

# Indigenous languages and Standard Australian English: influences and impacts

**Warning** – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and students are advised that this curriculum resource may contain images, voices or names of deceased people.

## GLOSSARY

**colonisation:** when one country takes over another, the period of time during the takeover is called 'colonisation'.

**colonisers:** invading forces that take control of a populated country; the invaded country is called a 'colony'.

**empathy:** the ability to understand or share the feelings, thoughts or experiences of another.

**First Fleet:** the name given to the group of 11 British ships containing convicts and colonists that arrived in Australia in 1788.

**pastoralist:** in Australia this refers to a landowner or farmer who breeds livestock; such as, cattle or sheep for agricultural purposes, allowing animals to graze on grasses and plants in large outdoor areas in the natural environment.

**primary source:** a document, artwork or oral history record that contains information obtained by research or by observing somebody/something carefully. They are a first-hand account and are not taken from other books.

**sleeping languages:** a term preferred by some First Nations people for Indigenous languages which are not currently spoken., it's used to communicate the belief that these languages are not 'lost' and still have the potential to be reawakened.

## Introduction: recording and reviving language

Despite the harm that **colonisation** has done to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their language and cultures, some early records of language created by European **colonisers** are now being used to reawaken **sleeping languages** and reconnect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with cultural practices and knowledge that had long been considered lost. The notebooks

of William Dawes (1791) are one such record that have assisted some First Nations people to reconnect with the language and knowledge of their ancestors.

### **William Dawes and Patyegarang**

William Dawes, an English officer who arrived on the **First Fleet** in 1788, spent time building friendships and trust with the local people. Through building these friendships, Dawes was able to learn about the language and culture of the First Nations Peoples of the area. One of Dawes' most important teachers was a young woman by the name of Patyegarang. Patyegarang had a great talent for learning English and helped Dawes to record detailed accounts of the local Indigenous languages. Over time Dawes developed a deep **empathy** for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, refusing to obey orders to capture or harm local people, which contributed to him getting sent back to England, despite his wish to stay and make Australia his home.

Dawes' approach was quite different to the approach taken by many other colonists at the time who would often capture and imprison local people in order to ask them questions about language, the local environment or to use them as interpreters.

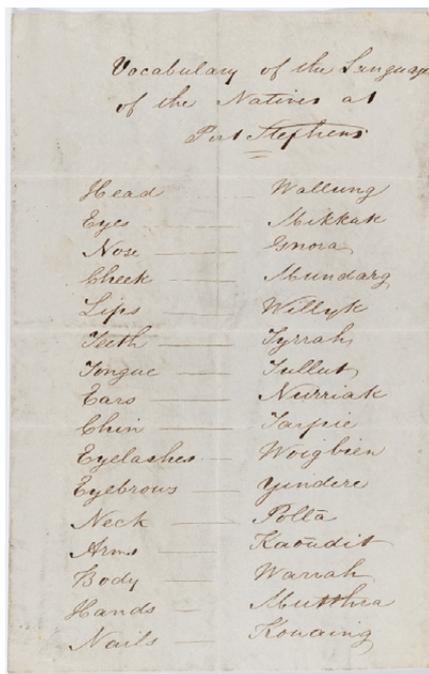
### **Charles Macarthur King and the Indigenous languages of Port Stephens**

Charles Macarthur King, was a wealthy **pastoralist** and police magistrate in New South Wales (SMH 1903). In around 1845, King created a word list of around 55 words, called the *Vocabulary of the language of the natives at Port Stephens* (King 1845–50). King's word lists are grouped into parts of the body, the physical environment (moon, stars etc), animals and commands (e.g. 'go away'). There is little known about how King collected the information for his word lists.

