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 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

RUIL CELEBRATES IYIL2019

Rachel Nordlinger (RUIL Director)

Welcome to our first newsletter for 2019, the United Nations’ International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYIL2019). The overall goals of IYIL2019 are to raise awareness of Indigenous languages, both for the benefit of the people whose languages they are, but also for others to appreciate the important contribution they make to our world’s rich cultural diversity (https://en.iyil2019.org/). In many respects, the International Year of Indigenous Languages is business as usual for us here at RUIL, since fostering, supporting and appreciating the value of Indigenous languages is our focus every year. In 2019 we will continue with our work in collaboration with Indigenous communities around Australia and the broader region to support community language objectives, promote and protect Indigenous languages, and showcase to the broader public the genius of these languages and the complex systems of knowledge they represent.

We cannot, however, underestimate the benefits of throwing an international spotlight on Indigenous languages and their significance for human rights protection, wellbeing, cultural continuity, reconciliation and sustainable development around the globe. Current estimates are that of the more than 7100 languages around the world, 96% of them are spoken by only 3% of the population, mostly represented by small Indigenous communities fighting to maintain their languages. This puts the bulk of the world’s linguistic diversity on the shoulders of a very small percentage of the population, and highlights why it is so important that we help and support them in their efforts. We welcome IYIL2019 and hope that it inspires increased efforts around the world to support the maintenance and protection of these thousands of languages.

We have a number of fantastic activities planned to celebrate IYIL2019, including our newly launched 50-words project detailed on page 2. We will also announce a number of new initiatives and events throughout the year, so look out for announcements on Twitter and Facebook, and enjoy our wonderful word posts while you’re there!

‘Here is the word for language in five Indigenous languages’

Image: Enlarged International Mother Language Day wordpost.
(21 February, 2019)
AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGES WORKSHOP

RUIL was very pleased to host the 18th annual Australian Languages Workshop at Camp Marysville in beautiful Dhaagung Wurrung (Taungurung) country, from 15-17 March. The workshop had 55 attendees from across Australia, including linguists, community language workers and language enthusiasts who came together to share their knowledge and practice of Australian Indigenous languages. Presentations and discussions covered an array of topics on languages from all around the country: from the analysis of intricate grammatical structures, to the revitalisation of Victorian languages, to metaphorical connections between country and kin, caregiver melodies, the National Indigenous Languages Report, and much, much more. It was a very successful weekend, full of intellectual stimulation, language sharing and even the customary camp-fire singalong.

WARRUWI INDIGENOUS SCHOLARS PRESENT AT ALW 2019

In March, RUIL had two visitors from Warruwi Community, Arnhem Land, as part of the RUIL Indigenous Scholars scheme. Rosemary Urabadi, an elder with expertise in the Mawng language and linguistics and Rosharlia Djorlom, who recently completed year 12. Together with RUIL linguist Ruth Singer they presented a paper at the Australian Languages Workshop, Marysville. In their talk, called ‘A history of teaching and learning in Mawng at Warruwi School’, Rosemary Urabadi talked about her work in the bilingual Mawng-English program that ran at Warruwi school 1973-2000. They also discussed the recent re-introduction of teaching in Mawng as part of Mawng literacy and Mawng maths classes. During their five day visit, Rosemary and Rosharlia spent time at the University doing research with Ruth Singer and went on a campus tour with staff from Murrup Barak, the University’s Indigenous centre. They enjoyed a walk to Steavenson's falls while in Marysville and spent a day with students at St. Leonard’s college, Brighton.

International Conference on Language Documentation & Conservation

Every two years the International Conference on Language Documentation and Conservation (ICLDC) is held in Hawai‘i. In 2019, a number of RUIL members attended and presented. ICLDC has nearly 500 participants and always attracts many community members as well as academic linguists, and the theme of this year’s conference was “Connecting Communities, Languages & Technology”. The sessions reflected a range of interests, with topics including collaborative language recording, language revitalisation projects, and automated transcription of recordings, among many others (see https://iclcd6.weebly.com/ for more details, and links to recordings of the presentations).
John Mansfield (pictured left), last month, published a major contribution to the study of complex words in an Australian language - *Murrinhpatha Morphology and Phonology* (de Gruyter).

“Murrinhpatha words really are as complex as the earlier literature suggested, or perhaps even more so,” says John. “Verbs carry information about who did what to whom, how many people are involved, their gender, and the manner of the action. But different verbs express these things quite differently, so you need to learn a lot of highly specific patterns. I’m still amazed that people learn and speak this language.”

