

Animumbes: Designing A Ground-Up Kristang Language Textbook Series Teaching Cosmopolitan Creole-Indigenous Approaches to Global Citizenship

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ABSTRACT: Kristang (iso 639-3:mcm) is the critically endangered language of the Kristang, Serani or Portuguese-Eurasian people of Melaka (Malaysia), Singapore, Perth (Australia) and Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), a Creole-Indigenous community currently undergoing sustained revitalization under the leadership of the author, who is at once the primary scholarly authority on Kristang, the only teacher of the language in Singapore, and the 13th and current Kabesa or Indigenous Chief of the entire community. This paper is a critical analysis of the design features of the first volume of the Kristang textbook series *Animumbes* (K. M. Wong, 2024a) initially written to complement the extraordinary milestone of the National University of Singapore becoming the first formal institution to ever offer Kristang language classes in January 2025 in collaboration with the author, and building on ten years of materials developed through low-cost grassroots volunteer language teaching supporting revitalization under the Kodrah Kristang initiative and originally described in K. M. Wong (2019), as well as earlier textbooks and reference material produced in the 1990s and in 2016 at the Portuguese Settlement (Singho et al., 2016). With an emphasis on inclusivity, reclamation of previously-occluded or diminished ways of being Kristang, and on framing the language and culture for the first time as living, relevant, future-oriented and globally literate and expansive, the paper also explores the manner in which the development of *Animumbes* acts as a decolonial pedagogical artefact that recentres Kristang epistemology, asserts Creole and Indigenous ownership over knowledge production, and challenges deficit-based, heritage-language and colonial standardisation models.

KEYWORDS: Kristang, textbook, Creole, Indigenous, Singapore, revitalization

1. INTRODUCTION AND POSITIONALITY

This paper provides a detailed analysis of the design and considerations behind the Kristang-language textbook *Animumbes* as a case study in Creole-Indigenous pedagogical sovereignty and in how Creole-Indigenous concepts can be operationalised alongside Western ideas and approaches to materials development for language teaching. It therefore advocates a situated model of Indigenous materials development framed within the unusual context of Creole-Indigenous language revitalisation, and necessarily incorporates an extensive detailing of the context of how the textbook came to be, the situation under which it was developed, and the positionality of the author, where I occupy a unique, atypical and/or complex and underrepresented position as the thirty-three-year-old author of the textbook and of this paper, the main scholar-practitioner for Kristang, and the 13th Kabesa, Cowboy of Heaven or Indigenous Chief of the Kristang community – a position that also did not have ontological visibility until I myself consolidated it in 2023 as part of revitalization efforts, and which I have held since 2015.

The language that the textbook is designed for, Papia Kristang (ISO 639-3: mcm), is the critically endangered Creole-Indigenous language of my people, the Kristang or Portuguese-Eurasian people of Melaka, Singapore, Perth, and Kuala Lumpur. Emerging in the early sixteenth century from intermarriages between Portuguese soldiers and local Malay inhabitants after the former conquered the city of Melaka in August 1511, Kristang developed from a distinctive urban Creole-Indigenous culture in Melaka and Singapore that, in addition to a primarily Portuguese-infused lexicon and Malay grammatical substrate, has also since incorporated influence from Dutch, Konkani, Malayalam, Tamil, Hokkien and a significant number of other languages (Baxter, 1988, 2025; Baxter & Bastos, 2012; Baxter & de Silva, 2004). Yet despite this remarkable longevity, the language is now severely endangered, with fewer than 100-200 speakers estimated to remain in Singapore and a rapidly contracting pool of elderly speakers in Malaysia. Postcolonial marginalisation, linguistic stigma, and state-led essentialisation of Kristang culture into a small, semi-museumified set of songs, dances, and costumes as part of nation-building efforts have further entrenched Kristang as a peripheral, nearly forgotten identity for many born in the late twentieth century (Pereira, 2015, pp. 53–57).

My own trajectory that led me to becoming Kabesa and the main scholar-practitioner for Kristang further reflects this historical dissociation. Born in 1992 to a Kristang mother and Chinese-Peranakan father in Singapore, and raised with little conscious awareness of Kristang and Eurasian language or culture, I initially only consciously rediscovered the language while

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conducting research for a general-audience linguistics magazine article on endangered languages in island Southeast Asia in 2015, while I was a third-year undergraduate at the National University of Singapore on a Singapore Ministry of Education Local Teaching Scholarship. Deciding to document it, discovering a mysterious, rapid and unconscious fluency with learning it along the way, and being encouraged by one older Kristang collaborator, Bernard Stephen Mesenas, to ensure the language would continue in Singapore by teaching it, I founded the grassroots non-profit revitalisation initiative Kodrah Kristang (“Awaken, Kristang”) in early 2016, offering lessons in Kristang to anyone of any ethnicity, age or background for free with Bernard and I doing the instructing.

Kodrah thus began as a small, volunteer-run set of beginner Kristang classes supported by grassroots partners and a young Singaporean core team, with the simple goal of making Kristang accessible in a city where no such opportunities existed, and I initially had no interest in developing a textbook, preferring to focus on using digital, ad hoc materials and worksheets that were less expensive and time-consuming to produce and more straightforward to distribute. Public interest quickly exceeded expectations, especially after a national newspaper feature in November 2016 that catalysed national awareness, followed by international exposure through a BBC feature in 2017, the first Kristang Language Festival later that year, and Kristang’s visibility in Singapore’s 2018 National Day Parade and 2019 Bicentennial commemorations. These moments decisively overturned entrenched narratives of Kristang as obsolete. Yet between 2018 and 2020 the initiative thereafter faced a severe rupture: I experienced sustained sexual and psychoemotional abuse by a Kodrah Core Team member, followed by reputational attacks and a false accusation that I had Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), which severely destabilised the project and coincided with the onset of COVID-19, forcing an unplanned suspension of classes in early 2020. Entering therapy in 2019 not only addressed this trauma but uncovered long-occluded dimensions of my neurodivergence (autism and ADHD), family history, and linguistic biography, including the realisation that Kristang had been taught to me as a toddler by my great-grandmother Mabel Martens. This reframed both my intuitive fluency and the broader pattern of historical erasure affecting my family and the Kristang community more generally.

