

A Comparative Analysis of Indigenous Language Revitalization in Taiwan and Australia

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Abstract

Language suppression has been an issue and a concern for both Taiwan and Australia. Compared to other countries, Taiwan has taken a more assertive and legislatively supported approach to language revitalization. Taiwan's response to preventing language loss has been quite methodical, experiencing stronger reinforcement from legal means and aiding Australia's awareness of their revitalization efforts.

In 1788, when British colonization began, Australia witnessed a devastating decline in Indigenous language use, stemming from policies of forced consumption, cultural oppression, and systemic dispossession. At the time of European settlement, approximately 250 Indigenous languages were spoken across Australia. Yet today, fewer than 20 traditional languages remain in use (Marmion et al., 2014). Unfortunately, language loss by the Aboriginal populations is intrinsically tied to cultural erosion, identity struggles, and socioeconomic disparities.

Indigenous language revitalization holds greater significance beyond linguistic concerns. Studies show that language is closely linked to mental well-being. Actually, indigenous communities actively using their ancestral language have experienced lower rates of mental health issues, improved education, and a stronger sense of identity. In this respect, the conservation of these languages is not only aimed at protecting cultural heritage but also at promoting the social and psychological well-being of Aboriginal Australians.

By taking a keen look at the similarities and differences between the contexts, we can find important strategies that may strengthen the efforts of the countries to preserve their Indigenous languages.

Historical Context and Language Suppression

Taiwan's Indigenous languages suffered under Japanese colonialism and later under the Kuomintang (KMT) government, which put forth Mandarin to be used as the national language

while discarding Indigenous languages by the wayside in schools and media (Council of Indigenous Peoples, 2017).

In both Australia and Taiwan, colonial rule led to the suppression of Indigenous languages. In Australia, British colonization began in 1788, leading to the enforcement of English as the only language used in administration, education, and public life. Simultaneously, Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families during the period of the Stolen Generations (1910–1970) and were severely punished if they were caught speaking their native languages during their mission school sessions (McConvell & Thieberger, 2001).

Current Status of Indigenous Languages

Both countries are experiencing the possible loss of their Indigenous languages, some of which are at risk of going completely extinct. Australia's Indigenous languages are currently facing endangerment. The 2019 National Indigenous Languages Report (NILR) highlighted that 90% of Aboriginal languages are endangered, with many now having fewer than 100 living fluent speakers. In addition, only an estimated 10% of Indigenous people speak their ancestral language within their household (AIATSIS, 2019).

Taiwan is experiencing a similar situation, with all 16 fully realized Indigenous languages facing endangerment, some such as Kanakanavu and Saaroa communities, which are currently known to have fewer than 10 fluent speakers (Huang, 2020).

Challenges to Language Revitalization

There are many obstacles when it comes to language revitalization efforts, such as:

- **Intergenerational Disruptions:** The majority of the primary speakers of traditional languages are only getting older, and younger generations often have little to no opportunities to learn these languages, limiting them from sustaining these languages (McConvell & Thieberger, 2001).
- **Limited Educational Resources:** Schools seldom offer Indigenous language education; therefore, there is a major shortage of teachers equipped with any relevant instructional materials (Zuckermann, 2020).

- **Policy and Funding Gaps:** Even though some governmental programs exist, funding is typically insufficient or inconsistently allotted towards Indigenous language promotion (Australian Government, 2021).
- **Technology and Media Representation:** Indigenous languages are underrepresented in both digital and broadcast media, making it exceedingly difficult for speakers to engage with their native languages in a modern setting (National Indigenous Australians Agency 2024).

Additionally, social attitudes also play a significant role. Many Indigenous Australians frequently encounter systemic discrimination. Because of that, it discourages speakers from passing on their language to the younger generation due to the fact that language use can be stigmatized under certain social conditions. The fear of being ostracized or marginalized from mainstream society has led to some families prioritizing English over their native tongues, magnifying language decline (Lo Bianco, 2016).

