective layer’ for any culture’s language, cooperation and identity. But he seeks no such protection for individual languages. There is a radical asymmetry among them, in fact. According to one estimate, the five largest boast a total of 2.595 billion speakers: Chinese (1,302m), Spanish (427m), English (339m), Arabic (267m), Hindi (260m).⁷ Fully one third of the world’s languages (34.4 percent of 7,097) are listed as ‘threatened’ or worse in status (Lewis et al., 2016):

14.9%	Threatened	(losing users)
6.5%	Shifting	(not transmitted to children)
3.9%	Moribund	(used by grandparent generation and older)
6%	Nearly Extinct	(grandparent generation with little use)
3.1%	Dormant	(reminder of heritage identity; symbolic proficiency)
—	Extinct	(no longer used)

Percentage of world’s languages listed as ‘threatened’ or worse (2016)⁸

Historically, most languages that have ever existed are extinct. So Pagel’s questions deserve a thoughtful response, especially among advocates for small languages. The idea that ‘we’ may not be able to ‘afford’ the world’s variety of languages may be directed to any one of them: what is gained by keeping it? How may it thrive and grow in modernity, rather than being confined to traditional ethnic identity or simple inefficiency before inevitable extinction?

Given the number of languages remaining, despite recent ‘mass extinctions’ (Krauss 2007), how should cultural *diversity* be understood and encouraged within global systems of knowledge and communication? In the digital era, how may the knowledge carried by oral and traditional ‘technologies’ (story, song, ceremony, walking) be transmitted across populations, across time and among different languages?

The dynamic environment of digital technologies may come to the rescue of languages that have not fared well in print-culture (Ong 2012). Postmodern global media may do a better job than did print-based modernism of assuring the

⁷ Source: *Ethnologue*: <https://www.ethnologue.com/statistics/size>.

⁸ Source: *Ethnologue*: <https://www.ethnologue.com/statistics/status>.

transmission of knowledge systems that are crucial for the present wellbeing and future prospects of particular communities. At the same time, a diverse ecology of languages and knowledge-systems enriches the overall pattern of linguistic diversity, encounter and exchange, where difference is a driver of newness.

Wikipedia's vision of a single *interoperable* knowledge-system for all humans regardless of language is itself symptomatic of universalistic scientific and technological assumptions inherited from modernism. But these in turn may need to be revised, if they further endanger small or 'threatened' languages. Such languages generate new knowledge in the run of daily life and in their encounters with neighbouring languages. Some of this knowledge may be of generalisable value to *other* languages as well as to native speakers. Thus, in the end, *all languages are world languages* – each is a distinct part of a 'semiosphere' of planetary extent. The question should not be about whether languages survive or not, but about how to use contemporary technologies to improve the chances of locally generated knowledge being discoverable and usable across languages, cultures and spaces.

On 'threatened' languages

In order to test new models of inter-language and intercultural relations in the context of global complex networks of knowledge, technology and communication, those involved can now be both *doing* and *documenting*. In this case, that means using the development of a Noongarpedia to gain important new insights into how languages can coexist, cooperate and interact with others (users and languages) via the internet.

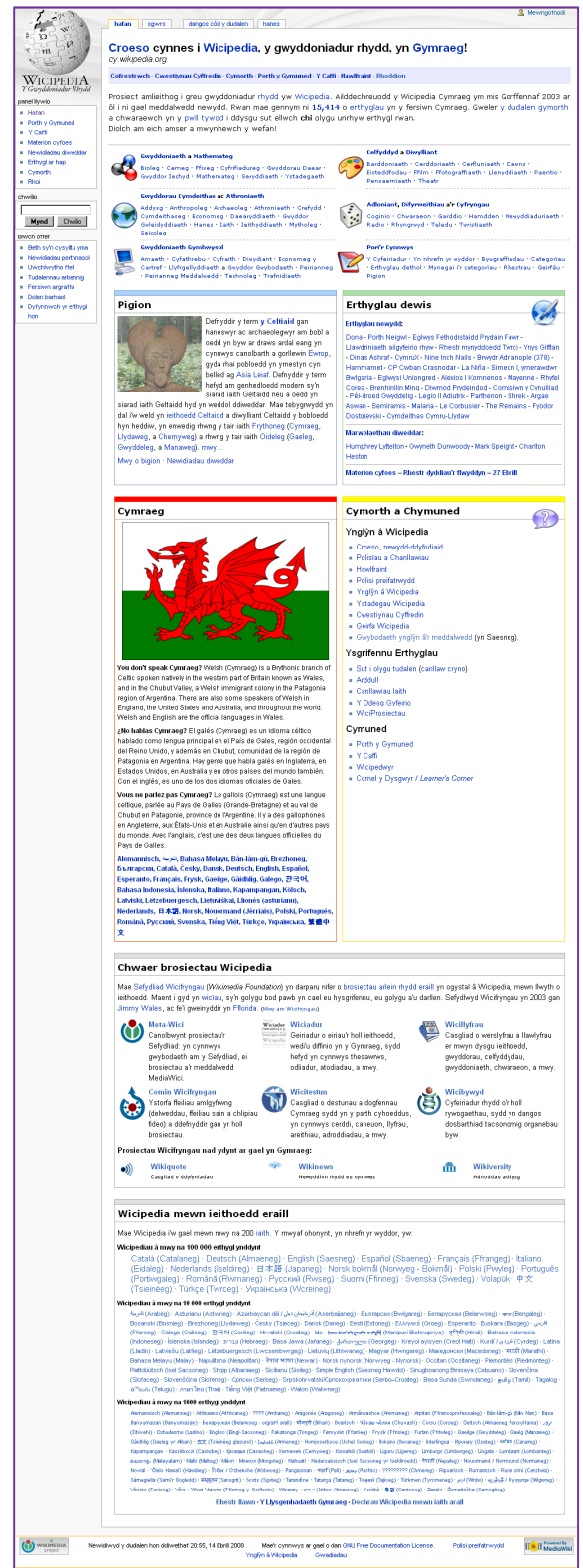
There are numerous examples of 'dying' languages that have been revived and modernised using technological media affordances. Interestingly, the 'aboriginal' language that Matthew Arnold wanted to be rid of in the imperial era was Welsh. He wrote: 'the sooner the Welsh language disappears as an instrument of the practical, political, social life of Wales, the better' (Arnold, 1867: 296-7). At the same time he argued in favour of an antiquarian revival of 'Celtic' literature (safely out of the way of 'modern' civilisation). The *politics of language* is thus a well-understood problem for Welsh. Twentieth-century language activism has done much to revive and stabilise Welsh across broadcast and online media, including a thriving *Wikipedia Cymraeg* with over 70,000 articles (June 2016).⁹