When Kodrah resumed in 2022, these revelations fundamentally reshaped its scope and epistemological orientation. The initiative expanded beyond language teaching into a wider Creole-Indigenous renaissance encompassing Kristang ontology, psychology, history, and methods of knowledge renewal, including Uncertainty Thinking, Individuation Theory, dreamfishing, and the Roda Mundansa. At the same time, my own positionality shifted: public visibility, especially as the first openly gay, polyamorous, atheist and neurodivergent ethnic community leader in conservative Singapore civil society, independence from state institutions, and community practice increasingly positioned me as a relational leader rather than merely an instructor, a role that became publicly acknowledged in 2023 and recognised as the historically grounded office of the Kabesa, Cowboy of Heaven or Chief of the entire Kristang people. This leadership context explains both the egalitarian yet directive structure of revitalisation and the community’s rapid uptake of its innovations. By January 2025, despite attempts to neutralise my influence through formal politics, Kristang reached a new institutional threshold when the National University of Singapore became the first university to offer full Kristang-language courses, taught by me and grounded in nearly a decade of community-language teaching praxis and refinement. This in turn required the development of more consolidated curriculum material that both remained faithful to the post-pandemic cultural and existential transformations of Kristang life and incorporated everything that had happened within Kodrah and elsewhere over the previous decade, demonstrating that what began as grassroots language classes had matured into a comprehensive, future-oriented Indigenous pedagogical architecture.

It was hence in response to this institutional and cultural need that the textbook series *Animumbes* was conceived. Published in August 2024 as part of the preparations for the NUS class and shaped by nearly a decade of community-grounded teaching, *Animumbes* integrates Kristang grammar, philosophy, polynomic variation, Creole-Indigenous logic, relational pedagogy, and mental-health-centred approaches into a coherent, learner-friendly curriculum. It is also a reflexive artefact of my unusual but critically important positionality, encoding in its structure, sequencing, voice, and pedagogical ethics my simultaneous identity as Kristang-language native speaker, trauma survivor, gay, non-binary, polyamorous and atheist community leader, and scholar-practitioner balancing Creole-Indigenous, community and academic considerations and worlds, and less-normative, historically marginalised ways of being Kristang, including atheist, queer and neurodivergent approaches to the identity, and having a non-European-origin surname while still being accepted as Kristang by the community¹. It is therefore the first Kristang textbook designed simultaneously for language revitalisation, decolonisation, and global citizenship training, and its conceptual foundations—multimodal scaffolding, affective learning, polynomic variation, trauma-informed praxis, and Kristang-centred identity work—mark a paradigmatic departure from earlier Kampong-textbook or heritage-linguistics models, presenting the Kristang people and culture in their true, Urban Indigenous form as profoundly cosmopolitan, modern, globally and cross-culturally literate and future-oriented.

¹ see Pereira, 2015, pp. 78-94 for a discussion of why this is salient in the Kristang and Eurasian communities in Singapore.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Across the world, the preparation of material for the teaching of small, minority or endangered Indigenous languages has become a subject of both academic study and language planning and policy at state, institutional or government level over the first two decades of the twenty-first century (e.g. Boukhentache, 2024; Ho, 2022; Limerick & Hornberger, 2021) in parallel with wider global and/or large-scale recognitions of the rights, dignities and lived realities of Indigenous peoples. Thoughtful and reasonable textbook and materials selection, whether within the particular Indigenous context or frame or at scale across languages and cultures, is intuitively something that any language teacher will recognise as foundational to positive success outcomes, and existing research in Western academia also consistently confirms the same (Fujii et al., 2023), with significant paradigms and frameworks for materials development for English and world languages existing as clear traditions in academia across the second half of the twentieth century (e.g. Tomlinson, 2010, 2023). However, existing scholarship also demonstrates that pedagogical materials for endangered languages, which often have a patchwork of speakers at varying levels of fluency who are all often also unconsciously expected to move toward dominant ideas of native speakerness (Leeman & King, 2014, pp. 218–219), are still very often shaped by external academic, documentary, or national ideologies that orient toward these larger languages rather than the pedagogical and epistemic frameworks of the communities themselves as a result of assimilation pressure from dominant hegemonic paradigms (Beckett, 2022; Hinton, 2013). In many communities and situations, including Kristang, this has resulted in textbooks that thus unintentionally reproduce colonial-era registers and perceptions of the language, and also causes such learning material to fail to resonate with younger learners, especially from the *Idaderes* / Millennial (born 1981 to 1997 in Kristang epistemology), *Zamyedes* / Gen Z (born 1997 to 2013) and *Adransedes* / Gen Alpha & Beta (born 2013 to 2031), whose worldviews often are much more inherently decolonial and anti-hegemonic, and differ dramatically from those of earlier generations. Supporting a gradual renegotiation of this paradigm is a large body of work from Indigenous language education scholarship, which argues that materials must reflect community epistemologies, ecological relationships, and relational modes of learning if maintenance, preservation or revitalisation is to be sustainable. Here, pedagogical materials are understood not merely as tools for teaching a language but as also inherently serving as carriers of worldview, affect, and identity, demonstrating the importance and value intergenerational learning, narrative knowledge, multimodal expression, and the embedding of cultural logic within material that teaches grammar and vocabulary (Creed, 2024; Hermes et al., 2012). Even within this frame, moreover, the actual Indigenous language *textbook* as a designed object has still generally received only minimal attention in applied linguistics.

