



# LITERACY DEVELOPMENT FOR LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION

Exploring Written Language and Literacy in the  
Endangered Language Context

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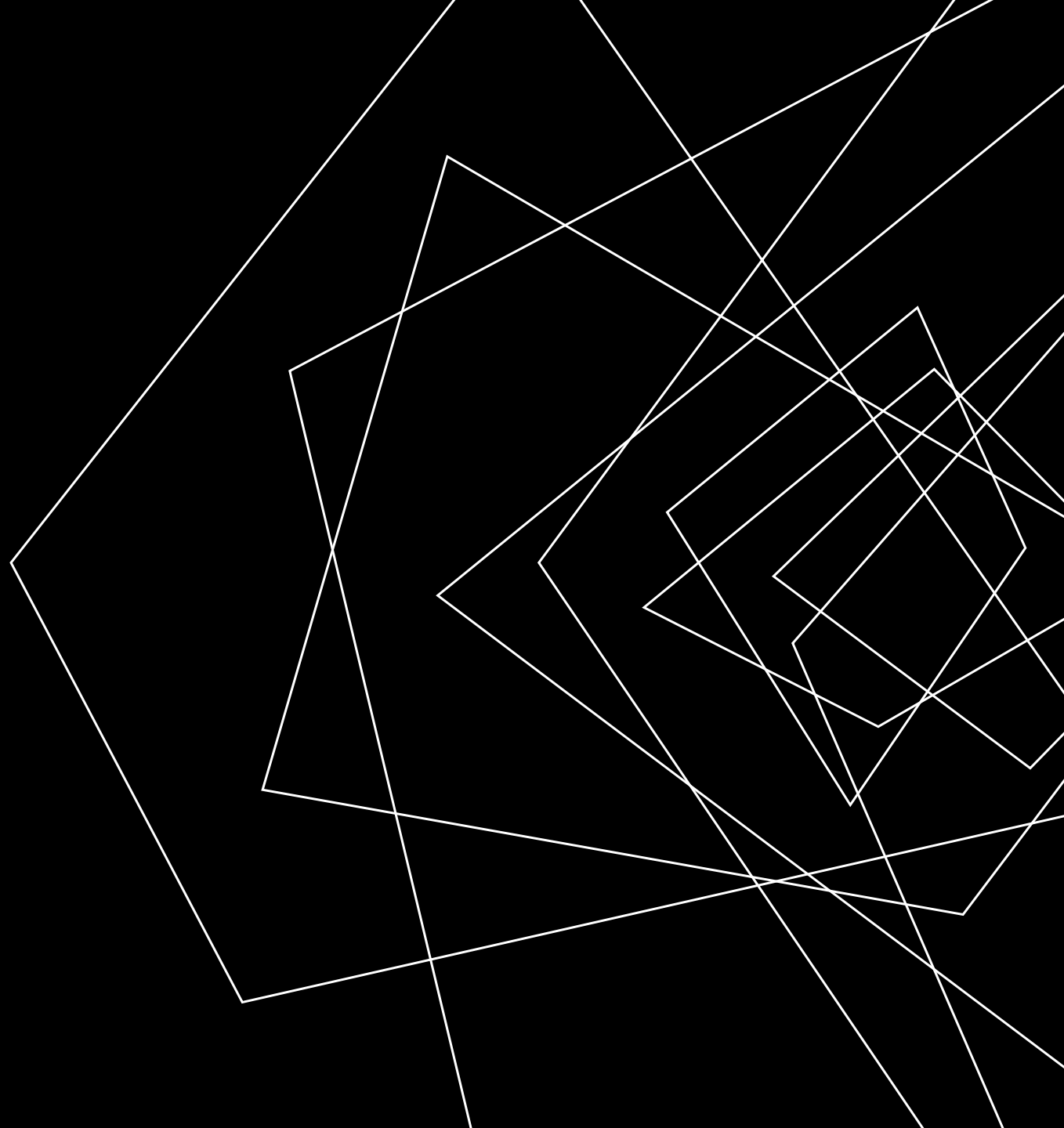
AWLL14 (2023)

# TOPICS



- English-focused trends in reading/writing research
- Reading/writing in the endangered language context
  - Multi-script environments
  - Writing system transference/influence
  - Orthographic variance
- Potential future study questions and challenges