⁹ See: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Welsh_Wikipedia; and http://cy.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia_Cymraeg/.

How might such experience assist language activists to improve the situation for the Noongar language, itself scarcely a stranger to the sort of political struggle exemplified by Welsh? The dispossession of Aboriginal people's languages was a key instrument of Australian assimilation policies stretching from the colonial era through to the 1970s and beyond. But now, both UK and Australian policy recognise the value *to all citizens* of recognising minority-group cultural and linguistic rights.¹⁰

In this context, one of the lessons of Welsh is that such laudable aims are realised not only in the domain of high policy but also beyond that in the everyday life of family, home, freedom and comfort, where such matters are best nurtured. Thus, for the highest policy purposes, Welsh-language broadcasting has devoted public resources and creative energy to populist and fun initiatives designed to boost the use of the Welsh language in the home and to improve its profile and reputation among non-native-speakers, from soap-opera to *SuperTed*.¹¹

The significance of the development of a Noongarpedia – devoted to informal or popular as well as formal knowledge networks – is that it yields this direct national benefit in itself, and also that it models the process for other Indigenous-language knowledge networks. Internationally, it offers improved models of inter-lingual knowledge relations to those working in digital systems. Minority-language Wikipedias may be few, and often they are *emergent* rather than fully established. In this respect the development of a Noongar Wikipedia is a 'natural experiment' that will yield rich information to others.



Front page of Wicipedia Cymraeg¹²

¹⁰ See: Reconciliation Australia: <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/about>.

¹¹ SuperTed was Welsh-language TV channel S4C's first-ever show. It has been translated into many languages and distributed worldwide. See: Methwyd dod o hyd i'r ddalen hon www.amgueddfacymru.ac.uk/cy/3807/.

Conclusion: Citizens of Media

In the end, this kind of project is always going to be ‘in progress’ and always on the move. Observations and conclusions will therefore always be provisional, reflexive of what has happened up to the moment and never certain or ‘successful’. While this may seem uncomfortable in a formal or Western setting, it is not so unusual for those operating within Noongar knowledge production processes and contexts.

As those contending with the post-Web 2.0 production of knowledge have begun to acknowledge, the mobile, negotiated, and dynamic environment of new knowledge networks presents us with an array of opportunities – as well as risks, trouble and challenges. The Noongarpedia Project is a case in point. Similarly, ‘emerging forms of citizenship’ are not necessarily to be found in the relations of obligation between individuals and states, as in traditional citizenship theory, but in the discursive and mediated relations between local small-scale language/knowledge/culture systems (like Noongar) and global giants of techno-mediated meaningfulness (like the Wikipedia/Wikimedia complex).

Online inter-lingual relations remain a relatively unexplored domain of civic action, but it is already clear that a kind of ‘national service’ to assist ‘threatened’ languages is vital for the wellbeing of both speakers themselves and the overall culture and knowledge. Thus we see this project as very much a ‘civic’ initiative, bringing Noongar people (whether young or ‘elder’) and other interested parties into contact with an ancient language *through the medium of* global media technologies, for knowledge-sharing and thence cultural and civic renewal.

Of course, there are many pitfalls ahead and some bitter experience in the past to deal with, so ‘civic renewal’ may work out in unexpected ways. Indeed, it may be that developing a ‘citizenship of media’ and ‘digital citizenship’ is more real (realisable in practice) for sub-national nations like the Noongar than it would be to secure aspects of formal citizenship itself, such as sovereignty. But such an achievement may also be a step along that road, and in the meantime it may contribute much to the wellbeing of citizens, Noongar and non-Noongar alike.

‘Gnulla boodawan djinang!’ – ‘We will see!’

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¹² Source: Wikimedia Commons:
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