Within *creole studies*, the situation is even more complicated. Creole languages have long been framed by European scholarship as linguistically “simple,” structurally reduced, or derivative (DeGraff, 2005) and these stereotypes have often unfortunately shaped the design of pedagogical materials. Creoles are still often “mostly informally tolerated” at best in multilingual language ecologies and societies (Migge et al., 2010, p. 1), and textbooks produced within postcolonial nation-states frequently standardise away variation, reproduce colonial orthographic norms, or privilege European lexifiers (Migge et al., 2010). As a result, textbook-based representations of creoles often obscure their internal complexity, cultural specificity, and modernity. Even fewer studies examine endangered creoles like Kristang specifically, where communities face the dual challenge of cultural erasure and epistemic delegitimization; most case studies focus on large-scale Indigenous languages (e.g., Navajo, Māori, Sámi, Hawaiian), whose institutional support structures and speaker bases differ substantially from those of a critically endangered urban language like Kristang, and where epistemology and evolutions or reclamations in worldview have generally proceeded after the success of revitalization for some time, not in tandem with it. Hence, there is virtually no published literature on textbook design for small languages that are creole in origin, polynomic, highly urbanised and simultaneously undergoing twenty-first-century deep epistemological and existential renegotiation and reinvigoration in addition to and in parallel with language revitalization.

The specific case of Kristang language teaching as part of revitalisation has also received minimal academic treatment in the pedagogical literature beyond descriptive grammar, lexicon, and sociolinguistic documentation (e.g. Baxter, 1988, 2025; Baxter & de Silva, 2004). Existing materials produced in Melaka, Singapore, and Perth have historically mostly reflected the heritage-language paradigm: they focus on phrase lists, limited grammatical explanation, and highly constrained semantic fields. None have been produced within the Creole-Indigenous axiological framework specific to Kristang (see Methodology below), and none incorporate other philosophical, psychological, and cosmopolitan components that have since become central to the Kristang revitalisation movement. There is likewise no scholarship addressing how Kristang’s polynomic variation, Indigenous ontologies, trauma-conscious pedagogy, or queer/neurodivergent-inclusive paradigms might be embedded in textbook design.

It is into these theoretical and practical gaps that the present paper thus seeks to intervene by showing how the Kristang textbook *Animumbes* functions as a unique Kristang-designed, Kristang-controlled instructional architecture embodying Kristang axiology and community practice in ways that also extend and concretise the scope of what is possible in revitalisation. On a meta-structural level, it additionally seeks to explore how such an approach reconfigures dominant assumptions about what counts as legitimate textbook design in language revitalisation.

3. METHODOLOGY

Rather than treating textbook construction as a purely linguistic or structural task, *Animumbes* was uniquely developed through a relational, values-driven, community-embedded methodology that sought to articulate a Kristang-centred mode of knowledge production as a means of defying and deconstructing the aforementioned stereotypes. The methodology was thus a combination of (1) standard best practices for materials development for world languages and especially English as refined and clarified by Tomlinson (2010, 2023) (2) Kristang Creole-Indigenous axiology specific to the culture (K. M. Wong, 2025), clarified and formalised during the expanded revitalisation period between 2023 and 2025 and aligned with the original pedagogical and sociocultural principles that guided Kodrah Kristang from its inception, and (3) the same six pillars of a global-citizenship orientation inherent to Kodrah identified and theorised in K. M. Wong (2019, Sections 9.1–9.6).

3.1 Context

The design of *Animumbes* took place within a revitalisation landscape that had undergone significant epistemological expansion following the uncovering and articulation of Kristang axiology and ontology in the *Libru Laranja*. Kristang axiology—comprised of the eight *balorkoroza* values of *saudadi* (wistful yearning), *elisia* (bittersweet joy), *erodi* (playful irreverence), *ireidi* (numinous self-regard), *soltu* (agentic independence), *teru* (tender affection), *perzefra* (superhuman resilience), and *fortidang* (dauntless courage)—provides the ethical, emotional, and relational foundation through which Kristang knowledge is produced, evaluated, and transmitted. This axiology thus provided a coherent interpretive lens for understanding what Kristang pedagogical practice should achieve: a future-oriented sense of longing and possibility in the language’s presentation (*saudadi*), a compassionate acknowledgement of intergenerational trauma and its emotional textures (*elisia*), the embedding of Kristang humour, mutability, and creative subversion (*erodi*), the cultivation of emotional dignity and empowered self-recognition in learners (*ireidi*), the fostering of learner agency and autonomy within a polynomic linguistic environment (*soltu*), the centring of tenderness and relational safety in classroom interactions (*teru*), the modelling of resilience amid historical fragmentation and linguistic loss (*perzefra*), and the affirmation of Kristang cultural survival as an ethical and communal imperative (*fortidang*).