TRENDS IN  
LITERACY  
RESEARCH

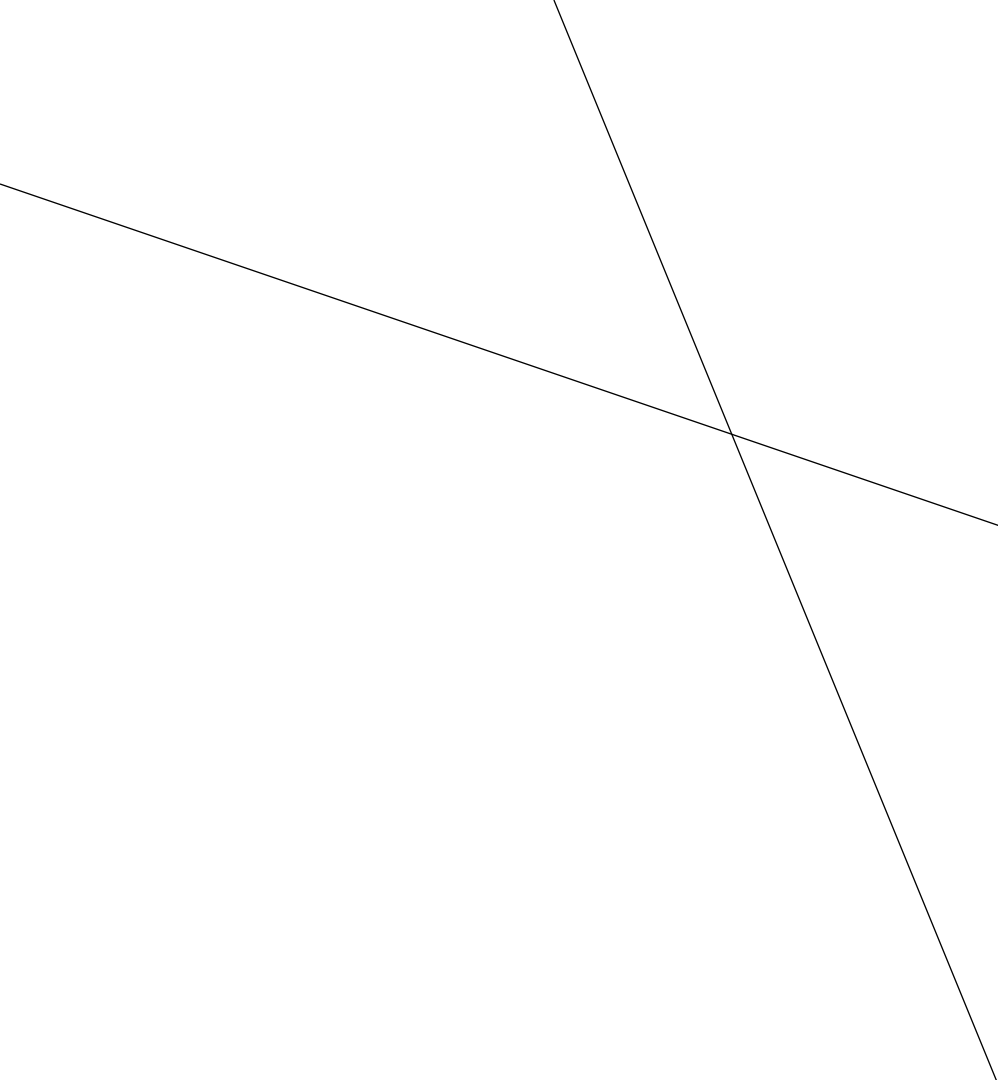


# ANGLOCENTRIC TENDENCIES

- Literacy research has a long history, but the majority of research has focused on English (Cook & Bassetti, 2005; Share, 2008).
- English is unique among most alphabetic writing systems (Share, 2008):
  - Highly opaque
  - Different decoding strategies
  - Elongated timeline for acquisition of decoding skills
- Even literature that does exist for other writing systems is typically focused on those with highly stabilized orthographies.

