Acknowledgement to Country

Kangaroos, caves and spirits in the air:
Factors in cross-dialectal text comprehension of Aboriginal English speaking students.

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What is our research about?

• Possible miscommunication between Aboriginal students and their non-Aboriginal educators/curriculum, which can influence educational outcomes

• Aims:
  – Examine educators’ understanding of Aboriginal students’ narratives (project 1)
  – Explore Aboriginal English speaking students’ comprehension of texts written in SAE (project 2)
  – Inform best practice
  – Improve outcomes for students

“The moment teachers hear a student talking Koori English, they think the kid speaks broken English and has a learning problem”

Mark Rose, personal communication.
Today it rained, so we went swimming
Project 1
Understanding an Aboriginal English speaking student’s text
Description

1. 6 teachers, 4 AIEOs from 3 PS and 1 HS
2. 8 passages → listened to twice → produce 2 recalls
3. Participants read text version (recorded)
4. Data analysis:
   1. Recall protocols of idea units
   2. Comparison of order of idea units
   3. Compare Ab'l/Non-Ab'l recalls

Recalled information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recall type</th>
<th>E.g.: My uncle was chasing the kangaroo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correct</td>
<td>My uncle was chasing the kangaroo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>My uncle was chasing something.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distortion/ reinterpretation</td>
<td>The dog was chasing a kangaroo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition</td>
<td>The uncle was chasing a kangaroo and he ran over it. / There was a cave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omission</td>
<td>Neither uncle nor chasing of the kangaroo recalled.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Here’s Mervyn with his teacher again.

- **M:** an’ we – an’ we like this kangaroo like cause we couldn’t – couldn’t – ‘cause we they was all at dis water pond there was big mob of ’em an’ um we ran over dis liddle one an’ we came back to look for it but it wasn’t there **an’ um we went right along this water pond** lookin’ for this one little one an’ then went under the car each time we tried to run it over so they—as they ran over the next hump they ran over one of the fences with them clipper things in it sharp things and the tyre went flat
- **J:** oh no
- **M:** An’ an’ den my uncle grabbed it an’ said [you stupid Kangaroo! blew his head off](#)

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**Addition**

- Original: An we went right along this water pond.

- Recalled: They were in a cave.
Omission and distortion

- Original: An an den my uncle grabbed it [kangaroo] and said ‘you stupid kangaroo’ blew his head off.

- Recalled: The uncle was sort of yelling and telling off the person who was driving saying ‘What did you do’?

Project 2

Aboriginal English speaking students' comprehension of texts written in SAE
Story reading/recall procedure

Teacher reads to student → Student goes to separate room to engage in a non-linguistic activity → Student recall to teacher → Two-way Analysis
Story 1: THE STORY ABOUT PING, by Marjorie Flack and Kurt Wiese

Once upon a time there was a beautiful young duck named Ping. Ping lived with his mother and his father and two sisters and three brothers and eleven aunts and seven uncles and forty-two cousins.

Their home was a boat with two wise eyes on the Yangtze river.

Each morning as the sun rose from the east, Ping and his mother and his father and sisters and brothers and aunts and uncles and his forty-two cousins all marched, one by one, down a little bridge to the shore of the Yangtze river.

... By the time Ping was right side up his mother and his father and his aunts were already marching, one by one, up over the bridge.

By the time Ping neared the shore, his uncles and his cousins were marching over, and by the time Ping reached the shore the last of his forty-two cousins had crossed the bridge!

Recall by Nathan

• N: ... Before 'at e's... all of his 'bout 42 cousins an 'at an' e didn't wanna be swooped so e went to the grass an...
• ...an e saw is boat an e swam back an all of his 42 cousins got on the boat ...
• T: Good, and is there anything else you can remember that you want to tell about... about the story?
• N: He had 42 cousins, 7 somin'else,
Recall by Sue

T: Okay, what do you remember about the story Toby?
– Um, the fact that they were, Ping was on (all?) very beautiful,
– and ’e was, it was along the Yangtze river he had forty two cousins
– um the call that made him come back was um la la la la la lay.
– um... the last to across the bridge that they had to cross was um spanked on the back with a cane um... Ping was his name um Ping um when he was underwater getting a fish the call was made and so he was lost so he hid
– and then um he went to bed in the reeds
– and then next morning there was no-one there and so he started swimming along the Yangtze river and then about maybe when the sun started coming up a bit more some boats came and there like merchant boats big boats small boats
– an’ then he found the trail for the rice cakes pieces from the rice cake,
– pieces from the rice cake and he followed that
– and a little boy with a barrel on his back um caught him
– and he was like oo oo oo oo. and um the mother, sister, the brother and the father came
– and they took Ping and they wanted to cook him for dinner at sunup... sunset
– and the little boy took Ping and dumped him back in the water
– and he heard the call of la la lay
– and he was yet again last but e still wen’ up
– coz he still wanted to be with his family

Summary of family responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order</th>
<th>Original</th>
<th>Nathan</th>
<th>Jayden</th>
<th>Sue</th>
<th>Matthew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mother and father</td>
<td>42 cousins</td>
<td>42 aunts</td>
<td>Mum</td>
<td>Mum, dad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 sisters and 3 brothers</td>
<td>7 something else</td>
<td>Aunts, uncles</td>
<td>Sister, brother</td>
<td>37 cousins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>11 aunts and 7 uncles</td>
<td>Sisters, brothers</td>
<td>father</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>42 cousins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Story 2: Bushfire (original extracts)

Dais and Geordie couldn’t find their home in those strange, aching shapes. Sheets of iron bent and buckled around black broken stumps.

‘That was the roof’, Dad pointed, then looked hard ahead. A moment passed. ‘It melted the bath!’ he murmured aghast…. The strangest of walls then circled the air. Faint at first, like a creature in pain from far, far away…

Like a seal raising back its long neck, Mum looked to the sky, then held out her arms with fingers spread wide. Her loose cotton dress bulged round (there was a baby within).

In a long, steady breath from deep inside, her unhappy song flew up so high that valley and hilltops resounded in echoes, carrying her message to the world of beyond.
Gary’s Recall

– An’ the two kids was on the other side
– An’ the mum, in her dress, there was a baby
– …an den the spirit went up in the air …
– An den…

Spirit schema

2. Nowhere on earth or up in the sky was the call of a single bird.
3. “The wind’s making me cough.” Wind had thrown her voice away
4. Sheets of iron bent, buckled around stumps
5. Creature in pain, circled the air, unhappy song flew up high, echoes, carrying message to world of beyond, baby
Once upon a time there was a beautiful young duck named Ping. Ping lived with his mother and his father and two sisters and three brothers and eleven aunts and seven uncles and forty-two cousins.

Comprehension: Matching schemas

Implications for the classroom

- Equally strong expression of cultural schema amongst both urban and rural students
- Grammar only analysis does not consider this cultural schema → deficit view
- Need for bicultural pedagogy
  - Students need opportunities to demonstrate understanding in variety of ways/languages
  - Students need explicit teaching of language to demonstrate understanding
Hedland Primary school students’ language backgrounds (March 2009)

Source: Baler and South Hedland Primary Schools teachers