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 Associate Professor Rachel Nordlinger and Professor Gillian Wigglesworth.

This newsletter presents some of the highlights of the last four 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

Part-parti Mirring-yi | Aboriginal knowledge of birds of SW Victoria

Part-parti Mirring-yi is the latest in a suite of bird apps developed through a partnership between RUIL and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, NT. Part-parti Mirring-yi has been created in collaboration with the Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority (CMA) and the Laka Gunditj Language Program. It features Aboriginal bird knowledge from the closely-related Dhauwurd Wurrung, Djaargurt Wurrung, Kee Wurrung, Kirrae Wurrung, Kuurn Kopan Noot, Peek Wurrung, and Woolooowoorroong language varieties of south west Victoria. The app is a tool for learning about language, culture and the natural environment.

In March RUIL members Jenny Green and Debbie Loakes (also affiliated with CoEDL) travelled to Warrnambool to meet with Laka Gunditj Language Program coordinator Joel Wright, Ada Nano (CMA consultant ecologist) and Gunditjmara and Eastern Maar knowledge holders to make audio recordings of bird names in their languages. A total of 19 people participated, the youngest only five years old. Their voices will be heard on the app, which also features photos of the birds, audio of bird calls, and short texts about the cultural significance of the birds. The app will accompany the CMA's Woodland Bird Identification Booklet, due for release later this year.

Compilation of archival and present-day Aboriginal bird knowledge for the region was undertaken by the CMA in collaboration with the Laka Gunditj Language Program, and the Eastern Maar Nation and Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners, through funding from the Australian Government National Landcare Programme. Other bird apps in the series include those in the Kaytetye, Eastern/Central Arrernte, Pertame, Anmatyerr, Murrinh Patha, Mawng and Gun-nartpa languages from the Northern Territory.

The bird app project has been funded by the Melbourne Social Equity Institute (University of Melbourne), RUIL (University of Melbourne), The Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, and First Languages Australia.

Shane Bell, Sherry Johnstone, Ada Nano, ‘Locky’ Eccles, Joel Wright, Janice Austin, Roslyn Clarke-Britton at the Gunditjmara Coop in Warrnambool recording bird names for the Part-parti Mirring-yi app (photo: J. Green)

Debbie Loakes and Tyson Lovett-Murray show Nasan Lovett-Murray the beginnings of the Part-parti Mirring-yi app (photo: J. Green)
The Ngandi Dictionary Project

RUIL Project Officer Brighde Collins visited the Ngukurr Language Centre in February to deliver intensive training for the community-run Ngandi Dictionary Project. This project began in mid-2015, when a language worker at the Ngukurr Language Centre, Grant Thompson, acted on a well-defined need for a modernised version of an old dictionary. The previous Ngandi dictionary was published as part of a grammar written by Jeffrey Heath in 1978, and consisted of many Ngandi words with an English translation, but very few English words with a Ngandi translation. This meant that when a non-Ngandi speaker was searching for a word in the English section, they couldn't find it, even if the Ngandi word had been recorded by Heath.

Currently in Ngukurr, where the main language spoken is Kriol, very few people speak Ngandi and the community wanted to be able to easily access these Ngandi words. Ngandi man and language worker at the Ngukurr Language Centre, Grant Thompson, has lead the project in translating these words from Ngandi/English into Kriol. The project intention is to enable community members to access and learn their heritage language through their own first language. Brighde has been working with the dictionary team since July 2015, with a digitised version of the dictionary prepared with assistance from RUiL team members Brett Baker and Nick Thieberger. Now, language workers Grant Thompson, Angelina Joshua and Dean-Austin Barra, and community members Cherry Daniels and Betty Roberts are at the end-point of the translation process, and have less than 400 words to go!

