2020 VCE Indigenous Languages of Victoria: Revival and Reclamation written examination report

General comments

In general, students scored highly in the ‘data’ questions (Questions 1–4), although some students did not show as clear a grasp of some of the concepts – such as transitivity and intransitivity – as required. Students seemed well prepared and ready to answer the essay questions (Questions 5 and 6).

Students are reminded to read the questions carefully and make sure they attempt them all. Some students missed out on marks because instructions were not carefully followed. In responding to Questions 5 and 6, students are advised to present answers that are as detailed as possible by answering the questions fully and using examples that clearly illustrate their points.

Specific information

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

Section 1

Question 1

Most students answered Question 1a. correctly. In the case of Questions 1c. and 1d., some students were well prepared to answer the basic questions about ergative (subject of transitive sentences) versus absolutive (subject of intransitive sentences and object of transitive sentences), but they were less able to discuss other cases, such as the ablative, marking the source (from). Students who were unable to deal with this then had difficulty with Question 1d. Question 1d. required students to create a translation of a sentence that has two ‘arguments’, two entities (‘the big possum’ and ‘the mother’), but these are not both ‘core arguments’ required by the verb – arguments that are marked by the ergative and absolutive. You can say ‘the big possum moved’ or the ‘big possum went’ without reference to the source. Thus, students mistakenly marked ‘the big possum’ with the ergative when that was not required.

Question 1a.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| dog | kal | kala |  |
| possum | kuramu | kuramuwa |  |
| mother | ngat | Ngatla |  |
| man | truwal | truwala | truwalan |
| forked stick | ngiyur | ngiyura |  |
| kookaburra | kuwatang | kuwatangla |  |
| kangaroo | kuri |  |  |
| crow | waa |  |  |
| rug | tu | Tuwa | tuwan |
| big | wurung |  |  |
| bit | ngathan |  |  |
| went: | yan |  |  |
| laughed | wiyaan |  |  |
| scratched | kritan |  |  |
| saw | nhaan |  |  |

Full marks were given for all answers that were correct in form and spelling.

This question gave students a scaffold for some of the following questions and assisted them to analyse the data that followed.

Question 1b.

High-scoring responses should have included that, in sentence 2, the mother is the subject of a transitive sentence and so is marked with the ergative as ngatla. On the other hand, in sentence 13, the mother is the subject of an intransitive sentence, so the form is ngat. In sentence 14, the mother is the object and the form is also ngat.

Question 1c.

The root form of ‘man’ is truwal, as found in sentences 6 and 7 where the man is the subject of an intransitive verb. The form -a is added in sentences 9 and 10 to indicate ergative/subject of a transitive sentence. The form -an is added in sentence 15 to indicate the ablative/source/origin (it is possible to respond that -n is ablative/source/from and it is added to the ergative).

The root form of the word for ‘rug’ is tu in sentence 11, but when it is the subject of a transitive sentence, it is tuwa as in sentence 14; it is also ablative in sentence 7.

Note that with the root tu, -wa is an allomorph of the ergative -a, and -wan is an allomorph of the ablative -an. Responses needed to include this for full marks. Responses that did not include the ablative were not awarded full marks.

Question 1d.

Yan kuramu wurung ngatlan (yan kuramu wurung ngatan is also acceptable). (The words could be in any order.)

Question 1e.

Truwala kritan ngiyur. (Other word orders are also acceptable).

Question 1f.

The dog bit the man.

Question 1g.

The possum saw the big crow.

Question 1h.

Word order does not distinguish subject from object in Bunganditj, so the order can be VSO (verb, subject, object) as in sentence 2, SOV as in sentence 1 or OSV as in sentence 3.

Question 2

Some students did not write a response to Question 2a. at all and appeared to have misunderstood what was asked in this part (listing the forms of the possessive suffixes) and in Question 2b. (which was about trying to explain the variation). It is very important that students read the questions carefully and answer the right question in the right place.

Question 2a.

* -ayn and -mayn for ‘my’
* -un and -mun for ‘your (sg)
* -ung and -mung for ‘his’

Note that an alternative analysis would be for students to list -mayn, -mun and -mung as invariant forms, with an additional phonological rule of geminate cluster reduction. If students only listed the three forms ‑mayn, ‑mun and -mung without explaining the process, they did not receive full marks.