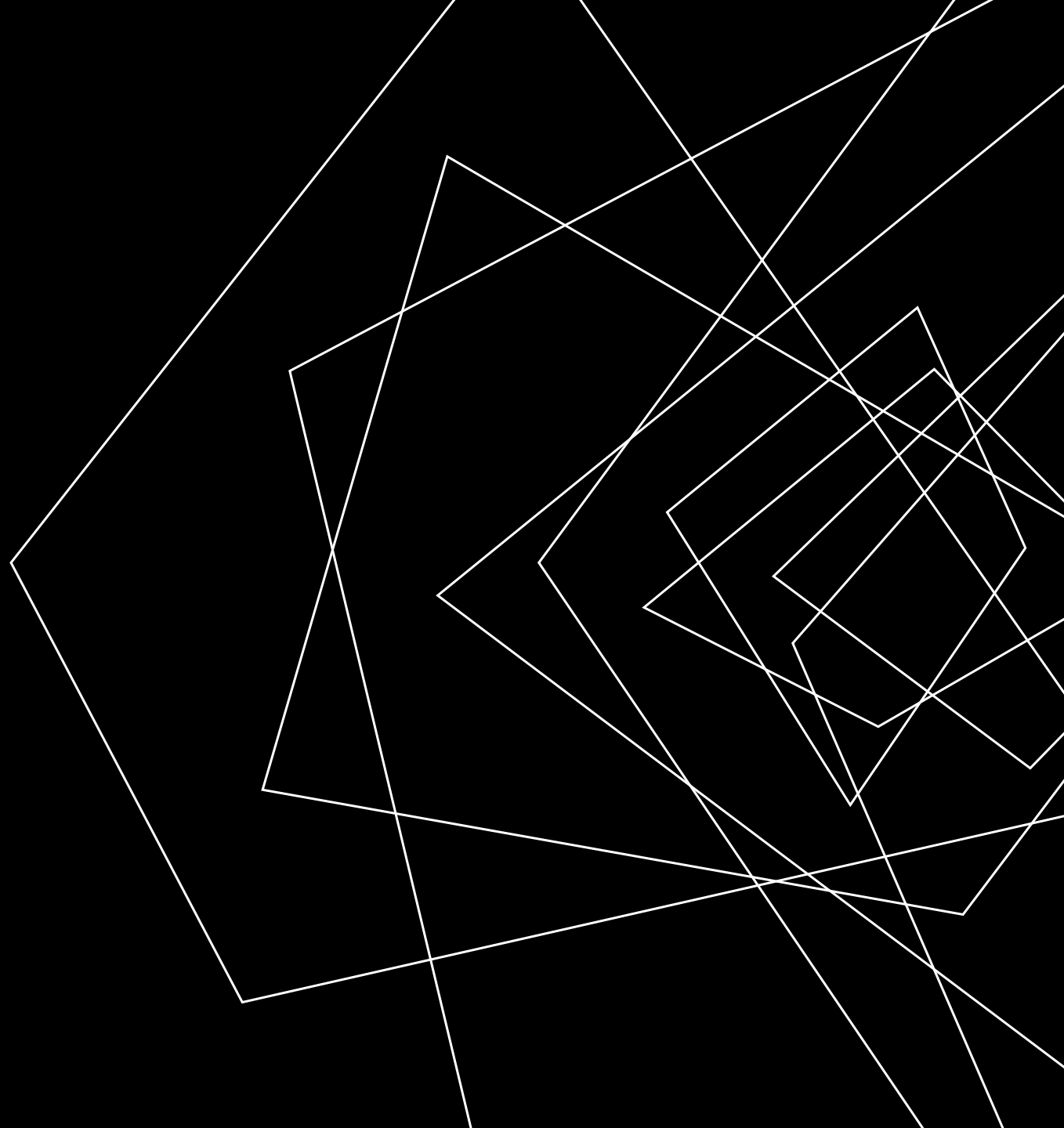
# ACCURACY VS. FLUENCY

- The question is often “how accurately can one read words?” but should it not be, rather, “how fluently can one read a text?”
  - This begs the question.... What is “fluency”?
  - Speed and automaticity (but not without accuracy)
- *Example:* Lamkang “surprise Bible readings” (Chelliah, p.c.)