On a wider ecosystemic level, within this revitalised epistemic landscape, the construction of *Animumbes* was also framed not as the production of a ‘heritage language textbook’, but as the production of the textbook for a living language and the formalisation of a Creole-Indigenous pedagogical system consistent with Kristang values, community psychology, and identity formation. The context also included a decade of grassroots Kodrah Kristang classroom data, community interactions, and teaching observations, as well as the transition of Kristang instruction into the National University of Singapore in 2025. These shifting pedagogical environments informed the methodological decision to design *Animumbes* as a scaffolded, multimodal, trauma-aware, cosmopolitan, and relationally grounded curriculum.

3.2 Participants

Although this study focuses on the design of *Animumbes* as a textbook, and therefore not evaluated through human-subjects data collection, its design was still nonetheless informed by a decade of interaction with diverse community learners across the Kodrah Kristang ecosystem. Participants whose learning trajectories shaped the methodological approach thus included:

- adult learners across multiple ethnicities, backgrounds, races and religions in multiethnic Singapore,
- Kristang youth navigating identity recovery and fracture,
- elderly Kristang speakers in Singapore, Melaka and Perth,
- and queer, neurodivergent, and historically marginalised learners

These constituencies reflect the polynomic, multi-orientation learner base that Kodrah has always served, and their varied affective, linguistic, and relational needs shaped how the textbook was structured, how variation was modelled, and how cultural and psychological content was embedded. A core group of six advanced Kristang speakers and *Kapitang* or Indigenous Elders, including one former Kabesa and all of whom had been working with Kodrah Kristang since 2017, was then used to means-test and pilot use of the textbook in classroom settings between August 2024 and December 2024 before its use in institutional classes was approved by NUS in January 2025, with the textbook starting to be used in actual classroom settings from October 2025.

3.3 Procedures

3.3.1 Standard materials development principles for English and/or world languages

Standard accepted principles for the development of language teaching materials as these are broadly understood within English Language Teaching (ELT) served as the Western academic, empirically-determined, and theoretical foundation upon which the *Animumbes* textbook was initially designed. In particular, Tomlinson (2010, pp. 94-97) offers a synthesis of best practices in global ELT coursebook development, and these were adopted as the baseline procedural framework before any Creole-Indigenous adaptations were applied:

1. Provide many opportunities for the learners to produce language in order to achieve intended outcomes.

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2. Make sure that these output activities are designed so that the learners are using language rather than just practicing specified features of it.
3. Design output activities so that they help learners to develop their ability to communicate fluently, accurately, appropriately, and effectively.
4. Make sure that the output activities are fully contextualized in that the learners are responding to an authentic stimulus (e.g., a text, a need, a viewpoint, an event), that they have specific addressees, and that they have a clear intended outcome in mind.
5. Try to ensure that opportunities for feedback are built into output activities and are provided for the learners afterwards

However, the application of these principles was made more complicated by the status of Kristang as a critically endangered, postcolonial Creole-Indigenous language with radically different epistemological, sociocultural, and ontological foundations from English. Most notably:

- Kristang has no stable, uncontested standard variety and Kristang speakers tend to unconsciously acknowledge “uncertain”, ontologically and epistemologically unstable or polynomic approaches to language without issue, making the notion of “accuracy” profoundly different from ELT and world language norms.
- The language’s Creole morphology and fluidity arguably also require materials that treat variation as constitutive, not deviant.
- Learners often not only carry intergenerational trauma, stigma, and linguistic shame, but also many deep biases and stereotypes about language learning and teaching themselves, whether inherited from colonial-era ideologies or modern Singaporean conceptions of non-native language learning as a result of Singapore’s mother tongue policies and how mother tongue is taught in the classroom such that it becomes mostly an academic subject (Yeo, 2024).
- At the same time, ten years of grassroots classroom praxis also demonstrates that many Kristang people—as well as non-Kristang Singaporeans—arrive with deeply entrenched expectations about what “proper” language learning should look like in a classroom setting. Learners tend to anticipate familiar pedagogical cues such as a textbook, whiteboard, written exercises, and a linear instructional sequence, and are often resistant to approaches that deviate from this paradigm. This resistance stems largely from a broader public unfamiliarity with Kristang itself: because the language is not widely recognised or understood, learners often need to see it framed through the conventional apparatus of a formal language—comparable to Malay, Mandarin, Tamil, German, French or any other ‘world’ or official language—before they feel confident participating in institutional instruction that extends beyond the conversational, interactional and game-based style characteristic of grassroots Kodrah Kristang classes.
- Authentic stimuli, including primary texts, in Kristang are historically extremely limited, unevenly documented, or mostly embedded in oral community memory, rather than printed, mass-produced or institutionally curated

For these reasons, Tomlinson’s principles could not simply be adopted wholesale. Instead, they served as a preliminary structural scaffold: a necessary but insufficient starting point that required systematic indigenisation, reinterpretation, and supplementation. Their application also had to be recalibrated to the lived realities of revitalisation learners in Singapore, where the success of Kristang language classes depends on fitting within a fast-paced urban environment marked by high cognitive load, limited time, and strong expectations of pedagogical efficiency. The textbook therefore emerged as a hybrid artefact—rooted in established ELT methodology yet fundamentally transformed by Creole-Indigenous pedagogical philosophy, Kristang axiology, and the practical constraints and emotional conditions of contemporary learners. It is this synthesis that enables *Animumbes* to function simultaneously as a credible academic resource, a culturally sovereign text, and a revitalisation tool grounded in the realities of life in 21st century Malaya.