Question 2b.

Where the noun has a final consonant, the forms are -ayn, -un and -ung, and where it has a final vowel (strictly speaking, a final -i) the forms are -mayn, -mun and -mung.

Question 2c.

* His kangaroo: kurimung
* Your mother: ngatun

If students have the invariant/geminate reduction analysis in Question 2a., the form for ‘mother’ would be ngatmun.

If students made errors in Question 2b., and did not understand the allomorphy, they were not penalised again; if a student wrote kuriung for ‘his kangaroo’, it would be accepted if they had already lost marks for not noticing this earlier.

Question 2d.

* kalayn: my dog
* kurimayn: my kangaroo

Question 3

This question was answered well by all students.

Question 3a.

* wakun: killed
* kaimun: caught
* briwan: threw
* nhaiun: saw

Full marks were awarded for four correct answers. One mark was given for three correct answers and no marks were awarded for fewer than three correct answers.

Question 3b.

In Table 2 the words are given without any context (case), whereas in Table 3 both the words for ‘man’ (nhunnana) and ‘woman’ (birripna) are the subject of a transitive verb and are consequently marked by the ergative -na.

Full marks were awarded when students identified that the forms in Table 3 were inflected/marked by the ergative marker.

Question 3c.

Birripna wak-wai nhaiun: The woman saw an opossum.

Wakwaina muyumbul wakun: The opossum killed a fish.

Question 3d.

Walked (marks were also awarded for ‘walk’)

Question 3e.

The word ‘camp’ without context/unmarked is raap in Table 2, and the ‘to’/motion towards/allative is conveyed by the addition of a suffix, ‑tya.

Question 3f.

There is a word that is doing the possessing, ‘man’/’woman’, and this word is marked by -num. The word that is being possessed is unmarked.

Question 3g.

* The woman threw the kangaroo’s boomerang: Birripna baraknum wan briwan
* The man saw the woman’s camp: Nhunnana birripnum raap nhaiun

Question 3h.

The woman walked from the camp.

Question 4

Some students did not fully grasp the concept of Question 4b. The question required students to consider what English words we use now that might not have been used in traditional society and might have been created in Nyangumarta by the use of the suffix -pinti, meaning ‘something to do with’. In our suggested answers we have included ‘glasses’, ‘hearing aid’ and ‘shoes’. The word for ‘glasses’ could well be the word for ‘eye’ + pinti. Some very good responses were made to this question. Students are reminded to think about developing strategies for how they might answer questions for which they cannot prepare in detail.

Question 4a.

The actual answer in O’Grady is ‘petticoat’, but any response that included a word relating to clothing of the lower part of the body was rewarded. One mark was awarded for suggesting a plausible meaning, and two marks were awarded for an adequate explanation.

Question 4b.

Marks were awarded for the organisation and creativity of the answer. Building on the idea that ngarnkapinti is an object for doing something with a ‘beard’, other body parts that might need to be covered or in some way ‘dealt with’ might be:

* eye + pinti: ‘glasses’, doing something with the eye
* ear + pinti: ‘hearing aid’, doing something with the ear
* leg + pinti: ‘crutch’, doing something with the leg
* foot + pinti: ‘shoe’
* water + pinti: ‘bottle’
* fat + pinti: ‘candle’
* smoke + pinti: ‘cigarette’

Question 4c.

Borrowing

Question 4d.

From English ‘cup of tea’. The phrase is combined into a single word.

Question 4e.

From English ‘apple’.

Question 4f.

Literally ‘mouth of-washing of’, meaning the thing we do the washing of the mouth with. Students may point out that it could mean ‘toothbrush’ or ‘mouthwash’.

Question 4g.

It means ‘saddle’: ‘sitting of-horse of’.

Question 4h.

Extending the meaning to a new area; similar to web in English (extension).

Question 4i.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Word | Original meaning | New meaning |
| tyinyityi | wedges cut in tree trunk for easy ascent | ladder |
| mapan | clever man | doctor |
| tjarranka | to examine carvings | read |
| pitjiripitjiri | red | sunburnt |
| kari | bitter | liquor, alcohol |
| yanta | spear, poke | knit, sew |
| ngarntir | bouncing of a boomerang | retracting of aeroplane’s landing gear |

Section 2

In general, responses to Questions 5 and 6, the extended responses, showed that students had prepared well for this section. However, it seems that this careful preparation may be somewhat restricting in some cases. Students are often prepared to answer these questions exactly, which have been refined so as to be more focused and to allow for responses relating to the target language studied by students. Some responses appeared to be a prepared answer, rather than demonstrating how students had used the opportunity presented by these questions to be more creative in their answers.

