Songs are a great way to learn and teach language. They are fun and easy to remember. Here are some different ways of developing songs in language...

TRANSLATE A WELL-KNOWN SONG

One advantage of translating a widely known English language song is that people already know the tune, as well as the meaning of the song. In the early days of a new Language program, Heads, shoulders, knees and toes is a popular choice because it teaches body parts. Many school programs, such Wiradjuri in Parkes, use a Good Morning song (“Yamandhu marang, yamandhu marang…”).

The main challenge of translating English songs is that the rhythm of the music may not fit readily with the Language words. Some of the the words may also be difficult to translate.

ORIGINAL SONGS IN MODERN STYLES

One advantage of writing an original song in language is that you can fit the words and music together as you go. Even a small amount of language can be used to make great songs. These can be fun songs to sing in the car with kids, or more elaborate pieces for performing in public.

“Our languages have a unique harmonic structure that resonates with this Land, this Land from which they are born. This is why we must continue our work in language revival. Our Old People left us a legacy, a responsibility to care for Country, and to care for Country we have to know the right stories, words and songs. When we say ‘sing up the country,’ that is what we are doing, and our Country hears us. When we say ‘make the country strong,’ that is what we are doing, when we speak our language, when we sing those songs.” - Vicki Couzens
LANGUAGE REVIVAL WORKSHOP
SONGS

Translating well-known songs can be challenging because the translation may not fit the tune too well on your first try. Sometimes you can deal with this by changing the meaning a bit – you can also experiment with changing the rhythm or the tune. You can also combine English and Language into one song depending on how much Language you’ve been able to reclaim.

1. Select a well-known song.
2. Replace some of the English words with Language words to the level you have learnt so far.
3. Try singing the song to the tune.
4. How well do the words fit with the tune?
5. What changes could you make to either the tune or the words, to help them fit together better?

- It is fine to rewrite the English words so the Language words can fit the music. Look at Uncle Stan’s version of ‘Silent Night’.
- Does a different word order help?
- Try thinking about the meaning of the whole line or song, not just one word at a time.
- For example, ‘Under the shade of a coolibah tree’ could be translated as ‘Under a tree, cool’. If you know a word-ending for ‘under’, you can make the line even shorter.
- Does this idea help your song translation project?

SILENT NIGHT

Muguwar ngurung, Yirimbang ngurung
_Silent night Holy night_

Mayinygalangbu baluganbu biyambul wirrinya
_All people and animals are all sleeping_

Maari-bu Dyuudyib-bu nganbala bimbala
_Mary and Joseph also are there in the stable_

Bali Yirimbang nganybula ngangaanha
_Baby holy they two caring for_

Bali yuwin Dyiidhu

_Baby named Jesus_

Biyaamidyu ngumambiyi
_God did, sent_

Uncle Stan Grant & John Rudder
Wiradjuri Songs Book 2