3.3.2 Kristang Creole-Indigenous Axiology as Design Method

The second major component of the methodological approach selected was thus the operationalisation of Kristang axiology—*saudadi*, *elisia*, *erodi*, *ireidi*, *soltu*, *teru*, *perzefra*, and *fortidang*—into concrete textbook design principles that supplemented those described above for mainline Western ELT or world language contexts. These axiological principles acted not simply as thematic overlays but as methodological criteria for lesson sequencing, example selection, visual design, narrative framing, and learner engagement specific to the context of Kristang being taught in institutional settings in Singapore in 2025.

3.3.2.1 Saudadi — Future-oriented longing and intergenerational continuity

Saudadi demanded that the textbook present Kristang not as a nostalgic remnant but as a language with a viable and compelling future. This informed the inclusion of modern semantic domains (e.g., technology, modern transportation, urban life) and activities that anchor learners in both ancestral memory and forward imagination. Lessons were therefore designed to cultivate a felt continuity between past, present, possible, and future Kristang worlds.

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3.3.2.2 Elisia — *Compassionate direct acknowledgement of pain and bittersweetness*

Elisia required a pedagogical stance that neither sanitised nor sensationalised the traumas surrounding Kristang loss. Instead, cultural notes and some exercises focusing on more complex concepts were crafted to acknowledge fragmentation, shame, and silence while framing them within a broader arc of survival. This enabled learners to approach Kristang with grounded emotional realism rather than romanticisation or despair.

3.3.2.3 Erodi — *Play, gentle mischievous irreverence, and creative linguistic flexibility*

Erodi emphasised the importance of humour and creole play as core features of Kristang linguistic life. This value shaped the inclusion of variation-rich examples, including those that honour modern public civic diversity in gender, sexuality and neurodivergence, playful imagery, and activities that foreground Kristang's improvisational, adaptive character. By embedding irreverence into the learning process, the textbook mirrors Kristang's historical refusal to conform to rigid colonial linguistic norms.

3.3.2.4 Ireidi — *Dignity, self-regard, and the restoration of cultural esteem*

Ireidi guided the textbook's representational ethics: Kristang had to appear dignified, contemporary, and intellectually substantial. Grammar explanations, cultural sections, and visual design therefore avoided deficit framings and instead foregrounded Kristang complexity, beauty, and depth. This was crucial for counteracting internalised stigma among Kristang learners. The design of the textbook also sought to restore a sense of the uniquely mythic and larger-than-life parts of Kristang to a Creole culture that had often been denigrated as just a broken, inferior version of Portuguese

3.3.2.5 Soltu — *Learner agency and polynomic independence*

Soltu informed the methodological commitment to model Kristang as a polynomic, non-standardised language. Rather than imposing a rigid normative variety, *Animumbes* thus presents multiple legitimate phonological, lexical, and morphosyntactic variants, and also includes the full 16-person pronoun system in indexes even though only the 1st to 4th pronouns are taught in the book. Exercises also invite learner choice and adaptation and the ability to use the textbook for Self-Directed or Blended Learning, simultaneously reinforcing autonomy and the Indigenous principle that linguistic authority is distributed rather than centralised.

3.3.2.6 Teru — *Tender relationality and communal safety*

Teru required that lessons be structured to foster psychological safety and relational warmth. This informed the sequencing of topics, the tone of instructions, the multimodal support for neurodivergent learners, and the complete and extremely careful avoidance of shaming error-correction models that would perpetuate antiquated stereotypes about the language or culture. The textbook was intentionally designed as a soft, welcoming entry point into a community that has historically experienced deep erasure, fragmentation and alienation.

3.3.2.7 Perzefra — *Resilience amidst rupture and loss*

Perzefra informed the textbook's meta-textual and overall narrative as one framed around revival, where Kristang is framed not as a fragile remnant but as a resilient system continually able to regenerate. This informed the inclusion of substantive vocabulary for domains of life that creoles are typically not expected to have, due to stereotypes (even in the academy) about them being relatively simple, uncomplex and mere mishmashed assemblages of other languages. Learners thus encounter Kristang as a language shaped by rupture but not defined by it.

3.3.2.8 Fortidang — *Ethical courage and the imperative of cultural survival*

Finally, *fortidang* grounded the methodological decision to articulate Kristang revitalisation as an ethical and Indigenous project. The chapter teaching the fourth person also highlights communal responsibility, Creole-Indigenous concepts related to the concept of the Living Earth and shared planetary ecosystem, and the global-citizenship orientation required of learners who engage with a critically endangered language. The textbook design therefore also frames learning Kristang as a participatory act of courage and collective meaning-making.

Taken together, these eight axiological commitments served as the methodological blueprint for *Animumbes*. They ensured that the textbook's pedagogy, tone, sequencing, and epistemic framing remained recognisably Kristang in spirit and structure, translating Indigenous value systems into a coherent twenty-first-century curricular design.

3.3.3 Integration of Kodrah's Six Cosmopolitan Pedagogical Parameters

The second methodological pillar was the adaptation of the six pedagogical parameters identified in K. M. Wong (2019), originally conceptualised to explain why Kodrah Kristang succeeded as a grassroots revitalisation model. For *Animumbes*, these parameters were reinterpreted as design principles to ensure the textbook embodied the modern, relational, and future-oriented ethos that has characterised Kodrah since 2016. Each parameter contributed a distinct pedagogical requirement, shaping how lessons were framed, how learners were positioned, and how Kristang was represented. These parameters—rearticulated here for textbook design—were:

3.3.3.1 Intergenerational Participation (Section 9.1 in K. M. Wong (2019))

This parameter emphasises the necessity of designing materials that resonate across age groups. Consistent with Kristang cultural norms of intergenerational learning, *Animumbes* was structured so that youth, adults, and older people could all engage

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with the content meaningfully. The text was thus produced in large font (minimum font size 14 for paragraph-level text and font size 18 for flavour text) for visual accessibility catering to older learners, while vocabulary domains were therefore selected to reflect the lived realities of multiple generations, and exercises were written in accessible, non-age-exclusive registers while still incorporating the use of digital technology and online tools. This allowed the textbook to mirror the multigenerational dynamics historically observed in Kodrah classrooms and ensured that Kristang learning remained a family- and community-centred practice.

