“Language is Like Food”: Language Revitalization and Maintenance in Relation to Indigenous Wellbeing

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Abstract:
For many years we have sensed that the retention and revitalization of Australian languages can lead to health benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but it is only rather recently that more concrete demonstrations of these views have begun to emerge. For instance, the Australian Human Rights Commission’s Social Justice Report 2009 observes, ‘A ten-year study of Indigenous Australians in Central Australia found that “connectedness to culture, family and land, and opportunities for self-determination” assist in significantly lower morbidity and mortality rates in Homeland residents’ [http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/sj_report/sjreport09/chap3.html]. Elsewhere we find instances of collaborations between language revitalisation efforts and those involved in health delivery. Such collaborations can be mutually beneficial as language documentation provides a clearer vision of cultural considerations for health workers. This paper will survey the growing interest in the link between language retention and revitalization, and, Indigenous wellbeing not just in Australia but other parts of the world, including British Columbia.