

Jamaine Wilesmith transcript

Hi, I'm Jamaine, also known as Durriwiyn, which is my artist's name. I'm a Biripi Worimi person from Taree, New South Wales, and a student at UQ studying the Bachelor of Arts.

The journey for me with learning my language has been very tough, very long, I've been trying to learn it for the past six years now and I have been incorporating it into like my songs and some stories to try and I guess preserve and make it become like a common knowledge for myself because I like to do a lot of creative stuff, so I like to have, like incorporate my language into everything I do to like make sure I become familiar with certain words because it's a different type of like dialect to what I'm used to and the sounds and the phonetics to it.

It does become very challenging to remember the different sounds that letters do make or like a bunch of letters make. Like, for example, G and K in my language are both the same sound, or if there's like a G that's written, it can also be a K. So like they are very intertwined and basically the same thing.

Growing up there wasn't much language spoken around me. There was sort of like gatekeeping towards our language. There was a certain family back home that did sort of harbour all of our knowledge, like from language to like ceremony to our, all that type of stuff, and it sort of stopped the blossoming of my I guess cultural identity and understanding that it's sort of like an open game. Like we all have some sort of access to it now, one) because of the internet, but also a lot of those family members that did hold the knowledge have either passed away or has given it out.

There wasn't much access to my language growing up, and also there's very limited access now, but it has gotten better over time. There was a certain family group that did hold a lot of the knowledge on language and cultural practices. They have either passed on now or passed down the knowledge and now a lot of the community has access to it through like teaching programmes and stuff through TAFE, which is great.

There's also some things on the internet that I've accessed myself to sort of get a grasp of what I'm getting myself into with my language just to start off somewhere and then hopefully incorporate that into my music and any creative endeavours I have.

There's also a recording from I think it's like the 1950s possibly, maybe 60s, and it's Uncle Eddie Lobban, who wasn't from our Biripi country and he didn't really like... he just grew up there basically, but he was the last person that actually spoke language fluently. And there's an audio recording of him speaking that language. And we haven't had access to that because it was in the State Archives for a very long time and only a certain family group had access to that actual recording. So there was a bit of limitations with that as well and a lot of our Elders suffered from that because they lost a lot of their language and like cultural practices because one) they couldn't practice for a very long time.

Like, for example, there was a ban from going into the town to access anything from the mission from where I'm from 'til the 1970s. It was a long period of time where they just couldn't do anything, they couldn't access anything, they only could stay on like the mission and live life like white people.

The role music plays in the learning and also the preservation of my language is one on a deep level and personal. It's very close to me, even spiritually, because some of the words that I have learned I've already had a connection with but with more of like the English language. So when I learn words that I already very much like and then I can translate them into my own language, it holds a lot more deeper meaning and like an emotional connection to them.

I feel like with music I can reflect, also express and project, something that I really deeply believe in or feel and then to be able to do that in my language just means so much more than words could describe. I mean, it's something that's been within me for so long and suppressed that I've been always trying to find an outlet for it, and having to hold onto something that I can't control or even have power over, and then now gaining that power, I feel like that's just one of the best things I could ask for.

The first song I tried to write in language was called Bingay, which is brother in my language. It was sort of a song that represents my inner child and talking to my younger self and seeing my younger self as more of a brother, but it also is a connection to the brother I have and then also my other family members. And it's just me expressing my love for them and saying that I will be home, I'm sorry that I left, I'll come back, I'll always come home, and I will love you guys forever.

And it basically just touches on those emotions that a lot of Indigenous people feel when they move away from home and they sort of lose their connection to their country and their people. They have a lot of very deeply rooted guilt, like sadness when they leave. So I feel like the song sort of expresses that light-heartedness towards those emotions and saying there is a positive that does come out of this. And I think it's more important to find yourself rather than be situated in a place where everything's always the same or everything's already built for you. It's sort of, in my opinion, better to go out, find yourself, and bring all that knowledge back to where you're from and then spread it around.

A significant part in my learning of language is my grandmother. She was my mentor, my cultural mentor, my guide in every way possible. She was always giving me advice, cultural knowledge, a smack up the head if I wasn't listening to what she was saying. She also helped me with understanding that not everything you hear is right. And with our language, for example, because there is a lot of like hidden words and hidden meanings and incorrect meanings, my nan was always very strong on saying like make sure you find evidence behind this or someone else vouch for that word or how it's pronounced or what it means. She was very stern with anything cultural, but specifically with language because she says words have power. And in our language, the words that we use, mean a lot. There isn't many because they mean very specific things.

The challenges of using my language in music, especially in digital spaces, is that sometimes they're incorrect or have different meanings or have no meaning in English translation, so I'm just using these words without any knowledge in what they actually mean. I'm just putting them in place.

My Aunty Angela from back home in Taree, New South Wales, Biripi country, she is one of the teachers, language teachers back home and she also teaches at the TAFE and she has also been teaching the Elders, because there's a programme running to teach Elders language because we lost a lot of that knowledge and we want them to regain it, have power over it, and then also help us, the younger generations learn it as well and encourage us.

In the future, when creating my music and writing my lyrics in language, my Aunty has said that she will help me with the translation to make sure that everything is right in the context and also if there's any words that's needs to be added to make sure it makes sense in our language.

[end of recording]