3.3.3.2 Cross-Ethnic Inclusivity (Section 9.2 in K. M. Wong (2019))

Kodrah Kristang has always welcomed learners of any ethnicity, reflecting the community's centuries of deep engagement with Portuguese, Malay, Chinese, Indian, Dutch, Armenian, Jewish and other cultural spheres in Malaya and island Southeast Asia. To maintain this inclusivity, *Animumbes* incorporates examples, illustrations, and cultural explanations designed to be legible and relatable to non-Kristang learners while still retaining cultural specificity. This reinforces the revitalisation philosophy that Kristang thrives when taught as a bridge-building, relational, and multicultural practice.

3.3.3.3 Open-Access and Egalitarian Ethos (Section 9.3 in K. M. Wong (2019))

Animumbes was structured to be free of proprietary gatekeeping, conceptually transparent, and oriented toward learner empowerment and linguistic descriptivism rather than prescriptivism. The book is low-cost and ring-bound and can thus be produced made-to-order out of a single PDF file by any print shop; it is accessible to anyone who signs up for Kodrah Kristang classes, now also offered under Singapore's People's Association network of grassroots course providers at a very low cost.

3.3.3.4 Recognition and Teaching of Variation (Section 9.4 in K. M. Wong (2019))

Because Kristang is polynomic and historically shaped by mobility, *Animumbes* rejects prescriptive standardisation in favour of modelling variation. Phonological, lexical, and morphosyntactic variants—whether associated with Melaka, Singapore, older speakers, or contemporary youth learners—are included and contextualised as equally legitimate forms of Kristang. Learners encounter variant spellings, pronunciations, and structures, accompanied by clear guidance on when and why variation occurs. This reflects the methodological principle that Kristang pedagogy must adapt to community realities rather than impose external norms and ensures that the textbook remains responsive to evolving community usage.

3.3.3.5 Global Citizenship Orientation (Section 9.5 in K. M. Wong (2019))

Kodrah's revitalisation philosophy positions Kristang not merely as a heritage language but as a medium through which learners cultivate intercultural empathy, ethical self-reflection, and broader world awareness. In *Animumbes*, this orientation is embedded through thematic units that draw attention to environmental stewardship, cross-cultural communication, and the nuts-and-bolts of linguistic revitalisation, and through the provision of vocabulary lists that explicitly situate Kristang within modern global conversation – for example, the Kristang names of all 193 countries, terms in Kristang for *demisexual* and *aromantic*, and the identification of fourth-person ontological entities as being identifiable as both angels and demons or psychological gestalts, based on one's own rational or spiritual belief system. This situates Kristang learning within the larger project of producing reflective, outward-looking global citizens who are conversant in perspective-taking and democratic standards for basic human respect and dignity.

3.3.3.6 Creole Creativity and Learner Agency (Section 9.6 in K. M. Wong (2019))

The final parameter centres on Kristang's creative, improvisational nature. In line with this, *Animumbes* incorporates words created through *sunyeskah* (dreamfishing), analogy-building, creative recombination, and open-ended production tasks. Learners are encouraged to recognise that in Kristang there is rarely one answer and to explore the language in culturally resonant ways, mirroring how Kristang speakers historically adapted to new social and linguistic environments. This methodological choice reinforces the understanding that learners are not passive recipients of a fossilised code but are active participants in Kristang's ongoing renewal.

4. RESULTS

The final *Karnilisang* or curriculum plan on which the ten chapters of *Animumbes* were based was completed on 14 August 2024 and is presented below as Figure 1.

The first column outlines the focus of each lesson in relation to Kristang Uncertainty Thinking, the primary epistemological framework in Kristang (K. M. Wong, 2024b), which provides a narrative, philosophical and conceptual anchor for learners as they progress through the course – the *Via Hierosa* is the Kristang Hero's Journey, which serves as a corresponding point of reference for agentic human psychoemotional development known as Individuation.

The column "Osulinggu" presents the core grammatical content allocated to each lesson. These items include foundational morphosyntactic structures (e.g., SVO syntax, pronouns, determiners), multidimensional prepositional systems, adjectival modification patterns, negation systems, verbal morphology, pluralisation and reduplication processes, quantifiers, and imperative constructions, and were sequenced based on classroom praxis over nineteen iterations of Kodrah classes that had proceeded prior to the development of the textbook between 2016 and 2024.

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The final column “Karnipalabra” details the vocabulary domains introduced in each lesson. These domains were selected to build lexical readiness for conversational use while simultaneously embedding deep cultural context through thematic clusters such as kinship, time, identity, Indigeneity and nature, navigation and placemaking, and Kristang–Eurasian culinary culture. The inclusion of English-language cultural notes in certain lessons also supports the global-citizenship orientation of the curriculum and ensures accessibility for diverse learner profiles.

