Welcome to the latest newsletter from the Research Unit for Indigenous Language.

RUIL consists of a team of researchers from the School of Languages and Linguistics, led by Professor Rachel Nordlinger and Associate Professor Nick Thieberger.

This newsletter presents some of the highlights of the last five months, and focuses particularly on events, fieldwork, new and continuing projects, and new grants.

For a full list of all publications, conference presentations and current grants, please visit our website: http://arts.unimelb.edu.au/indiglang

CELEBRATING DUNCAN LEARY

In May 2019, Rachel Nordlinger and Allyra Murray attended a morning tea to celebrate the lives of the late Duncan Elphinstone McBride Leary and his partner Ernest Lanz, joined by special guest Ken Wharton, a friend of both and executor to Ernest Lanz’s will. The morning tea was held at the University of Melbourne’s archives where Leary’s extensive collection of papers are now held and have been catalogued and safeguarded by UoM archive staff.

In 2017 RUIL received Duncan Leary’s extraordinary multi-million dollar bequest for the research of Australian Indigenous languages. This generous bequest – the largest ever for the research of Australian languages – has ensured that RUIL’s activities to strengthen Indigenous language research and support Indigenous communities in their language-related goals can continue into perpetuity.

Duncan Leary graduated from the University of Melbourne in 1955 with a Bachelor of Arts. He met his life partner, chef Ernest Lanz, in Geneva, Switzerland, before the couple returned permanently to Melbourne in the 1960s. Duncan maintained a strong association with the University of Melbourne for the rest of his life, studying many subjects through Melbourne’s continuing education program, including a number in the fields of Aboriginal history and culture. Though we know little about his connection to Indigenous languages, it is clear that Duncan was a passionate linguist, speaking five languages in addition to English.

We at RUIL are so extraordinarily grateful for Duncan Leary’s generosity, which has enabled us to create the Leary Trust for Australian Indigenous Languages, and will continue to have a substantial impact on Indigenous language research and the ways in which we are able to support Indigenous communities to maintain their linguistic heritage.
On July 2, a Nhanda Language Day was held at Bundiyarra Aboriginal Community – Aboriginal Corporation in Geraldton, WA. This event was arranged with the help of the Irra Wangga Language Centre Linguists and Aboriginal Language teachers. Attendees from RUIL were Nhanda man Steve Kelly, Nick Thieberger and Rachel Nordlinger (pictured left to right).

The proceedings of the day went as follows: Irra Wangga Language Centre Co-ordinator Rosie Sitorus discussed Nhanda language and future directions, Nick and Rachel presented their 50 words project with 50 words of the Wajarri language being added to the project. To round off Dr. Anna McCallum the Sciences Collections Online Project Coordinator, at Museums Victoria presented her findings of a new species of Squat Lobster found in deep ocean waters off Kalbarri. In Steve Kelly’s words, “we Nhanda people eventually named the lobster in our language”. Unfortunately, we can’t make the new name public until it’s formally published, however the new name will be formalized in the coming months.

Another interesting development from the day was a presentation from Bush Heritage Australia highlighting their commitment to engage and partner with the Nhanda people. All in all, it was a wonderful day that left the community feeling optimistic for the prospects of Nhanda language programs being implemented in the future.

Well done and top job to all those who supported, shaped and attended, making this a memorable occasion!
Fieldwork report: INTERGENERATIONAL CHANGE

Between March and June, RUIL PhD student Sasha Wilmoth went on two trips to Pukatja (Ernabella), a Pitjantjatjara-speaking community in the APY Lands, South Australia. She recorded about 30 women, ranging in age from 14 to 80. The recordings include narratives, conversation, and different types of elicitation tasks. Together, they form a snapshot of different ways of speaking Pitjantjatjara in the community, and are the main data for Sasha’s study of intergenerational change and young people’s Pitjantjatjara. Many of these recordings were made out bush, as the participants showed Sasha their country, cooked kangaroo tail, and dug for maku (witchetty grubs).

The narratives showcase a huge range of life experiences in the community – from older women who were brought to the Ernabella mission as children, to younger women who received English-only education and were excited to see a famous AFL star in the community shop. Linguistically, the recordings confirm the strength of Pitjantjatjara, with seemingly little influence from English, despite certain salient changes that many in the community are worried about.

Sasha was also able to give back recordings of children made by post-doc Rebecca Defina as part of her child language acquisition project.

