Welcome

Welcome to the third newsletter of the Research Unit for Indigenous Language. This newsletter is published twice-yearly and contains details of the research activities, latest news and other achievements of the Research Unit.

Launched in May 2013, the Research Unit consists of a team of researchers from the School of Languages and Linguistics. Led by Professor Gillian Wigglesworth (Director) and Associate Professor Rachel Nordlinger (Deputy Director), the Research Unit is advised by a distinguished Steering Committee consisting of language experts from a range of government, academic, community and other organisations.

Staff within the Research Unit have been active in research into Indigenous languages and the communities where they are spoken. This newsletter presents some of the highlights for the second half of 2014, and focuses particularly on events, fieldwork, new and continuing projects, and new grants and publications.

MORE INFO: Full list of all publications, conference presentations and current grants - http://arts.unimelb.edu.au/indiglang/

Public Lecture and Book Launch

Drawn from the Ground: Sound, sign and inscription in Central Australian sand stories

On 16 September 2014 a public lecture was delivered by Dr Jenny Green (ARC Research Fellow in RUIL) at The University of Melbourne. It was held in conjunction with the book launch and reception for Dr Green’s recently published book Drawn from the Ground: Sound, sign and inscription in Central Australian sand stories. We were thrilled to have Rachel Perkins, founder of Blackfella Films, with us to officially launch Dr Green’s ground breaking publication. Generous funding support was provided by a University of Melbourne Faculty of Arts Engagement and Advancement grant.

Over 200 people attended this joint event to celebrate Jenny Green’s research into the ephemeral art form of sand stories in Central Australia, and the use of gesture, language, and drawing in the sand, which are incorporated in the narratives. Seeing how these stories work as a dynamic multimodal practice provides an insight into the narrative and aesthetic traditions of an ancient culture, and leads to a more sophisticated understanding of the characteristics of speech, song and song-poetry in these communities.

More broadly it contributes to the theory and analysis of language and multimodality in all human communication, and shows how important it is to see ‘language’ as a composite achievement where different semiotic systems work in relationship to each other. Language encompasses far more than just speech or words.

Following the lecture Rachel Perkins, an Arrernte woman, gave a beautiful speech stating how significant Green’s work is to both the Aboriginal custodians and for scholars working in this field of research.

RUIL extends its gratitude to Aunty Di Kerr, an Elder with the Wurundjeri Tribe Council, who gave a thoughtful Welcome to Country at the beginning of the lecture, and also to Cheryl Sandiland and Kirri Dangerfield for providing Auslan/English interpretation for deaf audience members.

Dr Jenny Green
REPORT: FIELDWORK

Code-mixing in Maningrida

Jill Vaughan spent time in Maningrida, Arnhem Land, in May and October this year to begin work on a sociolinguistic project investigating code-mixing in this highly multilingual community. Along with Batchelor Institute linguist Margaret Carew, Jill recorded multilingual interactions in public domains (e.g., at the footy grand final) as well as narratives from speakers of a number of local languages (Njdébbana, Burarra/Gun-nartpa, Djinang, Djamarrpuynyu, Kune and Na-kara). Data collection for this project will begin in earnest in 2015.

Jill also helped organise a language app development workshop and a digitisation workshop at Maningrida College to begin the process of digitising, cataloguing and archiving important audiovisual cultural materials stored around the community. The workshops were well-attended by community members, students and school staff whose participation was testament to the high levels of enthusiasm in Maningrida for developing language resources and activities. The next step will be to work on a Maningrida language app prototype.

REPORT: FIELDWORK

The acquisition of kinship terminology in a morphologically complex Australian Language

John Mansfield and Joe Blythe have conducted whirlwind field trips to Wadeye. John collected data for various projects including Joe’s ARC DECPRA project “Acquiring Murrinhpatha Kinship Terminology” (2013-2016). First Joe (in July and September) and then John (in September/October) used an iPad to run kinship acquisition experiments. The experiments use “apps” that are specially tailored for specific children, each preloaded with photographs of the child’s own kin and with prerecorded instructions in Murrinhpatha. The child is then shown the series of photos, with a recorder running, and tested on his or her knowledge of how these people should be referenced using kin terms. It’s quite a lot of work to develop and run the test for each child, but various Wadeye families have gradually developed interest and enthusiasm for the project. Families enjoy the beautiful portrait photos created as part of the test, and siblings develop playful rivalry in seeing who can “score the highest” in their knowledge of kin relationships. Kids aged around ten are sometimes able to select the correct term to refer to, say, their mother’s father’s sister’s husband’s brother’s daughter’s son.

NEW PUBLICATIONS


The Languages and Linguistics of Australia: A Comprehensive Guide is part of the multi-volume reference work on the languages and linguistics of the continents of the world. The volume provides a thorough overview of Australian languages, including their linguistic structures, their genetic relationships, and issues of language maintenance and revitalisation. Australian English, Aboriginal English and other contact varieties are also discussed. Contributors include several RUIL researchers: Janet Fletcher, Ruth Singer, and Brett Baker.

Thesis completions and poster

- Wilmoth, Sasha. Discourse Markers in Murrinhpatha. (Hons. thesis)
- Wilson, Aidan. Tiwi Revisited: A reanalysis of Traditional Tiwi verb morphology. (MA thesis)

A poster has been produced to celebrate the success of the Getting In Touch workshop held 8-9 April 2014 - we will distribute them soon!
RNLD Student Volunteers

Erin Barnes

In June this year Honours student Erin Barnes travelled to the Kimberley Language Resource Centre (KLRC) with the Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity (RNLD) in Halls Creek, where the RNLD and KLRC team of Emma Murphy and Carolyn McAdam ran a community-based training workshop on Documenting and Revitalising Indigenous Languages (DRIL). The participants in the workshop, who spoke Jaru and Kija, came from different backgrounds: some worked at the school, one at the KLRC, and one at the Arts centre in a nearby community. The KLRC is run solely by Indigenous community members and Erin enjoyed participating in the workshop and learning some Jaru. The workshop put into perspective the difficulties of running language programs in communities. Despite the difficulties, what resonated most was how passionate the participants were about imparting knowledge about their language to younger generations. Erin is extremely grateful to the KLRC for welcoming her in their community and to RUIL and RNLD for making the trip possible. The workshop was a great introduction to working in a community language centre, and she is keen to do more of this work in the future.

