2023 VCE Aboriginal Languages of Victoria external assessment report

General comments

Although the quality of the students’ responses varied, some responses were very good as they demonstrated an understanding of the language structures.

Three general points that future students should bear in mind:

* Make sure that you answer all the questions. Assessors have no choice but to give N/A (zero marks) to unanswered questions. It is strongly recommended that students always attempt all the questions; even if a student is unsure about an answer, it is better to attempt the question and possibly get some marks than not to attempt at all.
* Make sure that you read the question carefully and answer questions in full. For example, when a question asks for two examples of something, giving only one example is sure to lead to fewer marks.
* There were two essay questions: Question 5 and Question 6. In some cases, students appeared to be basing their answers on material seen in the practice exams (such as discussions of community consultation). Students should be careful to answer the question that is asked rather than answering the question they expect to be asked.

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

Responses to Questions 1a. to 1h. were generally good. A few concerns have been noted in the individual questions.

Question 1a.

food yarnunju

man ngarrkangu (the form ngarrka is also accepted)

boomerang karli

on top of kankarlija

woman karnta karntangu

child kurtuku kurtungu

kangaroo wawirri wawirrirlu

house papulu(rla)

One mark was given for each correct line in the answer. In the case of ‘woman’, ‘child’ and ‘kangaroo’, both of the forms listed above needed to be present and correctly spelled for the mark to be given.

Question 1b.

Wawirri is used as an object (e.g. sentence 8, Ngarrkangu nyanganya wawirri ‘the man sees the kangaroo’) and as the subject of an intransitive sentence (e.g. sentence 9, wawirri palungu ‘the kangaroo died’). Wawirrirlu is used as the subject of a transitive sentence in sentence 6 (e.g. wawirrirlu warnpaka ngarnu ‘the kangaroo ate the grass’).

Two marks were given for an explanation of wawirri (one mark for explaining that it is an object and a second mark for explaining that it is an intransitive subject) and one mark was given for the explanation of wawirrirlu as a transitive subject.

Some students noted a difference between subject and object functions, but did not comment on the difference between an intransitive subject and a transitive subject. This key grammatical difference is found in many Aboriginal languages and has been the subject of many previous examination questions. (Note that the suffix -rlu is termed ergative but students are not expected to use this terminology, although it is expected that they be aware of its function.)

Question 1c.

The form -ngu has the same function as -rlu. It marks the subject of a transitive sentence (i.e. it marks the ergative case), as in, for example, sentence 2, Ngarrkangu kuparnurra kuyu ‘The man was cooking meat’ and sentence 7, Karntangu yarnunju kurtuku yungunya ‘The woman is giving food to the child’.

The form -rlu is found in sentences 6, 1 and 12, the latter being Nampijinparlu nyangu karnta. ‘Nampijinpa saw the woman’.

Students needed to state that the two forms have the same function. They also needed to provide a suitable explanation with an appropriate example or examples from the form -ngu from the data. (It is not absolutely necessary to exemplify -rlu here as this has been addressed in part b., but an example of -ngu should be provided. It is also not necessary to use the term ‘ergative’ here, provided the student shows an understanding of the function or meaning of the suffix.)

Some students tried to identify some difference between -rlu and -ngu, e.g. by proposing that one is used for people and one for animals, but this was not consistent with all the relevant data. Students should be aware that there can be variants to the forms of suffixes like the ergative suffix.

Question 1d.

The suffix -ku marks the dative case (or the recipient or indirect object; i.e., it indicates the entity receiving something or the entity to whom something is being given). An example is sentence 7, Karntangu yarnunju kurtuku yungunya ‘The woman is giving food to the child’. Another example is sentence 10, Kurtungu karli Nampijinpaku yungunya ‘The child is giving the boomerang to Nampijinpa’.

Students needed to provide an accurate description of the function of -ku (the term ‘dative’ is not necessarily required) and also a suitable example, such as sentences 7 and 10.

Question 1e.