Question 5a.

Question 5a. required students to describe the protocols and processes of community involvement in the production of the resources, and the benefits that community knowledge would bring to the process. High-scoring responses should also have described the need to carefully examine the original sources of the language, and how features of neighbouring languages or other Indigenous languages might need to be brought in to cover some of the gaps in the record of the target language.

For example, there would be a need to find out about:

* words for the canoe, its parts, the word for the actions involved in making it, the actions involved in using it
* words for source materials and tools needed to construct a canoe
* words for the kinds of activities you would do with a canoe (transporting people, going out fishing etc.)
* expressions for giving directions when travelling with a canoe (e.g. ‘paddle to the west’)
* some of these words might have to be borrowed from neighbouring languages or coined anew (using some of the principles discussed in Question 4).

Question 5b.

Student responses would depend on whether they chose to discuss a dialogue or a song.

If discussing a dialogue, responses would be expected to include the kinds of interactions that would be needed: greetings, questions and answers, and exclamations and warnings. For example, the dialogue might discuss the process of constructing a canoe, where perhaps an elder teaches a younger person how to do that. Or it might discuss the process of moving the canoe, giving directions for undertaking the journey.

The text of a song, on the other hand, might have a much wider reference. Responses to this option could discuss what kinds of things people might sing when either making or, possibly more likely, using the canoe. Responses would need to indicate that the creation of new vocabulary would likely be needed here. Use of repetition is likely to be a feature of a song.

Note that the making (reconstruction) of the canoe could be the focus of a language immersion activity.

Question 5c.

In Question 5c., responses might point out that canoes were likely used on many of the rivers in the target language area. The role that canoes played in traditional society and the features of the traditional lands where people must have used canoes for moving about may also be in the response.

Question 6a.

There are a number of possible responses to this question.

One imperative is to introduce words and expressions early on that are easy to pronounce and easy to remember. The other imperative is to introduce words and expressions that have a high functional load.

Students might learn nouns first (names of animals, body parts etc.), or they may first learn simple sentence exchanges such as ‘How are you?’ ‘I am well’ or equivalent greetings, or they may start by learning something like pronouns. The reasons for this are:

* nouns are objects and can be identified and pointed to or shown with pictures
* question words and single word responses (yes, no, maybe etc.) are often easy to learn and remember and can be used very often (i.e. they have a high functional load)
* sentence exchanges can be used in communication and practised, allowing a new student to speak the language immediately
* pronouns would allow a student to get to the core of the language’s structure more quickly.

What should follow might include pronunciation of sounds not used in English and stress patterns in the language.

Activities introduced to facilitate learning might include language games, songs and language immersion activities such as sending text messages or emails to each other.

The grammatical aspects that are most difficult would include the pronoun system, case endings, verb tense and number marking.

Ergatives are difficult for English speakers to comprehend, as are bound pronouns (especially when they show little alignment with free pronouns), inclusive/exclusive pronouns, the inclusive construction, verb classes, noun classes, free word word order, alienable/inalienable possession and so on. Allomorphy always presents a challenge to language learners.

Question 6b.

Traditional stories may provide examples of language use that are not found in everyday language; stories are more likely to be something that members of the community would want to share with learners, although perhaps not with the same level of detail that people who are more knowledgeable would have.

They may also be the basis for songs or other resources.

Question 6c.

Responses might include differences between cultures in terms of what is talked about. Some examples might be that kinship terms (father, mother, uncle, aunt etc.) have (or may have) different meanings in Indigenous languages and are also used in different ways. Similarly, place names often have meanings that are clearly understandable to speakers in a way that place names in contemporary Australia often do not. Hence, learning the meanings of place names, and the cultural connection with those names, is perhaps more important in Indigenous languages than in English. (It is likely that some of the recorded place names in Victoria have unclear meaning and unclear reference.)

Therefore, if students learn kinship and place names properly, they are learning broader aspects of culture.