Strategies for Language Preservation and Revitalization Australia can Learn from Taiwan

To counter these challenges, a multipart approach is necessary, including:

- **Community-Led Language Programs:** Local initiatives, such as language nests and immersion schools, can help to facilitate intergenerational learning (Hinton & Hale, 2001).
- **Integration into Formal Education:** Policies should be authorized to include Indigenous language instruction in schools, as evidenced by successful models deployed within both New Zealand (Māori language revitalization) and Canada (First Nations language education) (Norris, 2007).
- **Digital and Technological Innovations:** The employment of mobile apps, online dictionaries, and AI-driven language learning tools can serve to better engage younger generations who have higher ubiquity of utilizing these technologies (Zuckermann & Walsh, 2011).
- **Cultural Empowerment through Media:** Increasing representation of Indigenous languages in media and entertainment can help to foster their normalization and daily use (Lo Bianco, 2016).

- **Government Policy and Support:** Creating long-term, highly funded government programs to support Indigenous language documentation as well as revitalization efforts is crucial to achieving success.

In perspective of academia, students can enroll in courses in languages such as Kaurna and Yolngu Matha thanks to the successful, recent introduction of Indigenous language programs throughout Australian universities. These initiatives demonstrate that with institutional support, language revitalization efforts can succeed and thrive (AIATSIS, 2019).

Data and Statistics on Indigenous Language Loss

Over 90% of Australia's indigenous languages have been lost since British colonization in 1788. Less than 20 Indigenous languages are still spoken today, and almost all of the ones that are left are in grave danger of extinction. The long-term effects of forced assimilation policies are reflected in the fact that only around 10% of Indigenous Australians speak their ancestral language at home. Although the Australian government has set aside AUD 20 million for language revitalization, the majority of the work is still done by the community, with little institutional support across the country.

A snapshot of language endangerment in Taiwan and Australia is illustrated in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Language endangerment

Indicator	Australia	Taiwan
Total Indigenous languages pre-colonization	~250 (before 1788)	~26 (Austronesian languages before 1600s)
Indigenous languages in use today	<20 (Marmion et al., 2014)	~16 (officially recognized)
% of Indigenous people speaking ancestral language at home	~10% (2016 Census)	~5-10% (varies by language)
Languages classified as "critically endangered"	~90% (NILR, 2019)	~50-60% (UNESCO Atlas, 2023)
Government funding for revitalization (2020)	AUD 20 million	~NTD 1.5 billion (AUD ~70 million)

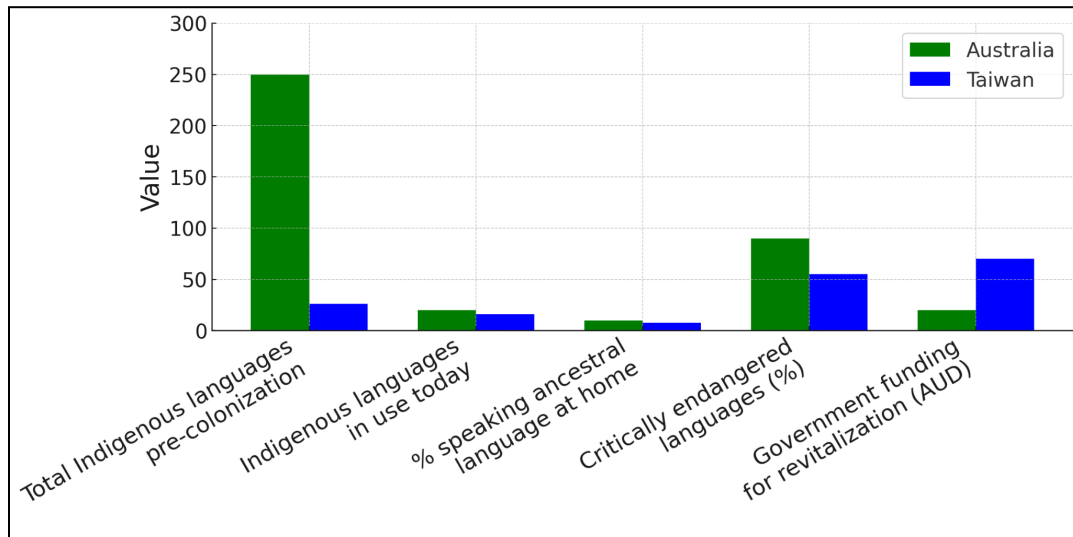


Figure 1. Language endangerment in Taiwan and Australia

The Austronesian languages that originated in Taiwan have maintained 16 out of their original 26 languages, which remain active in modern times. The endangerment status of Indigenous languages in Taiwan is lower than in Australia since only 50–60% of them face critical endangerment. The Indigenous Languages Development Act (2017) serves as an example of Taiwan's active legislative approach by mandating official documentation and media broadcasting and educational programs in Indigenous languages. The revitalization budget in Taiwan exceeds AUD ~70 million, which enables organized initiatives such as Indigenous-language media and bilingual schools.