The form of the locative suffix is -rla, e.g. Sentence 3 Karli kanya kankarlija pamarrparla. ‘The boomerang is on top of the rock’ or sentence 11 Yarnunju kanya kantu papulurla ‘The food is inside the house’. (Note that Table 1 provides the stem of the word for ‘rock’, pamarrpa, so the correct answer here is that the locative suffix is -rla, not simply -la or -a.)

Question 1f.

Based on sentences 1–12, the word order appears to be the same as in English, i.e., subject-verb-object. An example is sentence 2, Ngarrkangu (subject) kuparnurra (verb) kuyu (object), which means ‘The man was cooking meat’. (Other examples are sentences 1, 6, 8, and 12. Note that some sentences do not contain a grammatical object, including sentences 3 and 10, which give the location of the subject.)

Most of the sentences have a clear SVO word order. However, for whatever reason some students chose to comment only on one of the few sentences in the data that show a different order, e.g. sentence 7 which contains both a direct and an indirect object. Marks were still awarded provided students accounted for the word order of their chosen sentence accurately. Students, however, should try to notice the general pattern, rather than focus on an unusual sentence in the data.

Question 1g.

Here, the word order is subject, verb, indirect object, direct object.

Some students got confused here if they had picked out sentence 7 as their example in question 1f. Other students also thought that the word order here was simply the same as in English, so more attention should be paid to the difference between direct and indirect objects.

Question 1h.

The verb kanya literally means ‘sits’ as shown in Table 1. However, in sentence 3 this is translated into English as ‘is’. In Warlmanpa the verb for ‘sit’ is therefore used to represent the locations of objects, and does not necessarily refer to a person sitting.

Students must make use of the information in both Table 1 and sentence 3 in order to be awarded the mark.

This was one of the more difficult questions and students were required to show an understanding that a verb translated as ‘sit’ in English might have a more general meaning in an Aboriginal language of ‘to be located at’. In English we don’t talk about boomerangs ‘sitting’, but in an Aboriginal language people might.

Question 1i.

The verb palungu may have undergone semantic extension (aka extension of meaning). The basic meaning of palungu, ‘died’, may have expanded to encompass other kinds of events involving the end of a stage or process, not just the end of a life. When eyes close, they stop being open (at least temporarily), and when water dries up it is no longer there.

One mark was awarded for identifying semantic extension as the relevant process here, one mark for a plausible explanation of the meaning ‘closed’ and one mark for a plausible explanation of the meaning ‘dried up’.

Question 2

Question 2a.

The linguistic term for the function of the suffix -jarra is dual.

Most students did not answer this question correctly, either answering that -jarra is a plural suffix or that it is a more general marker of number. Students should know that in Aboriginal languages dual is often marked in different parts of the grammar, on pronouns and verbs as well as nouns.

Question 2b.

In Warlmanpa, the concept of ‘a few’ is expressed as a suffix (-panji) attached to the noun, while in English the same concept is expressed by separate words (‘a few’) before the noun. One mark was awarded for explaining the Warlmanpa suffix and the second for comparison with English.

Question 2c.

pamarrpa tartu

Question 2d.

A few men see the dog.

Students needed to answer the question correctly to get both marks. So, if students simply write ‘The men see the dog’ or ‘a man sees the dog’ (errors of the number of men) or if they write ‘A few men saw the dog’ (error of tense), they would receive one mark. Two errors, such as ‘The man saw the dog’, received zero marks.

Question 2e.

Correct translations were:

Kurtungu nyangu papulu.

Pamarrpa kanya kankarlija warnpakarla.

Nampijinparlu yarnunju ngarrkajarraku yungunya.

Two marks for each correct sentence. Based on sentences 1–12, the order of the words here is correct. However, marks were not deducted if students shifted the verbs in the first two sentences to the end, or shifted the verb in the third sentence to second position.

The first sentence, Kurtungu nyangu papulu, does require the student to work out that the word for house in sentence 11 is marked with a locative –rla and to remove that locative. This is one of the harder questions and students were given one mark for Kurtungu nyangu papulurla.

This question was intended to be more difficult than some others and none of the students received full marks. Many of the errors made related to leaving out suffixes indicating case. A specific issue with this question was that students did not take into account that the -rl in the spelling papulurla in sentence 11 is a single sound that is spelled with two letters (a retroflex sound).