In February, Brighde was training the team on translating some of the trickier descriptions, Kriol orthography, and consistency with the way that words are described. The group also ran four Ngandi Breakfast/Morning Tea sessions, where community members gather and learn how to introduce themselves and make conversation in Ngandi. They also practiced how to play ‘go fish’ in Ngandi, in preparation for the next school term. It was an incredibly fun and rewarding trip for Brighde. If you want to hear Grant Thompson talk about Kriol, be sure to come to our public lecture on May 30th at 6pm (see inset, left). You can learn more about the Ngandi language work that Cherry and Grant are doing by watching the following ABC news story: https://youtu.be/hjxHL6Vk1ew

Something lost, something found: Kriol of Northern Australia

Public Lecture 6pm, Tuesday 30th May

Our next RUiL Public Lecture will be delivered by Dr Greg Dickson and Mr Grant Thompson.

Northern Australia is a global hotspot of endangered languages. Growing out of the diminishing of Australia’s diverse linguistic heritage is a new language, Kriol. Based on English but pulsing with innovations from its Indigenous speakers, this lecture shows how Kriol is a vibrant, growing language yet one with a troubled existence.

More information and registrations:
http://alumni.online.unimelb.edu.au/kriol
Jenny Green was invited to present a floor talk at the National Gallery of Victoria in an exhibition of Indigenous women’s art titled Who’s afraid of colour? Jenny focused on the art of Emily Kam Kngwarray and other women artists from Utopia in the Sandover region of the Northern Territory. Jenny reflected on the people she worked with during her time there in the 70s and 80s, where she was involved in the ‘new art’ movement at Utopia. In 1977 a group of women, including Kngwarray, started experimenting with different ways of making art, including wood block printing, tie dye and then batik. The early batiks quickly received national and international acclaim, which is understandable, as they are beautiful! To read some more information and see some of the featured artworks, visit: http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/exhibition/whos-afraid-of-colour/

It was a truly valuable experience and I learnt a great deal from each and every person at the workshop. It was particularly insightful to see how the group navigated cultural protocols regarding language ownership and community consultation, and this really highlighted the importance of Aboriginal autonomy in the wider language revitalisation effort. In recognising the knowledge of participants and their role as custodians of the Gugada, Wirangu and Mirning languages, the workshop became a space grounded in Indigenous sovereignty and leadership. I feel privileged to have been included in such a community-controlled approach and would like to thank RNLD and RUIL for providing the fantastic opportunity, as well everyone in Ceduna for so warmly welcoming me into the workshop and sharing their local language and culture.'
Does the language we speak affect the way we think?

Director Rachel Nordlinger and her colleague Associate Professor Evan Kidd from ANU have started on a project that will help us to understand more about the answer to this very important question. Rachel and Evan are working with speakers of Murrinhpatha (Wadeye, Northern Territory) using eyetracking technology to learn more about how Murrinhpatha speakers process their language. This experiment involves showing speakers a picture and asking them to describe what is happening in the picture. The eyetracker records where in the picture they are looking before they start to utter their sentence. Researchers in Europe have done this with speakers of languages such as Dutch, Tagalog and Tzeltal and have found that the word order of the language being spoken influences where speakers look before they start to speak. So if the language puts subjects first (as English does, for example), then speakers will look most at the agent in the picture before starting to speak. If the language puts verbs first (as in Tzeltal) then speakers look more evenly across all participants in the picture before they start to speak. This suggests that the order of words in the language influences the ways in which we think about and plan our sentences. This research has never been done, however, on a language with fairly free word order, such as Murrinhpatha. Thus, Rachel and Evan’s research will make an important contribution to our understanding of the relationship between language diversity and the ways in which humans think. Watch this space for the results!

RUIL has a new website!
We are excited to announce the new website for the Research Unit for Indigenous Language:

http://arts.unimelb.edu.au/indiglang

Keep an eye out for new content as we continue to update it in the coming months

RUIL celebrates international Mother Language Day with Treasure Language Storytelling

This International Mother Language Day, we were proud to support a Treasure Language Storytelling event in Melbourne. Treasure Language Storytelling is a performance event where storytellers tell stories in the original languages before sharing the English translations. On the night the audience heard stories from Woiwurrung, Yoruba, Southern Min, Kannada and Lopit people. Read more about the event here: http://www.treasurelanguage.org/melbourne-february-2017.html

Some of the stimuli pictures used in the research project

Rachel Nordlinger (left) with project participant Desmond Pupuli