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 4 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

THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL VISITS RUIL

In November 2019, the Governor-General of Australia His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd) and Her Excellency Mrs Linda Hurley visited the Research Unit for Indigenous Language to learn more about the 50 Words Project. They met with RUIL members Professor Rachel Nordlinger, Katie Jepson, Allyra Murray and Professor Lesley Stirling along with Vice-Chancellor Professor Duncan Maskell and Dean of Arts Professor Russell Goulbourne. Rachel led the conversation on the background and objectives of the project and the many community collaborations so far. She introduced the website, played a range of languages and showcased the diversity within the contributions to date. The discussion ranged from magpies to relationships with Indonesia and New Guinea. Their Excellencies were particularly interested in the relationships between languages around Australia which are strikingly demonstrated through the View Words function on the website. They were eager to hear about how languages are maintained today through practices of multilingualism as well as revitalisation activities. The Gurindji sign videos sparked a conversation on the use of sign languages alongside spoken languages in multimodal communication. We were pleased to see their interest in the project and look forward to updating everyone on the website’s progress in the New Year!

Image (above, pictured left to right): Katie Jepson, Rachel Nordlinger, Allyra Murray, Governor-General David Hurley, Mrs Linda Hurley, Professor Lesley Stirling, VC Professor Duncan Maskell and Dean of Arts Professor Russell Goulbourne.
Mudburra to English Dictionary

The Mudburra to English Dictionary was launched in Elliott by The Honourable Warren Snowdon, Federal Member for Lingiari, on 20 November to celebrate the UNESCO International Year of Indigenous Languages. It is the result of a 40 year collaboration between the Mudburra community of the Northern Territory and linguists, most recently those from the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language.

The dictionary contains Mudburra words with English translations, illustrations and detailed encyclopedic information about plants, animals and cultural practices, as well as place names and a grammar guide. This is also the first Indigenous language dictionary to include hand signs, and this section was researched and filmed by RUIL Postdoc Jennifer Green, in collaboration with Felicity Meakins (University of Queensland) and Mudburra elders.

Images: Mudburra elder Shannon Dixon with the Hon. Warren Snowdon, Member for Lingiari (left). Mudburra elder Ray Dixon cuts up the cake for the Elliott school children (right).

The Mudburra to English Dictionary was launched in Elliott by The Honourable Warren Snowdon, Federal Member for Lingiari, on 20 November to celebrate the UNESCO International Year of Indigenous Languages. It is the result of a 40 year collaboration between the Mudburra community of the Northern Territory and linguists, most recently those from the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language.

The dictionary contains Mudburra words with English translations, illustrations and detailed encyclopedic information about plants, animals and cultural practices, as well as place names and a grammar guide. This is also the first Indigenous language dictionary to include hand signs, and this section was researched and filmed by RUIL Postdoc Jennifer Green, in collaboration with Felicity Meakins (University of Queensland) and Mudburra elders.

Images: Mudburra elder Shannon Dixon with the Hon. Warren Snowdon, Member for Lingiari (left). Mudburra elder Ray Dixon cuts up the cake for the Elliott school children (right).

DICTIONARY LAUNCHES

Alyawarr to English Dictionary

It has been more than 25 years since the launch of the first Alyawarr dictionary (Green, 1992). On the 8th of November a new, updated, and substantially revised second edition was celebrated at Arlparra, in the Utopia homelands. The Honourable Warren Snowdon, Federal Member for Lingiari, launched the dictionary and then attended a forum where local school staff and community members discussed ways to make the Alyawarr language a core part of the Arlparra High School curriculum.

The Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) awarded the Institute for Aboriginal Development (IAD) funds to begin work on the second edition and supported the final production of the dictionary, as part of the Australian Indigenous Languages Dictionaries Project.

Images: Lilly Morton and Lucky Morton with Alyawarr Dictionaries, old and new (left). Nigel Morton and Gilbert Corbett present Ken Wyatt, the Minister for Indigenous Australians, with an Alyawarr dictionary after an event at Amperlatwaty on the 6th of November that celebrated the handback of land in the Sandover region to the Alyawarr Traditional Owners (right).

Field work report:

DOCUMENTING SPEECH & LANGUAGE PRACTICES

From September to November this year, RUIL member Rosey Billington visited Vanuatu to continue research on the sound systems of languages of central Vanuatu. On this trip, she visited the village of Eton to begin a new project ‘Documenting speech and language practices in Eton’, supported by a small grant from the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme. The language of Eton is spoken by a few hundred people on the east coast of the island of Efate. Until now, the main available record of the language was a wordlist from the 1970s. Rosey worked with members of the community in Eton, especially 89-year old elder Eddie Karris, to collect audio and video recordings of kastom stories, historical narratives, and descriptions of traditional practices and knowledge systems. She also collected data which will inform the description of the speech sounds and grammatical structures of the language. Rosey will be returning to Eton next year to continue the project and work with other members of the community, and will also be discussing ways the recorded materials can be used to create small books and a draft dictionary for community use.