Question 3

While Question 3 was generally answered quite well, some students seemed to struggle to keep track of which tables they needed to consult and which parts to focus on (e.g. ‘dual forms’). Students are advised to check the questions carefully before answering.

Question 3a.

The word for boomerang is wangim.

Question 3b.

The bound pronouns for the singular are:

* -ik (‘my’)
* -in (‘thy’) (‘your’ singular would be accepted)
* -oo (‘his’)

Question 3c.

The bound pronouns for the dual are:

* -ngal (‘ours’, ‘mine including you’)
* -ngun (‘ours’, ‘mine and someone else but not you’)
* -pul (‘yours’, ‘yours and someone else’s’)

If a student also included the third dual, writing something like -maga bullain or simply -bullain, marks were not deducted, but all three forms listed in the answer above were needed for full marks.

Question 3d.

The dual pronoun for ‘their’ seems to have the additional words maga and bullain that are not shown as bound.

Question 3e.

The similarities between the plural forms in Table 4 and 5 are the suffixes -ngunyin ‘ours, including you’, -ngunyinu/ngunyinoo ‘ours, excluding you’, -ngoot ‘yours’ and -dhan ‘theirs’.

Students needed to list all the forms to get full marks.

Note that -ngunyinu and -ngunyinoo are different spellings for the same word.

This question was not answered well by many, either because students confused plural with dual and gave answers relating to the dual, or because they failed to give examples.

Question 3f.

The differences between the two dual forms in Table 4 and Table 5 are the additional word maga in Table 4.

Question 3g.

The similarities are the possessive bound pronouns -ik ‘my’, -in ‘your’ and -oo ‘his’. Two marks were awarded for identifying all three similarities.

Question 3h.

The word for behind is wäny-.

The word for back is probably ngarrik-, but this form is difficult to deduce from the sources. Ngarr, ngarrg(a) or ngarrig were acceptable.

This is one of the more challenging questions and required students to recognise that the original sources are not consistent in their spellings. (Marks were not deducted for writing words without the diacritic/accent.)

Question 3i.

Students were asked to identify and define any possible suffixes that could be added to Table 6. Examples are the suffix -oody or -oodh, which may indicate a location.

Some students answered this question by referring to suffixes that had already been discussed in earlier questions and could not, as a result, be given marks.

Question 4

In general, the answers to Question 4 were good.

Question 4a.

* ‘sh’ is expressed by ‘tj’ (-tja also accepted)
* ‘f’ is expressed by ‘p’ (pu- also accepted)

Question 4b.

The two English words that end in consonant sounds are ‘bush’ and ‘porridge’. Either:

* ‘-a’ is added (English bush > Kukatja puutja)
* ‘-pa’ is added (English porridge > Kukatja piritj-piritjpa)

Question 4c.

Extension of meaning

Question 4d.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Kukatja word | Original meaning  | Additional modern day meaning |
| yilypi puturru | hairstring | leather belt |
| Kultu | upper part of the body | top of a dress |
| manatjaka | bottom | shoe, boot |
| rampali-patala | light, fragile | petticoat |

Two marks were awarded for all four parts correct, one for a partially correct answer, which would be either one or two correct answers.

Question 4e.

pirril-pirri: The meaning is ‘comb’, literally that which does the action of scratching. ‘Scrubbing brush’ or ‘scratching stick’ were also acceptable as were ‘rake’, ‘fork’ and terms for items that scratch something to smooth it down, such as ‘sandpaper’ or ‘file’.

Nyakunytja-pirri: The meaning is ‘mirror’ and ‘glasses’, literally ‘the thing that does the action of seeing’. Other words like ‘telescope’, ‘television’, ‘binoculars’, ‘magnifying glass’ were also acceptable.

ngantjal-pirri: The meaning is ‘magnet’, literally the thing that adheres, sticks. Words relating to things sticking, such as ‘sticky tape’ and ‘glue’, were also acceptable.

Most of the answers to this question showed a level of imagination; students came up with answers that the assessors didn’t expect but had explanations as to why.