### **Examining primary sources**

With a partner, investigate the two **primary source** records of Indigenous languages below. Compare and contrast the two by considering the following:

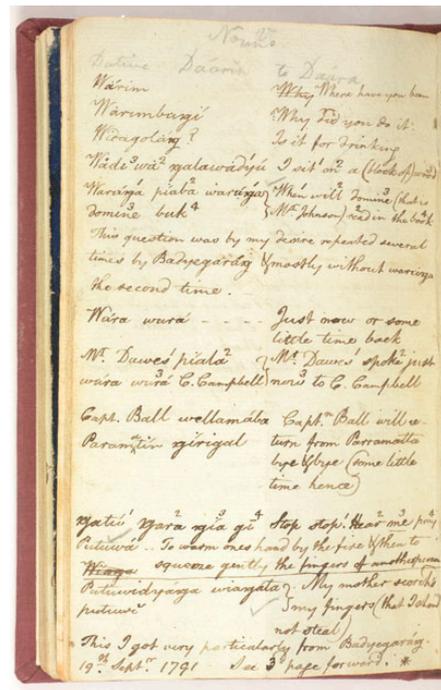
- How are the two lists similar/different?
- What do you notice about the types of words and ideas contained within the lists?
- Does each list provide enough information to enable someone to converse in a meaningful way?
- What can you infer about the values or level of interest each author had in learning or conversing in the language?
- How might Australia's colonial history have been different if more Europeans followed Dawes' attitude of building friendship, trust, sharing knowledge and mutual respect rather than trying to impose European ideas, values and language on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples?



Vocabulary of the language of the natives at Port Stephens (King 1845–50), © 2020 Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, CC-BY-4.0.

### Transcript

Head – Wallung  
 Eyes – Uikkak  
 Nose – Gnora  
 Cheek – Uundarg  
 Lips – [Willyk?]  
 Teeth – Tyrrah  
 Tongue – Tullur  
 Ears – Nurriak  
 Chin – Tarfrie  
 Eyelashes – Woigbien  
 Eyebrows – Yindere  
 Neck – Polla  
 Arms – Kaoudis  
 Body – Warrah  
 Hands – Uutthia  
 Nails – Kouain



'Vocabulary of the language of N.S. Wales in the neighbourhood of Sydney (native and English)' (Dawes 1791), © SOAS 2009, CC-BY-NC-ND.

### Transcript

Wárim – Where have you been  
 Wárimbuinjí – Why did you do it:  
 Widagoláŋ? – Is it for drinking?  
 Wádi wá ŋalawádyú – I sit on a (block of) wood  
 Waruŋa píaba waruŋa domine buk –  
 When will domine (that is Mr Johnson) read in  
 the book?  
 Wúra wúra – Just now or some little time  
 back  
 Mr Dawes píala wúra wur C Campbell –  
 Mr Dawes spoke just now to C Campbell  
 Capt. Ball wellamába Param.atín ŋírigal –  
 Capt. Ball will re-turn from Parramatta bye  
 and bye (some little time hence)  
 ŋatú ŋara ŋía gī – Stop stop! Hear me pray  
 Putuwá, Wíaga – To warm one's hand by the  
 fire and then to squeeze gently the fingers of  
 another person

## References

Dawes, W 1791, 'Vocabulary of the language of N.S. Wales in the neighbourhood of Sydney (native and English)', *The notebooks of William Dawes on the Aboriginal language of Sydney*, WilliamDawes.org, Book B, p. 21, viewed 20 August 2020, <https://www.williamdawes.org/ms/msview.php?image-id=book-b-page-21>, © SOAS 2009, CC-BY-NC-ND.

King, CM 1845–50, *Vocabulary of the language of the natives at Port Stephens*, cited via Mitchell Library, State Library New South Wales, viewed 17 September 2020, [http://digital.sl.nsw.gov.au/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?embedded=true&toolbar=false&dps\\_pid=IE1164365&ga=2.247211844.1169129037.1600310647-914488474.1597305326](http://digital.sl.nsw.gov.au/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?embedded=true&toolbar=false&dps_pid=IE1164365&ga=2.247211844.1169129037.1600310647-914488474.1597305326), © 2020 Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, CC-BY-4.0.

Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) 1903, *The late Mr C Macarthur King*, 7 September, p. 6, Obituaries Australia, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, viewed 17 September 2020, <http://oa.anu.edu.au/obituary/king-charles-macarthur-14444/text25532>