*As stressed by Share (2008),  
to have a truly universal  
theory of literacy, it must  
be applicable to all  
languages (i.e., writing  
systems)*

**ENDANGERED  
LANGUAGES**  
(A UNIQUE CONTEXT)



# LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT

- Thousands of languages currently at risk, resulting in loss of indigenous knowledge and identities (Chelliah, 2021)
- Language Endangerment Index (LEI) has four criteria (Lee & Van Way, 2016):
  - Intergenerational transmission
  - Absolute number of current speakers
  - Speaker trends
  - Domains of language use



# ENDANGERED LANGUAGE CONTEXT

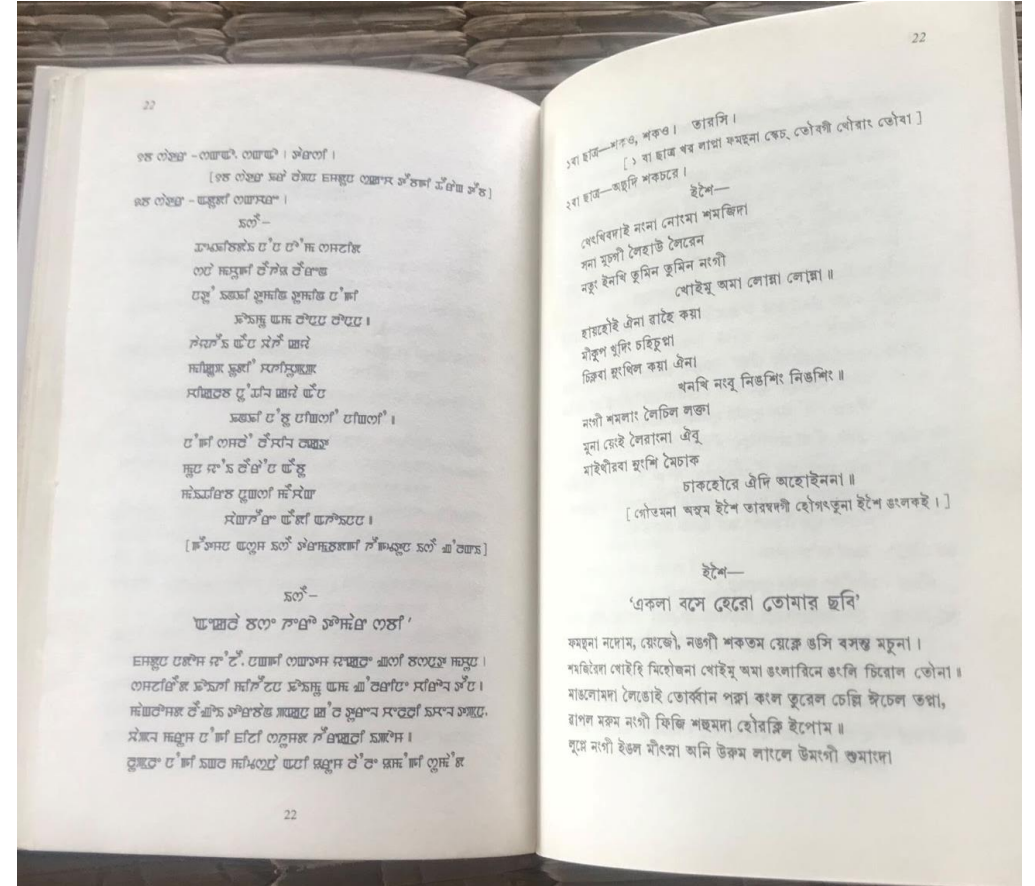
- Many languages were are still are unwritten
- Orthography, even writing system itself, may be in flux (Cahill & Rice, 2014; Chelliah & Garton, *in print*)
  - Multiple spellings for words
  - *Example:* Lamkang spellings of morphophonological processes (Chelliah & Garton, 2023)
  - Multi-script environments
- Many sociolinguistic factors at play (Cahill, 2014, 2021)
  - Influence of the majority language's writing system

# MULTI-SCRIPT ENVIRONMENTS

- It is not uncommon for languages to have undergone a series of script changes, which can result in multiscrypt environments.
- Prevalence of using Roman script for easy use online can also result in multiscrypt environments online.

# MULTI-SCRIPT ENVIRONMENTS

- *Example:* Manipuri had a script shift in 2006, resulting in older generations knowing Bangla and younger knowing Meitei Mayek. Roman script, though unofficial, is the bridging script (Garton, Dale, Roy & Basumatary, 2022)



Photograph of Meitei Mayek and Bangla side-by-side pages in “Crimson Rainclouds”, photo courtesy of L. Somi Roy

# MULTI-SCRIPT ENVIRONMENTS

- *Example:* Bodo (Boro) has had a series of script shifts over the past several decades (Sarmah, 2014). Roman script is also common online alongside Devanagari due to ease of use (Garton et al., 2022).