Chloe Dallas

In late September, second year linguistics student Chloe Dallas completed an internship with RNLD. Chloe accompanied DRIL trainers Margaret Florey and Emma Murphy on their visit to Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre in Port Hedland, Western Australia. A small group of participants spent an intense three days developing and sharing their skills in linguistics, sound recording and language teaching. Also present were the Wangka Maya linguists, who observed the workshop and participated in some of the fantastic group discussions. Chloe had the opportunity to spend time getting to know the participants and the linguists, and to learn about Wangka Maya’s community language projects. As it was a smaller workshop, the participants were able to focus on specific skills they wanted to gain in order to support their language work. Several languages were represented among the participants, enriching the workshop and allowing for some interesting comparisons during the activities. There is an ongoing relationship between RNLD and Wangka Maya, and this is a great foundation for continuity in the workshops, despite the time interval between them. Chloe’s internship with RNLD was a valuable experience that gave her insight into the organisation’s applied work, and enabled her to form bonds with people in the Port Hedland community.

REPORT: PROJECTS

Wadeye Digital Project

This project is an ARC Discovery Indigenous grant with seed funding from the Institute for a Broadband-Enabled Society (IBES). The team is led by Lyndon Ormond-Parker (School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne) and involves a team of researchers including RUIL’s Rachel Nordlinger. The project trialed the use of information technologies to preserve Indigenous cultural heritage and to provide evidence for the development of sustainable options for the future use of cultural collections via the National Broadband Network. In collaboration with the Kanamkek-Yile Ngala Museum in Wadeye (Port Keats), Northern Territory, the project transferred analogue audiovisual material recorded with obsolescent technology into contemporary archival standard digital formats to preserve significant and endangered intangible cultural heritage and language materials. The project is currently trialing the use of a ‘Raspberry Pi’ device for delivery of local health promotion content in the Wadeye health clinic and is developing a system to provide access to this rich repository of audio-visual materials via a wireless local area network to ensure the intergenerational transmission of vital local knowledge and heritage.
NEWS: GRANTS & AWARDS

• Discovery Indigenous Grant: Jenny Green is part of an Australian National University team led by Elizabeth Marrkilyl Ellison that will be undertaking language research with Western Desert Ngaanyatjarra and Ngaatjatjarra people, who use special speech styles to mark particular occasions and life transitions.


• Discovery Project Grant: Nick Thieberger is part of a team part of a team led by Sally Treloyn (Melbourne Conservatorium of Music) and including Mary Anne Jebb, Kimberly Christen and Andrew Dowding who will investigate Indigenous song-lines in the Western Pilbara region.

• Future Fellowship: Nick Thieberger has been awarded an ARC Future Fellowship grant from 2014-2018 which will have a combined total of $756, 404 worth of funding. The project aims to address the critical issues around fragile records of the worlds Indigenous languages that are at risk of being lost. Better research methods that can benefit not only academics but also the general public aim to be developed in this project and used to train new researchers and community members in creating better records. Collaborating across Australia and the Pacific in building tools that will result in better research practices, it will increase knowledge of what research has been done, and will target areas for future focus. Modelling new fieldwork methods, building reusable datasets, and curating long-term collections of language records will all be part of this project, as will outreach to support similar work both in linguistics and in the broader community.

• Early Career Research Grant: ‘The social life of languages in Maningrida: code-choice in a multilingual community’. Jill Vaughan has been awarded a $25,000 University of Melbourne Early Career Researcher Grant to investigate sociolinguistic factors in code-mixing and multilingualism in Maningrida, Arnhem Land.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Language Acquisition in Murrinhpatha (LAMP)

LAMP project members presented at the XIII Meeting of the International Association for the Study of Child Language held from 14-19 July in Amsterdam. Barbara Kelly presented on ‘Input of a polysynthetic Australian language: Prompts, Directives and Questions’, and Bill Forshaw presented on ‘Little Kids Big Paradigms: Murrinhpatha Dual Subject Verbs’. Bill also presented a paper at The 39th Annual Boston University Conference on Language Development held from 7-9 November in Boston. He presented on ‘Acquiring Murrinhpatha: Big Verbs are Tricky’ a joint paper co-authored with Barbara Kelly, Rachel Nordlinger, and Gillian Wigglesworth.

EVENTS

Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language (CoEDL) Launch

On 24 November the CoEDL was officially launched by Federal Liberal MP Kelly O’Dwyer at The Australian National University. The University of Melbourne is a major partner institution, and four RUIL researchers are Chief Investigators on this ARC funded project: Nick Thieberger, Janet Fletcher, Gillian Wigglesworth, and Rachel Nordlinger.

MORE INFO: http://www.dynamicsoflanguage.edu.au/

Ormond College (VIC)

Rachel Nordlinger visited Ormond College on 13 October to talk to undergraduate residential students. The college is home to several Indigenous students currently studying at the University of Melbourne, and started its own Reconciliation Action Plan in 2013. As an alumna of Ormond College herself, Rachel was very pleased to be invited to speak about the importance of language in Aboriginal culture, and share the work RUIL does to play an active part in recording, reclaiming, and revitalising Indigenous languages in Australia.