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 Professor Gillian Wigglesworth.

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

LAUNCH OF THE BATES ONLINE PROJECT

RUIL’s Nick Thieberger has developed an online resource based on sets of vocabularies of Aboriginal languages created in the early 1900s. Clint Bracknell launched the Bates Online project at the National Library of Australia on June 12th 2018.

In 1904 Daisy Bates sent out a questionnaire to various authorities across Western Australia asking them to write examples of the local Aboriginal language. The responses to her questionnaire, preserved in handwritten notes, are important for the people associated with those languages to trace relatives who gave that information over a hundred years ago. At least 123 speakers are named in the vocabularies and, even now, it’s not clear how many languages they represent. The papers include languages from the Southern South Australia/Western Australia border all the way up to the Kimberley.

However, until now, the papers have been largely inaccessible, stored on paper in state libraries in WA, SA, and the National Library.

Bates Online has put all 21,000 pages online in a searchable database, complete with maps showing where the words and phrases come from, as well as images of the original notes and typescript.

The text of all the vocabularies is linked to the image of the source document, and a map of locations provides an entry point to the vocabularies. In addition to the search system, there is a ‘fuzzy’ search system that allows users to find what they are looking for amongst a range of different spellings.

At a time when Australian Indigenous languages are under severe threat from English, it’s critical to make the best historical sources available to everyone so they’re not forgotten, but particularly to Indigenous Australians who want to relearn and reinforce their languages. The pages are online at http://bates.org.au.
STORIES FROM THE RUIL/RNLD INTERNSHIPS

This year’s RUIL interns were lucky enough to accompany Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity (RNLD) trainers across the country. They participated in workshops that provide training and resources to the Indigenous communities on the important work of preserving their own languages themselves, while focusing on indigenous language authority and participation.

This is what our interns had to say about their experience...

I accompanied DRIL trainer Amy Parncutt to Groote Eylandt for the workshop in the Angurugu and Umbakumba Language centres. While my role was largely one of observation, I learnt so much about effective communication and respectfully navigating cultural differences and group dynamics. I was in awe of Amy’s confidence and ability to empower the local community in their language work. While still holding the role of ‘expert teacher’ within the workshop space, she never once assumed the role of ‘language expert’, leaving this entirely up to the Anindilyakwa people themselves. This distinction I think, is extremely important and not only visibly empowered the Anindilyakwa people themselves, but also created new and exciting opportunities for learning from all parties involved.

I believe an internship like this is an invaluable tool for anyone doing research and working in community, and in particular students just starting out in this area. I thank RUIL and RNLD for this incredible opportunity. - Marcella Maloney

I travelled to the Mirima Dawang Wooral-berring (translates to Mirima place for talking) in Kununurra, Western Australia, where RNLD ran a workshop for local Miriwoong community members employed at the language centre. The workers perform a number of vital tasks that ensure the Miriwoong language is passed on to the next generation, such as teaching language classes and producing learning resources.

The workshop was designed to improve the confidence of the participants in public speaking—something especially important for the workers who teach in the community. As a part of this, we helped the participants create a presentation over the course of three days. My personal favourite was one given by two of the language workers who teach young boys in their community on the topic of bush tucker. It was fascinating to learn about the practices of the Miriwoong in finding different sources of food—especially since they were so dependent on the time of year the food was being sought. It emphasised the connection the Miriwoong have to their traditional lands in the East Kimberley, and by extension, the importance of protecting the Miriwoong language as a means for transmission of this cultural knowledge.

It was genuinely inspiring to see the passion that Miriwoong workers had for preserving their culture, and I feel incredibly humble to have had the experience that I did in Kununurra. - Conor Clements

I accompanied trainers Emma Murphy and Hiroko Shioji on a language workshop to the Kimberley Language Resource Centre in Halls Creek, where they provided training for community members from around the Kimberley on ways to continue learning, teaching and using language within their communities.

The workshop saw participants from six different language groups around the Kimberley: Jaru, Kija, Bunuba, Kwini, Bardi and Kukatja. The participants outlined some areas they wanted to focus on and based on these focus areas, Emma and Hiroko conducted sessions that concentrated on providing activities and strategies for language teaching that would develop the participants’ skills in these areas.

The information provided by RNLD comes from trainers who are passionate about the work they do. In turn, the participants are extremely eager to strengthen the language continuation work in their community.