*Screenshot of a publicly available Facebook post by the Bodoland Talks page, with comment responses (Bodoland Talks, Sept. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023).*

**Bodoland Talks**  
2d · 🌐

अखाफोराव जानबुं network 4G नि खुस्थिया फसंहैनो लाहार-फाहार खालामदों "नकिया" कम्पानिआ।  
बे बोसोरनि जोबथासिमहालागैनो माउफुंगोन होननानै फोरमायदों।

👍👎👏 85 12 comments 7 shares

👍 Like      💬 Comment

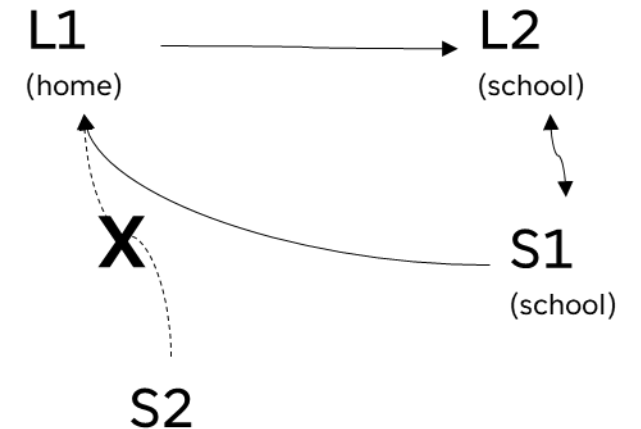
Most relevant ▾

**Bodoland Talks**  
बेनि गेजेरजों जोंनि बुहुमनि सुबुं फोरहा मा मा खाबुफोर मोननो हागोन बेखौबो खेबसेयैनो फोरमामखानायमोनबा मोजां जागौमोन Bodoland Talks  
1d

**Be buhumaonw dabw net anw nanga arw okhafwrao baoso** 🤔🤔🤔  
2d Edited

# NATIVE SCRIPT

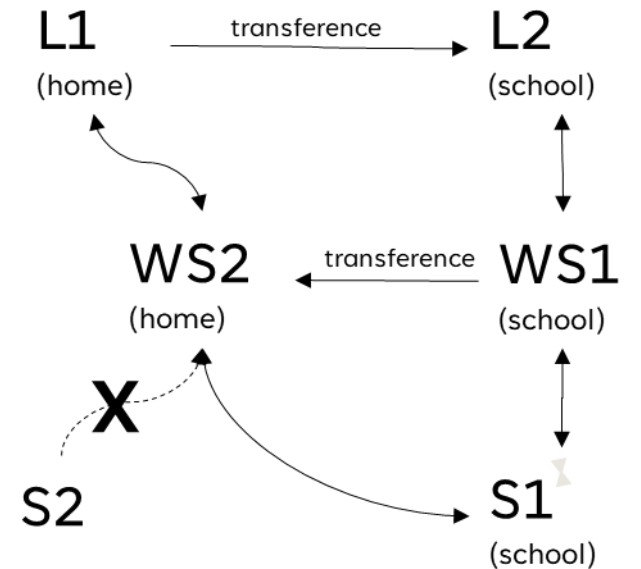
- Native script (S1) (Gnanadesikan, 2020)
- Learning a new script (S2) is difficult, like learning a new language (L2) (Gnanadesikan, 2020)
- Possible scenario that an individual's S1 is the script used for the writing system of their L2 (Gnanadesikan, 2020)
  - The script most familiar to a community could be favored for the unwritten L1



Adapted from Gnanadesikan (2020, p. 116)