KARNILISANG Kodrah KRISTANG 1A COURSE SYLLABUS (caa 14 August 2024) 1A & 1B Thematic Focus: Decolonial Thinking (Orange Book Chapter 440) Aligned with Animumbes 1 and NUS CE Kristang Level 1 (each lesson 3 hours)			
Lisang Lesson	Via Hierosa Individuation Focus	Osulinggu Grammar	Karnipalabra Vocabulary
1	Galang Pasadu The Hull of the Past	SVO structure; sa; ki, keng; ngka; pronouns 1SG/2SG/3SG; 3D determiners	(1/2 history & culture in English) greetings; binary polarity; pronouns
2	Chomaventura (1) The Call to Adventure Riska / Linearity (1D)	teng/nteh; undi; teng na/nteh na; naki/nali/nala; 2D & 3D prepositions	languages and ethnicities; basic, classroom & ambient objects
3	Genyang Beneta (2) The Bargain of Goodwill Sipila / Planarity (2D)	cardinal & ordinal number placement; kantu & price	cardinal numbers to 100, ordinal numbers to 100
4	Ardansa Xameza (3) The Flame of the Forest Spasu / Space (3D)	adjectival modification base structure; undura; pronouns 1PL/2PL/3PL	nationalities; religions; quaternity of identity (jenis, wenza, jenta, afisi)
5	Mundumulera (4) The Heart of the World Tempu / Time (4D)	pronouns 4SG & 4PL; eleidi ontology and deixis; kela, keletu	Gaia; objects in the natural world; animals and plants
6	Alma Fundeza (5) The Soul of the Deep Fortuna / Probability (5D)	verb syntax and morphology, negation placement, special negation, kung	basic verbs and action words; special negation verbs
7	Rua Vahandra (6) The Dauntless Road Emagu / Reality (6D)	verb serialisation; bai & beng; kung with movement; santah; bai-support for verbs	action and movement verbs, transport, places in the city
8	Forsa Xamandra (7) The Strength of the Numinous Forsa / Willpower (7D)	pluralisation and reduplication; kiamba; numbers to 10000	family and relations; age; basic Western chronological time identifiers
9	Sol Krismatra (8) The Dreaming Sun Propisi / Symmetry (8D)	quantifiers and basic S.I. units; di (of / from); imperatives; nang	food and ingredients; eight senses
10	Korpu Karimang The Luminous Body	NA / Revision	recipe and cooking actions; major Kristang and Eurasian dishes

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Figure 1: Karnilisang for Animumbes level 1

Animumbes therefore achieves several outcome that earlier Kristang materials did not: it consolidates a decade of iterative grassroots classroom praxis, a newly articulated Creole-Indigenous axiological frame, and university-level expectations into a single, coherent instructional architecture that is simultaneously linguistically rigorous, epistemologically situated, and operationally teachable at scale. Where prior resources in Kristang have tended to function as phrasebooks, reference compilations, or heritage-oriented introductions with constrained semantic domains and implicit standardising pressure, *Animumbes* enables sustained progression through an explicitly sequenced curriculum that links grammatical development to culturally meaningful conceptual anchors (Uncertainty Thinking and the Via Hierosa) and to contemporary communicative readiness. In practical terms, this also

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means the textbook does not merely “support lessons”, but now standardises *teachability* without standardising the language: it allows different cohorts, instructors, and learning contexts to reproduce comparable learning trajectories while still treating polynomic variation and dreamfishing as constitutive, normal, and ethically necessary.

Animumbes therefore also enables forms of learner engagement and identity formation that earlier materials were structurally unable to support. By integrating psychoemotional scaffolding, trauma-aware sequencing, explicit de-shaming pedagogical tone, and a cosmopolitan representational field (including queer, neurodivergent, and learners of the language from outside the Kristang community), it makes Kristang learnable not only as an ancestral code but as a viable present-day medium for relational life, ethical reflection, and global citizenship. This is the design outcome that most directly distinguishes *Animumbes* as a revitalisation instrument rather than a heritage artefact: it permits learners to enter Kristang without first accepting colonial-era premises about legitimacy, standardness, or “proper” speakerness, and it provides a shared curricular container within which modern Kristang worldview, humour, dignity, and futurity can be taught explicitly rather than assumed or deferred.

On a larger scale and in relation to the research gaps described in the literature review, in addition to providing a concrete example of how Indigenous approaches and epistemologies can be integrated with existing Western academic best practices for materials development (Tomlinson, 2010; Creed, 2024), *Animumbes* also intervenes in the long-standing problem of creoles being rendered “simple,” derivative, or in need of standardisation by making polynomic variation an explicit design principle rather than an editorial problem, thereby refusing the standardising impulses and lexifier-privileging norms highlighted in creole education critiques (DeGraff, 2005; Migge et al., 2010). In doing so, *Animumbes* operationalises precisely what comparative policy and textbook scholarship has called for, but rarely demonstrates in a small, urban, critically endangered Creole-Indigenous setting: a materials-development methodology that is simultaneously context-responsive, community-sovereign, and institutionally legible (Ho, 2022; Limerick & Hornberger, 2021).

An image of the final textbook itself as it is now being used in NUS and PA classes for the first time starting from October 2025 is attached as Figure 2.



Figure 2: The Animumbes level 1 textbook

5. DISCUSSION

A significant amount of existing scholarship on endangered language pedagogy tends to conceptualise textbooks mostly through the frameworks of heritage linguistics or documentation-driven revitalization, where such textbooks are expected to provide structured input, grammatical explanation, and semantic domains that reflect “basic” communicative needs. In contrast, *Animumbes* treats Kristang not as a bounded heritage object but as a living Creole-Indigenous system with its own functional epistemology and axiology. In this sense, the methodology used to design *Animumbes* aligns both with Indigenous educational scholarship, which argues that language teaching must mirror the philosophical, relational, and ecological foundations of the cultures from which languages arise, and with contemporary applied linguistics, which has consistently negotiated with the issue of context-appropriate and culturally-informed language teaching for the world languages that are the usual focus of academic inquiry and investigation.