The process of language loss happens over various stages. First, language shift and eventual loss materialize when younger generations prioritize English rather than the use of Indigenous languages. This is usually a result of pressures inflicted by formal education, which uses primarily or exclusively one particular language. Hence, over time, without the consistent use of the language from fluent speakers, languages tend to become either dormant or extinct. Some scholars argue that colonial education policies forced Indigenous children to learn English exclusively, therefore holding a very significant role in interrupting the linguistic continuity of Indigenous and native languages (McConvell & Thieberger, 2001).

Social Implications

Rejuvenating indigenous languages is of great significance for Aboriginal Australians and Australian communities in general. One of the main advantages of language conservation is its impact on mental health and happiness. Research has shown that indigenous people who speak their native language reach higher levels of self-esteem, lower depression rates and stronger and more resilient community connections (Zuckermann, 2020). These psychological advantages are used to emphasize the importance of revival efforts in addition to cultural conservation.

Another highly serious factor is education. Integrating Indigenous languages into school programs has been connected to improvements in academic performance among Indigenous students. Bringing language inclusivity into the education system assists in bringing about a sense of pride and belonging, leading to an increased level of student participation and lower dropout rates (Hinton & Hale, 2001). Countries such as New Zealand and Canada have amplified the positive impact of bilingual education programs by preserving Indigenous languages at the same time as improving educational outcomes (Norris, 2007).

Economically, language revitalization can give rise to new opportunities for employment and cultural tourism. The training of indigenous languages, the development of language learning applications, and the production of communication content featuring Indigenous languages contribute to creating jobs and developing skills. In addition, the initiatives of cultural tourism present the language and Indigenous traditions to attract domestic and international tourists, opening a source of income for the local communities (Lo Bianco, 2016).

However, there are still challenges. In the absence of sustainable and supportive governmental policies, some language programs struggle to uphold long-term success. The inconsistency of funding, not to mention lack of qualified educators, threaten progress achieved in recent years. Additionally, the exceeding level of dominance of English in mainstream media and on digital platforms is something that certainly hinders daily use of Indigenous languages.

To ensure lasting success, Indigenous language revitalization has to be a collaborative effort involving government agencies, educational institutions, media organizations, and

Indigenous communities themselves. Putting an emphasis on the role of language in national identity and reconciliation efforts can give a basis for further strengthening public support for initiatives to preserve certain languages.

Government Policy and Legislative Support: Taiwan vs. Australia

A key difference between Taiwan and Australia can be seen in their legislative approaches. For example, Taiwan's *Indigenous Languages Development Act* (217) makes certain that:

- Indigenous languages are recognized as national languages.
- Warrants inclusion in their school curricula.
- Requires public services and media to provide content in Indigenous languages.
- Allocates consistent funding and resources for teacher training, documentation, and community programs (Lee, 2019).

To continue, Taiwan's *Indigenous Languages Development Act* also implements:

- Indigenous languages are taught in schools with populations holding Indigenous people.
- All public service announcements and official documents are available in Indigenous languages where necessary.
- Adequate training be provided for education, language documentation, and community programs.

Alternatively, Australia lacks an equivalent nationwide law. Though some states have initiated school programs, national enforcement and funding remain limited. Their language revival techniques are heavily dependent on community efforts and voluntary acts. Currently, Australia has no nationwide mandates, excluding New South Wales and Queensland, which both have implemented Indigenous programs within their schools.

With that said, funding for language revitalization is still inconsistent. No more than 20 millionAUD was allocated during 2020. Critics have argued that the amount is not enough in light of the scale of language loss (Australian Government, 2021).

Education and Community-Led Initiatives

Taiwan and Australia jointly rely on community-led movements to maintain the existence of Indigenous languages. However, what separates Taiwan from Australia is how Taiwan has set up *tribal language workshops* during which elders teach younger generations in informal settings. Taiwan has gone even further by integrating Indigenous languages into formal education. Ever since the early 2000s, Indigenous students have had the right to elect to learn their ancestral language in school, and bilingual education programs are on the rise (Lee, 2019).