GURINDJI LANGUAGE FILMS AND POSTERS

In May the Gurindji Takataka sign language project took out the ICTV (Indigenous Community Television) Video Award for Best Language Film.

Sign languages are an important part of the communicative ecologies of Australian Indigenous peoples. These sign languages are used on some occasions to replace speech. Sign is used when hunting and silence is required, and sign is used in particular cultural circumstances when speech is not allowed. The sign lexicon includes signs for flora and fauna, signs for kin relations, and signs for topography, time, and human actions as well as those for introduced things such as ‘money’, ‘aeroplane’, and ‘school’. Sign is also used by Indigenous deaf, who may combine elements of the repertoires of traditional sign with new signs learnt from Auslan (Australian Sign Language) and with practices such as finger-spelling.

UPDATE:

STRENGTHENING LANGUAGE, STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY

A new set of posters has been produced as part of the Strengthening Language, Strengthening Community Project, a collaboration between Mildura community members and RUIL linguists Debbie Loakes and Jill Vaughan. The posters feature vocabulary around the environmental themes of ‘Sky’, ‘Earth’ and ‘Wildlife’ in the Latji Latji and Barkindji languages of the Mildura region. Artworks for the posters were contributed by Koorie students from Chaffey Secondary College, and the posters were designed by SOLL student Marian Stoney. The posters have now been returned to the community and will be displayed in schools and community institutions around Mildura.
RUIL NEWS

Endangered Languages Documentation Programme Grants

RUIL member Rosey Billington has been awarded £6,939 GBP for the project ‘Documenting speech and language practices in Eton’. She will soon be heading to Vanuatu to work with people in Eton village on the island of Efate to learn about the language spoken there. The language has an estimated 500 speakers, and very limited available records. This project will significantly increase the level of documentation of Eton and facilitate ongoing research and the development of language materials with community members.

RUIL associate student Jonathan Moodie has been awarded £8,795 GBP for the project ‘A pilot study on the documentation of the Lokoya language’. The Lokoya language is spoken by around 10,000 people living in Eastern Equatoria province of South Sudan. It is considered to be threatened and very little documentation has been done. This project will carry out some initial language documentation, working with speakers living in Melbourne, and in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. It will also examine the feasibility of carrying out a major documentation project for the language and will investigate the possibility of training a limited number of Lokoya speakers living in Kenya to record a range of conversations, discussions, traditional stories and songs either in Kenya or, if possible, in their homeland.

Congratulations & Welcome

Congratulations to RUIL student Katie Jepson (pictured top right) who recently submitted her PhD titled *Prosody, prominence and segments in Djambarrpuyu*. We would also like to welcome Katie and Amit German (pictured bottom right) to the team as Research Assistants. They are currently doing a great job on the 50 Words project.

Language Word Search

We have created a word search using the 50 words website as the resource. You can find 15 words in Mathi Mathi – good luck!

wanpapi (fire) kathini (water) wilangi (wind)
midaki (rain) mitian (moon) tirril (sky)
bapi (mother) baingu (child) kilingawi (today)
matha (no) guruki (magpie) nganguri (tree goanna)
mirmbul (fish) danuyin (thigh) wimbuli (ear)

For Allyra, as an Indigenous woman, it was both empowering and humbling to experience the generosity of the Yolngu when sharing their culture. Walking away from her experience at Garma she has a new appreciation for the work she helps operate at the Research Unit and is looking forward to returning to Yolngu country in the future.

To view sessions from the Key Forum and more visit the [Garma YouTube channel](#).

VOLUNTEERING AT GARMA 2019

The Research Unit for Indigenous Language’s project officer, Allyra Murray (pictured left), was one of four lucky University of Melbourne professional staff selected to volunteer at the Garma Festival of Traditional Cultures, in North East Arnhem Land. Among 40 other volunteers, Allyra camped on site to help with the bump in activities to prepare for the festival. Over the 4-day festival she worked at the Key Forum, where she was fortunate enough to catch many great discussions; her stand out talks were given by Noel Pearson & Djawa Yunupingu. Additional highlights included joining *bunggul* (dance) and learning about woman’s healing.

For Allyra, as an Indigenous woman, it was both empowering and humbling to experience the generosity of the Yolngu when sharing their culture. Walking away from her experience at Garma she has a new appreciation for the work she helps operate at the Research Unit and is looking forward to returning to Yolngu country in the future.

To view sessions from the Key Forum and more visit the [Garma YouTube channel](#).