The results also further underscore that a ‘modern’ and ‘cosmopolitan’ approach to Kristang—one that synthesises past, present, possible and future, treats variation as central rather than peripheral, openly respects neurodivergence and queerness, and so on—can be systematically implemented in textbook design. This represents one of the clearest departures from earlier Kristang teaching materials produced in Melaka or Singapore, which tended to present a simplified or prescriptive form of the language that mostly focused on the past and heritage. In *Animumbes*, phonological and morphological variants are presented as normative, not as ‘exceptions’ requiring explanation. This aligns with linguistic literature on creole continua and fluidity but exponentially extends it by making variation into a core lived principle and an ethical and relational commitment: a refusal to erase the lived linguistic realities of Kristang speakers, who are grounded in the 21st century, and who, like anyone else, operate in relation to contemporary societal trends, technology and thoughts of the present and future. A language textbook for a critically endangered Creole-Indigenous or Indigenous language should not mummify the language; it should seek to update it and make it relevant, especially to younger generations who are literally the only logical future for the language if it is to proceed and continue to be viable as a living entity.

The inclusion of multiple legitimate forms and dreamfished words meanwhile constitutes an explicit challenge to colonial standardisation ideologies, which have historically positioned multilingual, mixed, creolised or so-called ‘artificially’ lexified languages as structurally deficient. The design therefore reaffirms what Indigenous scholars have long argued—that pedagogical models for endangered languages must avoid imposing Eurocentric uniformity and must instead not only reflect community-embedded practice, but some of the histories of many European languages themselves, which were also artificially relexified in the 19th and 20th centuries (and again, often by very small groups of people or even by single individuals) as part of nationalisation or industrialisation. The emotional and psychological architecture of *Animumbes*—its careful avoidance of shame, its multimodal scaffolding for neurodivergent learners, and its compassionate framing of linguistic loss—suggests that decolonial trauma-informed pedagogy is similarly indispensable for communities facing the aftermath of cultural erasure. This echoes increasing scholarship showing that Indigenous cultural and language revitalisation is inseparable from healing and identity reconstruction.

Finally, Kodrah Kristang’s long-standing position has been that the Kristang people are not simply the descendants of Portuguese colonisers or residents of Melaka’s Portuguese Settlement but are a dynamic, multiethnic, postcolonial community embedded fully in the twenty-first century. The textbook therefore becomes not just a linguistic resource but a cultural corrective: it rewrites the terms through which Kristang identity has often been imagined, and positions Kristang as the centre of its own epistemic and ontological universe and being – defined on its own terms and oriented to itself on its own terms, not in comparison to Portuguese, to Malay, to English or to any other language or epistemic framework. In this sense, *Animumbes* also asserts an important principle of Indigenous and Creole sovereignty: that Kristang knowledge production belongs first and foremost to Kristang people, and that the authority to describe, teach, theorise, and expand the language resides within the community rather than in colonial, academic, or external structures – noted by many scholars to be a crucial and foundational component of successful cultural revitalisation (e.g. Ho, 2021). On a metatextual level, the textbook therefore enacts a form of epistemic ownership by supporting the reframing Kristang as a self-determining intellectual tradition: one capable of generating its own grammatical categories, psychological models, philosophical systems, and pedagogical designs, and again in direct challenge to colonial and even modern academic notions of creole cultures and languages being simplistic, superficial and non-generative. By codifying these within a formal curriculum produced by a Kristang author for community-oriented learners, *Animumbes* materially reinforces the community’s right to speak for itself, to define what its language is and is not, and to chart its future without needing any validation from any external authority or institution.

6. LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Built on nearly a decade of grassroots teaching under Kodrah Kristang, and catalysed by the institutionalisation of Kristang classes at the National University of Singapore in 2025, *Animumbes* translates reclaimed Kristang axiology and cosmopolitan praxis into a first formalised and concrete instructional architecture. In doing so, it challenges both heritage-language models that treat endangered languages and Indigenous languages as static remnants, and academic approaches that continue to frame creole

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languages and cultures as structurally subaltern, deficient or derivative. The paper has shown that a polynomic, variation-rich, globally-centered and future-oriented representation of Kristang is not only possible but pedagogically productive and applicable, presenting Kristang as fully at home in the twenty-first century, and positioning learners not as nostalgic caretakers of a vanished world but as co-authors of an ongoing, evolving linguistic and cultural project that is real, responsible and relevant.

Future research should extend this work, which has primarily been focused on design, by examining how learners experience *Animumbes* in practice; how Kristang youth, queer and neurodivergent learners, and non-Kristang participants negotiate identity through the curriculum; and how similar Creole-Indigenous design logics might be adapted for other endangered, Indigenous or creole languages. Comparative work with other Indigenous-led textbook projects would also help clarify which elements of the *Animumbes* model are locally specific and which are more broadly transferable. Finally, for scholars, linguists and practitioners of language revitalisation more generally, *Animumbes* and *Kodrah Kristang* also now offer one real and possible blueprint for how a critically endangered creole can be taught in ways that are structurally rigorous, emotionally honest, and uncompromisingly Creole-Indigenous, dismantling many stereotypes and prejudices about not just what is possible but what is legitimate within the current Western epistemic frame of language. Future research should necessarily engage with the radical approaches to language that the revitalisation of Kristang as expressed through *Animumbes* have not just raised but made concretely unavoidable, and which deserve more thorough discussion and exploration.

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