In Australia, programs along the lines of *language nests* (early childhood immersion programs) and community-led classes have had some success with reviving languages such as Wiradjuri and Kaurna (Zuckermann, 2020). Moreover, while the country has made some progress with university courses (e.g., Yolŋu Matha at Charles Darwin University), Australia tails behind in terms of integrating Indigenous language classes and instruction within their primary and secondary school settings.

Integrating Indigenous languages into school curricula has been linked to improvements in academic performance among Indigenous students. Bringing language inclusivity into the education system helps to bring about a sense of pride and belonging, leading to elevated levels of student engagement and lower dropout rates (Hinton & Hale, 2001). Countries such as New Zealand and Canada have exemplified the positive impact of bilingual education programs by preserving Indigenous languages at the same time as improving educational outcomes (Norris, 2007).

Media Representation and Technological Integration

Taiwan has seen great strides with respect to normalizing Indigenous languages as represented in the media. Public outlets like *Taiwan Indigenous Television* (TITV) broadcast in Indigenous languages, and apps like the *Atayal-Mandarin dictionary* enhance accessibility (Huang, 2020). In contrast, Australia's *National Indigenous Television* (NITV) offers limited Indigenous-language content. Digital tools like the *Ma! Iwaidja* app exist but are underutilized and poorly promoted.

Benefits of Indigenous Language Revitalization Research shows that Indigenous language use is linked to:

- Improved mental health and reduced depression.
- Stronger identity and community.
- Higher educational outcomes when Indigenous languages are included in curricula (Zuckermann, 2020; Hinton & Hale, 2001).

Economically, revitalization supports cultural tourism, app development, and language instruction jobs, strongly contributing to sustainable development in Indigenous communities (Lo Bianco, 2016).

Recommendations for Australia Based on Taiwan's Example

1. **Stronger Legislation:** Enacting a law similar to Taiwan's *Indigenous Languages Development Act* would support a better legal foundation for mandatory language education and funding.
2. **Enhanced Media Presence:** Creating a broader presence of Indigenous-language programming on platforms such as NITV and ABC could help increase usage.
3. **National Curriculum Integration:** Looking up to Taiwan's model, Australia could administer Indigenous language courses in schools that have significant Aboriginal populations.
4. **Technological Investment:** Government-funded apps and online courses could help to elevate language accessibility, especially for younger generations.

Discussion and Conclusion

The revitalization of Indigenous languages is important for the sake of cultural continuity, identity preservation, and social cohesion with respect to Aboriginal communities. The paper examines Indigenous language revitalization efforts between Taiwan and Australia through their legislative approaches which serve as models for Australian initiatives. The paper examines past

suppression and cultural-mental health connections and practical solutions. The analysis presents cross-cultural preservation solutions through case studies and policy frameworks and community outcomes.

1. Due to their growing use of dominant languages (Mandarin in Taiwan and English in Australia), younger generations in both countries find it difficult to preserve intergenerational language transmission.
2. Australia's decentralized grassroots approach to preserving linguistic diversity has not been as successful as Taiwan's centralized policy framework.
3. Australia should follow Taiwan's language revitalization model by incorporating formal education programs and boosting funding and legal protection to strengthen its language preservation efforts.
4. Every nation requires solutions that represent and consider its unique political and cultural characteristics.

This comparative analysis demonstrates how Australia needs to adapt Taiwan's strategies to preserve Indigenous languages by highlighting the urgent need for coordinated, multi-sectoral efforts. To ensure the success of Indigenous languages, Australian governments, educational institutions, and Indigenous communities must work together to make sure language preservation initiatives are adequately funded and effectively implemented. Such success can lead to improved mental health, stronger community bonds, and increased recognition of Indigenous rights.

Future Considerations

The research evaluates Taiwan's Indigenous language revitalization model through its mandatory school programs and constitutional recognition and digital preservation methods to develop a blueprint for Australia's revitalization efforts. The Indigenous Languages Development Act (2017) of Taiwan operates as a centralized policy which differs from Australia's grassroots approach to reveal funding and institutional support deficiencies. Both nations experience difficulties in passing down languages across generations because Mandarin and English hold dominant positions. Future research needs to evaluate Taiwan's technology-based educational programs (such as Atayal language applications) and mental health advantages while studying

how Australia can implement these strategies through legislative measures and educational curricula and community-based technological collaborations. The study provides cross-cultural knowledge to develop sustainable solutions for protecting languages and cultures.

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