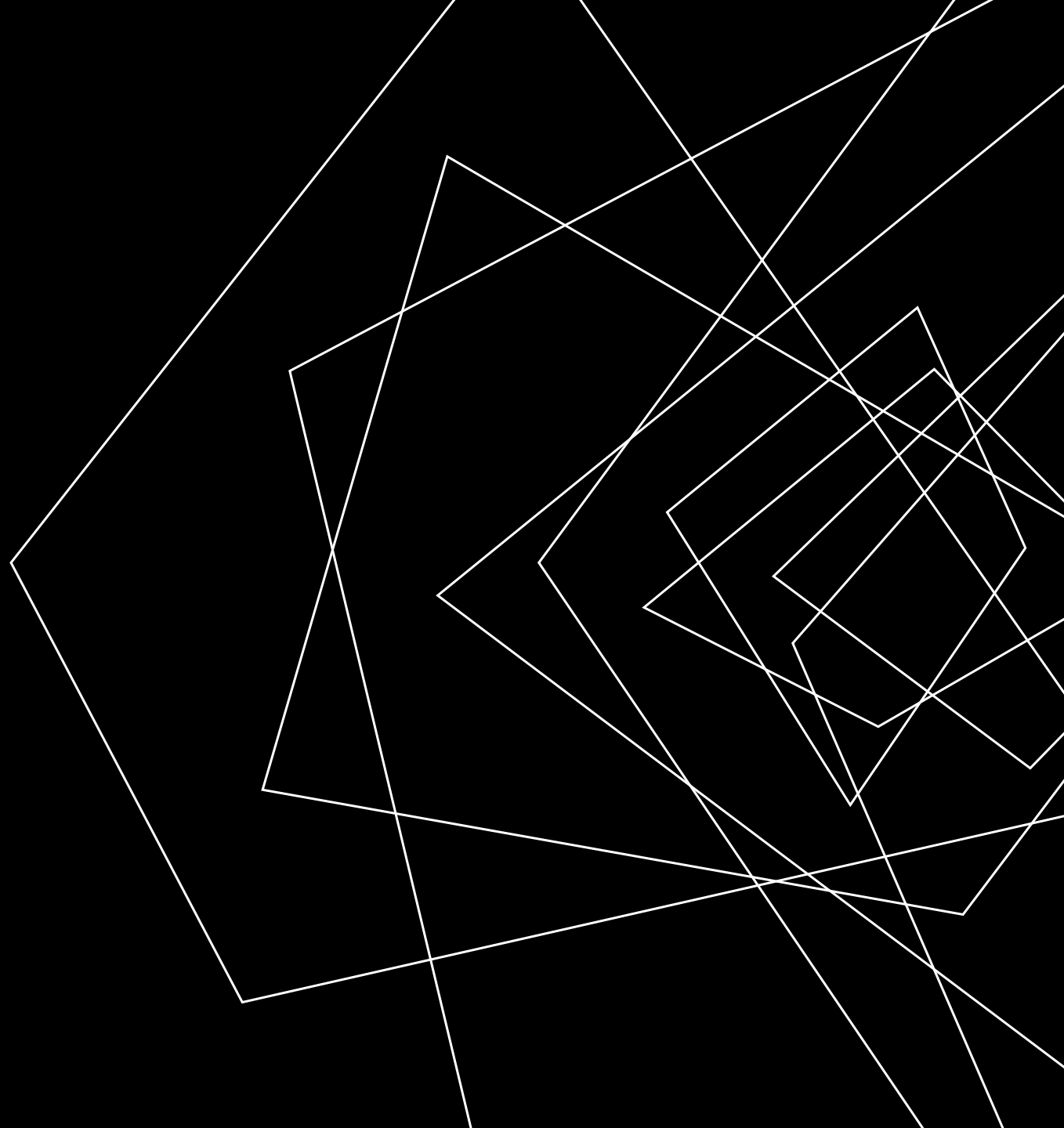
# WS1 AND WS2

- First writing system learned (WS1)
- For endangered languages, WS1 may be used by the majority language, which may be ones L2



Expanded from Gnanadesikan (2020, p. 116) to include writing system relations

**NEXT STEPS?**



# POTENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- What are the impacts of script code-switching on an individual's reading and writing behavior?
  - Does script switching also come with other forms of code switching (register, etc.)?
  - How do script changes within a text influence reading fluency? (i.e., is it disruptive?)



# POTENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- How does orthographic variance influence reading and writing behavior during correspondences?
  - Do individuals code-switch spelling conventions?
  - If so, which party code switches?
- What are the effects of majority language transference on reading fluency and decoding strategies for a minority, endangered language?
  - Does familiarity, or lack thereof, with another script influence decoding skill development?
  - When the majority language has a conflicting graphematic solution space, how does this influence decoding?

## POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

- Familiarity to different writing systems, orthographies, or even scripts across study participants (difficult to control for these variables)
- Variables such as word familiarity/frequency (commonly used in literacy research) may be difficult to determine without comprehensive corpus
- Participant numbers for quantitative studies

## IN CONCLUSION...

- The endangered language context is uniquely complex for reading and writing
- Marginal research outside the English context, and even less on endangered languages
- There are rich opportunities to learn more about the cognitive processes involved with reading and writing from unique perspectives

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**THANK YOU!**

Questions?