Question 4f.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Numeral | new Kukatja word |
| 6 | kalyu |
| 7 | wirlki |
| 9 | karrpu |

Question 4g.

wirlki was adopted for 7 on account of its appearance (the numeral 7 looks like a boomerang).

kalyu was adopted for ‘6’ on account of the similarity of the numeral ‘6’ to a raindrop, possibly hanging off a tree or a plant.

karrpu was adopted for ‘9’ on account of the small circle on top of this numeral, which resembles the sun being at the top of the sky.

Marks were awarded for plausible accounts linking a numeral with the meaning of an existing Kukatja word, even if the student incorrectly matched the numeral to the word.

Section 2

There was a range in the quality of the responses to Questions 5 and 6, though in general the students’ work was impressive.

Some responses, while mostly good, seemed too rehearsed and generic. Students are advised to make the effort to engage with the specific stimulus material. Some answers appeared to have borrowed much from the practice exams, discussing issues such as community consultation, need for borrowing words from other languages and so on, which sometimes did not relate directly to the topic of the question.

Question 5

Question 5a.

Students needed to describe the protocols and processes of community involvement relating to the production and usage of language resources in relation to grinding stones, and describe the benefits that community knowledge would bring to the process. Since some of these objects might be physically still available, for example in local museums and keeping places, students would need to discuss with community the appropriate access to those objects.

They will also describe the need to carefully examine original sources about the history of the target community and any references to making of or use of grinding stones; just as the prompt from Smyth refers to different communities, there may be features of this technology that apply across wide areas of the country, but there might also be specific different types of grinding stones that were used in particular areas.

They may also need to consider where the stone used is sourced from, from rock outcrops, from river-beds etc., or did it come from outside the country.

It might be that information about the production and use of these grinding stones is lacking or not sufficient in the particular target community, and that knowledge from other neighbouring groups might need to be brought in to cover some of the gaps in the records of the target community.

(Students should address all four bullet points in the question. This question is marked out of 20 (for both parts a. and b. together).

Question 5b.

Examples of what would need to be considered in answering this part are:

* Words for the grinding stones, the words for the actions involved in making them, the actions involved in using them. The answer should also include words for foods and substances to be ground, and words for the ground products (such as flour, paste, powder and so on). Associated activities could also include pounding, pouring, baking, collecting, winnowing and so on.
* Where will these words be sourced from, if not found in language lists for the particular language? Will these words be borrowed from neighbouring groups or maybe innovated, coined anew (as in the example of Question 4).
* Words for associated activities (sharpening, grinding, grinding grooves etc.)
* Perhaps there will be grammatical / morphological processes that need to be considered, such as repeated action.

Question 6

Responses to Question 6 were generally good.

Question 6a.

The question asked students to describe the resources they would create for a language reclamation project for their study language. Examples of what we would expect in this question include:

* Students could give an insight into what they have been doing in class by way of cultural/language reclamation.
* This could include creation of songs, stories etc. in language, animated stories in language.
* Such a presentation could also include clips of interviews with Elders, custodians, language activists, language teachers and/or language learners.
* An audio-visual presentation should also probably start with a Welcome to Country (WTC) or Acknowledgement of Country (as appropriate).

A good answer would introduce the community and describe who to ask. It would also approach the issue of what is important to the community. It might touch on what remains in the folk-memory of the distant past, as well as touching on history since colonisation. The question leads students to think about Dreaming and other stories. The question of the sensitivity of this information might also need to be canvassed.

In addition, students are asked to consider the types of materials that could be produced to convey the messages that community wish to give about themselves. This could include video, audio, printed books with QR codes linked to online audio and video, animations etc. It may be that particular communities have a preference for one type of media, and students might also discuss that.

Question 6b.

Students were asked to explain the aspects of their study language they think should be included in a Visitor’s Centre. Possible answers might include:

* place names and personal names
* short and useful words in language
* pronouns
* animals associated with the moiety system
* words for weapons, objects, kinship terms, stars, history of the region
* words for plants, trees, different types of foods
* body parts

In addition, answers could also refer to souvenirs, such as postcards, playing cards, T-shirts and so on that include or feature words and expressions in the target language.