RNLD’s approach to language continuation supports the notion of self-determination within Indigenous communities. This promotes the importance of community members passing on the knowledge of their country and culture, and maintaining rightful agency over their own language. It was an extremely inspiring experience working with RNLD during a language workshop in the Kimberley; a region so different from the urban life I have in Melbourne. It was amazing to meet people passionate to continue learning and speaking their languages, and share their ideas and knowledge with us. - Elysha O’Reilly
RUIL DIRECTOR’S INAUGURAL PROFESSORIAL LECTURE

In May, Professor Rachel Nordlinger gave her Inaugural Professorial lecture on ‘The genius of Australian Indigenous languages, and why they are important for all of us’, where she discussed some of her favourite features of these languages – ranging from unusual grammatical properties, to intriguing word meanings, to the questions they raise about how languages are learned and processed. The talk was very well received by the many that attended. You can view the lecture at -

https://vimeo.com/273614736 - enjoy!

BURARRA DIALECTS PROJECT IN MANINGRIDA, ARNHEM LAND

Maningrida in northern Arnhem Land is among the most multilingual communities in the world, with its 2500 people speaking fourteen languages from three language families on a daily basis, as well as English and Kriol. Within this highly multilingual context, traditional languages are changing due to new patterns of mobility, multilingualism and the influence of English among their speaker communities. RUIL postdoc Jill Vaughan has begun work on a project documenting dialectal variation in one Maningrida language, Burarra. Burarra has four dialects – An-barra, Martay, Maringa and Gun-nartpa – but much variation that distinguishes them survives predominantly in older speakers. The dialect labels nevertheless continue to be important identity categories, even as differentiation in linguistic practice changes.

Jill is working with Indigenous researchers Cindy Jinmarabynana (An-barra), Doreen Jingarrabarra (An-barra), Abigail Carter (Martay), Laurie Guraylayla (Maringa) to produce a corpus of naturalistic language use in a range of genres from speakers across the Burarra region, and to collect data about the multilingual practices of the language’s speakers. The team recently spent six weeks recording and transcribing An-barra, Martay and Maringa speakers, and have been documenting cultural, mythological and local territorial information to create a rich record of Burarra speech and knowledge. The team are also making language materials for use in the community and at Maningrida College. At the end of the trip, Jill and Cindy gave a talk to the community about the project and about linguistic diversity in Arnhem Land.

The Burarra Dialects Project is funded by the Endangered Languages Documentation Program through SOAS University of London, and materials from the project will be made available online at the Endangered Languages Archive.
HOBART LANGUAGE DAY

In April 2018 Anmatyerr women Clarrie Long Kemarr (pictured above, left) and April Campbell Pengart (pictured above, right) from Ti Tree in Central Australia travelled down to Hobart with Jenny Green to attend Hobart Language Day. The event celebrated languages and language diversity, and many languages and cultures were represented. The team gave a presentation about the traditional sign language used by Anmatyerr and Warlpiri peoples in Ti Tree and surrounding communities. April then demonstrated sand stories, a narrative practice perfected by women and girls, where drawings on the soft sand accompany spoken or sung stories. Everybody had a wonderful time!

Image (below): April pictured with Daisy Allan, from the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre representing the palawa kani Language Program.

NEWS: GRANTS

ILA Grant

Ruth Singer and Margaret Carew, and Warruwi Community (Arnhem Land) have received a project grant from the Indigenous Languages and Arts Program, Department of Communication and the Arts (Australian Government). The funding is to develop the Mawng Ngaralk website, a resource on local languages, song and dance and the Mawng dictionary and create movies with young people at Warruwi. This total funding of $88,000 over 2 years was awarded to Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Education.

Legacy Materials Grants

Nick Thieberger has been awarded two grants of £10,000 each by the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme:
- Digitising recordings from North Malaita, Solomon Island, with Ian Frazer, a retired anthropologist from New Zealand
- Digitising tapes from the Divine Word University in Madang, PNG.

AIATSIS dictionary grant

Ruth Singer and Warruwi Community have been awarded a grant of $20,000 to complete and print the Mawng dictionary. The Australian National University will manage the grant.

WELCOME AND FAREWELL!

Welcome to RUIL’s new Project Officer, Allyra Murray (pictured left). Allyra is a Yorta Yorta, Wemba Wemba, Nyangumarta & Torres Strait Island woman, who has recently moved to Melbourne from Perth. If you get in contact with us, you will most likely be speaking to her!

We have recently farewelled Dr Tim Brickell (pictured centre) and Dr Stefan Schnell (pictured right). Both Tim and Stefan have provided valuable contributions to indigenous language documentation during their time with us.

We wish them both all the best for their future!