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

**A TIME FOR FIRSTS: MURRINHPATHA SEMINAR AND SNOW DAYS**

In September Nguvudirr Jeremiah Tunmuck (pictured left), funded by a RUIL Indigenous Scholar grant, visited The University of Melbourne to work with DECRA postdoctoral fellow John Mansfield (pictured right). Nguvudirr is a Magati Ke man from Yederr, a fluent speaker of Murrinhpatha, and a skilled translator of Murrinhpatha to English. He lives in Wadeye, NT, and he has extensive experience as a language consultant working with John and others.

The RUIL Indigenous Scholar grant scheme supports the work and/or professional development of Indigenous researchers in projects that involves collaboration with RUIL members. As it turned out, his visit was a series of firsts for both Nguvudirr and RUIL.

On Friday 17 September Nguvudirr, together with John and Tony Goodfellow, delivered a seminar in the Murrinhpatha language entitled “Yederr country, Murrinhpatha heavy and light”. Nguvudirr led the seminar in his first language and John provided translation in English. This was the first RUIL (and possibly University of Melbourne) seminar delivered primarily in an Aboriginal language. The message was powerful, and the seminar was very well received by attendees. It was a privilege for RUIL to be part of it.

For the rest of his visit, Nguvudirr and John worked on transcription and translation of archival Murrinhpatha stories. They added two further texts to the Murrinhpatha corpus which will also be returned to the Literacy Production Centre in Wadeye. Nguvudirr gained a better understanding of what happens to language data on its journey from the bush to the university campus, and on to publication and the possibilities of collaborative research.

There was also time for some play and besides exploring Melbourne, Nguvudirr and John visited the Victorian high country for a personal first snow day!

STRENGTHENING LANGUAGE, STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY: SHOWCASING MILDURA’S ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES

The Strengthening Language project is a collaboration with the Aboriginal community of Mildura to share and discover more about the traditional languages of the Mildura region. In November, the team got together again in Mildura to continue work on supporting the local Latji Latji and Barkindji languages and running language activities with school students.

The project team worked with a small group of Chaffey Secondary College students to create artworks for a series of Latji Latji and Barkindji language posters around the themes of ‘Environment’ and ‘Animals’. We now have a beautiful set of images, and can’t wait to see the finished product! In the afternoon, we met with staff at Mallee District Aboriginal Services to discuss repatriation of language materials housed at the national AIATSIS archive. The team also began preparations to make recordings of word lists in Barkindji and Latji Latji for use in future school activities in Mildura and beyond.

The Strengthening Language team members at RUIL are Jill Vaughan and Debbie Loakes, supported by wonderful RAs Yu-Ting Chiang and Marian Stoney. The project is supported by the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust and the Melbourne Humanities Foundation.

We look forward to our final project visit in the New Year!

LINGUISTICS ROADSHOW

In November, RUIL student Katie Jepson and members Jill Vaughan and Rosey Billington visited school students in Mildura in north-western Victoria as part of the Linguistics Roadshow. The Linguistics Roadshow is a workshop program introducing students to the science of language through fun activities and discussion, and has been running since 2015 (supported by the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language). This year, the team were invited to meet Year 7 students from Chaffey Secondary College and Year 6 students from Mildura Primary School, Mildura West Primary School and Mildura South Primary School. Through an interactive talk, the students learned about what linguistics is, delved into the huge diversity of languages around the world, considered different kinds of language variation, and explored the diversity of Australia’s linguistic landscape. The students also tried their hand at a Dyirbal language puzzle, learned about speech articulation with MRI videos of the vocal tract, and enthusiastically mapped out some of the lexical variation in Australian English.
A TRIP TO TAHITI

Janet Fletcher and Nick Thieberger were part of a team that worked with colleagues in Tahiti at the University of French Polynesia on support for Pacific languages. Most of the seven languages of the French Polynesian archipelago are severely endangered with very little transmission to the next generation. We ran courses in using tools like Elan, Praat, and Flex and on issues around language recording and archiving. Participants represented a number of different languages from French Polynesia and from different language academies. While there we also participated in the Pacific Islands Universities Research Network conference which brings together researchers from Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Vanuatu and the Solomons.

We were able to visit a primary school to see how Tahitian is being taught in 5 hours per week. The kids were very engaged and were learning English and Tahitian as well as French in the school.

This trip was part of the outreach work of the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language.

6 February 2019
Public Lecture: The genius of Australian Indigenous languages, and why they are important for all of us

Did you miss RUIL Director, Rachel Nordlinger’s Inaugural Professorial Lecture? See her at the National Institute of Dramatic Art, Sydney.

Register at: https://bit.ly/2EGPWJ0

15-17 March 2019
The 18th annual Australian Languages Workshop

For registration and workshop program head to: https://bit.ly/2CUD4wR

3 April 2019
Public Lecture: Lou Bennett
Further information on the topic and registration will be released shortly via the RUIL website and social media.
ARC funding success

RUIL Dr John Mansfield has been awarded an ARC Discovery Early Career Researcher Award, beginning in 2018. This project aims to investigate how Aboriginal languages are evolving in urban contexts, and how language shapes Aboriginal engagement with cities. It will focus on Darwin-based speakers of Murrinhpatha, a language with unusually complex word structure. It has been argued that linguistic complexity emerges only in small, remote societies; but little is known about it might evolve when speakers engage in broader, urban social networks. The expected outcome of this project is an understanding of linguistic complexity in an urban context, and the patterns of social interaction of Aboriginal people in Darwin.

RUIL member Dr Brett Baker, together with colleagues Associate Professor Mark Harvey; Associate Professor Robert Mailhammer and Dr Rikke Bundgaard-Nielsen, have been awarded an ARC Discovery project titled “Lexical access in Australian languages” to the value of $484,000 over 3 years. This project aims to investigate how listeners use cues from the way speech sounds are produced to break the speech stream into individual, recognisable words. Outcomes will include advances in theories of speech processing, informing the development of speech processing systems, and contributions to Indigenous cultural maintenance.

European funding success

RUIL members Barb Kelly, Rebecca Defina and Lucy Davidson have been awarded a $23,262 UA-DAAD Australia-Germany Joint Research Cooperation Scheme grant for “A guide for documenting language development in under-studied languages”. Birgit Hellwig (University of Cologne), Evan Kidd (MPI NL) and Henrike Frye (University of Cologne) are the German recipients of 16000 euros. The grant covers travel costs for meetings in Australia and Germany over the next two years as they work collaboratively to develop a methodological tool kit and publication pathway for work on lesser studied languages. We look forward to reporting on the progress and outcomes of these projects!

2018 Award for Excellence in Team-Based Research Programs

The PARADISEC team including RUIL member Dr Nick Thieberger and colleagues, Prof Barwick, Dr Harris, Prof Evans, Prof Simpson and Prof Hajek have been awarded The University of Melbourne 2018 Award for Excellence in Team-Based Research Programs. An amazing example of teamwork and collaboration across disciplines and universities. Well done!

Image: Nick Thieberger pictured with Amanda Harris (left) and Linda Barwick (right)

Farewell

RUIL said farewell to postdoctoral fellow Cris Edmonds-Wathen in October. Cris worked with the Warruwi Community school in Arnhem Land on a project to extend children’s proficiency in spatial language in Mawng. Cris has journeyed back to Darwin to teach at Charles Darwin University. We thank Cris for her time with RUIL and wish her the very best for her future endeavors!

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year