Images: Jeremiah Karris talking about the different animals that live in the reef at Eton
Field work report: APY CHILD LANGUAGE RESEARCH

Our project investigating children’s Pitjantjatjara language development is continuing and expanding. In September-October, RUIL postdoc Rebecca Defina spent six weeks in Pukatja. She continued to build on her longitudinal corpus of child and caregiver conversation, which now includes nearly 200 hours of recordings with 12 focus children made at intervals over three years. She also collected a series of adult and child sandstories, kinship interviews, and experimental data for two projects – one investigating questions of numerical cognition and the other investigating the prosody of Pitjantjatjara verb chains.

This year our project has been extended across the APY communities. In May and October, RUIL postdoc Lucy Davidson spent time in the two Pitjantjatjara speaking communities Pipalyatjara and Kalka, in the westernmost part of the APY Lands, South Australia. These were the first two data collection trips for her study into children’s acquisition of nominal case marking; how young children learn to use word endings which carry rich grammatical information, such as who is doing what and to whom. Working in connection with Rebecca Defina, Lucy’s research in Pipalyatjara/Kalka helps broaden the overarching language acquisition project to one that looks at children’s speech across the APY Lands.

Tie-em up: Playing with the long strings

In June three Anmatyerr women, April Campbell Pengart, Clarrie Kemarr Long and Emmanisha Kemarr Pepperill, travelled from Ti Tree in the Northern Territory with Jenny Green to attend the Second International Workshop on String Figure-Making Practices in the School of Archaeology and Anthropology, The Australian National University. They presented, along with Stephan Claassen from the Netherlands, on string game sessions filmed by Green between 2007-2012 with Arrernte and Anmatyerr speaking peoples from Central Australia. Anmatyerr educator April Campbell Pengart discussed string figures in relation to some spatial concepts in Anmatyerr — as April puts it, a kind of “hands-on maths”. The group also joined in the ‘making’ sessions where all the conference participants shared their knowledge of string figures from different communities of the world. The trip was supported by the Leary Trust for Australian Indigenous Languages.

PUliima 2019

RUIL team members Ruth Singer and Katie Jepson ran packed-out workshops on making good quality language recordings at PULiiMA 2019 Indigenous Languages and Technology Conference, 19th-22nd of August, in Darwin. PULiiMA is primarily attended by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are working to support their own languages and this year RUIL was a proud sponsor of the event. Participants came from all around Australia including the Torres Strait Islands, Roebourne, Ceduna, Nambucca Heads, Robinvale, the Warlpiri triangle, and Cape York, among many other places. In the workshops Ruth and Katie explained what can cause a good recording to go bad, how to avoid some pitfalls, and how to use a range of recording devices. Participants completed some hands-on tasks in which they recorded speech in different environments and then listened back to how they sounded. It was wonderful to see participants gain confidence in using recording devices and understanding audio terminology. This is the third time RUIL has been invited to run a recording workshop at PULiiMA. Ruth also presented a talk in the conference with Rosemary Urabadi and Jenny Manmurulu about using Mawng in Warruwi School.
In early December RUIL, partnered with the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language, hosted a public lecture presented by Kaurna man, Jack Kanya Buckskin, and Associate Professor Rob Amery (both pictured left), on ‘Re-awakening Kaurna, the language of the Adelaide Plains’ and the strategies used to successfully reclaim Kaurna from written records.

The lecture video link will be shared via our social media, and we can guarantee you will want to check this one out!

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

- waru (fire)
- kapri (water)
- pirriya (wind)
- warta (tree)
- kirnara (moon)
- yilkari (sky)
- mama (father)
- tjilku (child)
- kuwarri (today)
- wiya (no)
- karlaya (emu)
- papa (dog)
- tirnka (goanna)
- mulya (nose)
- pina (ear)

Happy Holidays
From the entire RUIL team, we hope you have a happy and healthy festive season. We look forward to sharing more exciting Indigenous language stories with you in 2020!

Congratulations to Dr Katie Jepson and Dr Ivan (Vanya) Kapitonov, who graduated in December!

To see our regular wordposts, follow us on Facebook and Twitter @indiglang