In fact, there’s so much going on in these verbs that they don’t really look much like ‘words’ as we would generally conceive of them. On the other hand, they do come as a single unit of speech which can’t be broken up. For example, take the ‘word’ *panthimardawiththapirri*, which translates to: ‘They were bringing them (waterlily roots) up from the water’.

“In writing this book, I am deeply grateful to people in Wadeye who befriended me – we were all way outside our comfort zones!” says John. “I’m also indebted to those linguists who paved the way with previous research, especially Michael Walsh, Chester Street, Joe Blythe and Rachel Nordlinger.

“Murrinhpatha is a really special language, one that developed very unique ways of representing the world. By delving into the details of how it works, we get a fascinating vignette in the bigger picture of what human languages can do.”

Field research on Aboriginal languages is usually conducted in remote communities. But today these languages are also spoken in cities such as Darwin. In July 2018 and January 2019 John Mansfield made two linguistic field trips to Darwin, as part of an ARC-funded project, “Remotely urban: Aboriginal language use in Darwin”. On these two trips, John worked with speakers of Anindilyakwa, Burarra, Djambarrpuynu, Kriol, Murrinhpatha and Wadjiginy. The traditional countries of these five languages are widely separated, but in Darwin they are all connected.

Aboriginal languages can be heard all around Darwin. Many speakers live in designated “Town Camps”, which provide housing for people from diverse locations and with diverse languages. Others live in mainstream suburbs, especially around northern Darwin and Palmerston. Others stay in the coastal parks and bushland.

Darwin is the country of the Larrakia people, who provide services to other Aboriginal people in the city. Aboriginal people meet husbands and wives in Darwin, forming new relationships between distant countries. They also learn words and phrases from each others’ languages, which they use as symbols of respect and to build new social networks. Non-Indigenous Australians could learn a lot from this!

**A NEW BOOK ON MURRINHPATHA**

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<td></td>
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We are excited to be launching the RUIL 50 words project. This will collect and present 50 words in as many Australian languages as possible, including sign languages. There will be a map of Australia that shows each word, and audio to hear the words spoken by a language speaker.

**Please contribute!**

Please join in by contributing 50 words in an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language, with audio and/or videos, that we will make into an online resource. More information is on our webpage: https://bit.ly/2UUMDS5.

**Images:** 50 words project wordlist example
Welcome

DR STEVEN KELLY!

RUIL welcomes new postdoctoral fellow, Dr Steven Kelly (pictured).

Dr Kelly’s research project is to work with the Kuruma Marthudunera Aboriginal Corporation (KMAC), and the Cultural Heritage Manager to implement key strategic cultural Heritage research projects in accordance with the Robe River Kuruma (RRK) strategic framework and other identified RRK cultural priorities. Kuruma Marthudunera Aboriginal Corporation (KMAC), established in 2013, is the registered native title body corporate for the Kuruma and Marthudunera (K&M) peoples. KMAC is also the provider of community projects, programs and services developed and delivered for the benefit of the K&M people.

The broad aspect of his research is to examine the role of translation, understood in its broadest sense, in the transmission, interpretation, transformation and sharing of language, values, histories and narratives. Dr Kelly will work with KMAC on their existing programs such as:

1. The Knowledge Capture and Transfer project
2. The Oral History Recording project
3. Care for Country initiative
4. Strategic Cultural Heritage projects

DIRECTOR RACHEL NORDLINGER ON ABC’S AWAYE PROGRAM

What makes Australia’s Indigenous languages so remarkable? Listen to RUIL Director Rachel Nordlinger’s interview with Daniel Browning on ABC RN’s AWAYE program, where she talks about the complexity of Indigenous languages, what they teach us about human language more generally, and her wonderful document their languages. You can download or listen to her interview here: https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/awaye/language-is-key/10884748

DR LOU BENNETT AM Public Lecture

In early April RUIL, in conjunction with the Research Unit for Indigenous Arts and Culture, hosted a public lecture given by former member of the internationally acclaimed trio Tiddas, Dr Lou Bennett AM (pictured below), titled ‘Sovereign Language Repatriation: Through Song Pedagogy’. Dr Bennett gave an overview on her work in language retrieval, regeneration and reclamation over the past 25 years as a practising artist and academic.

We will release the lecture video link via social media - please stay tuned!

CONGRATULATIONS PHD STUDENTS!

Congratulations to the following RUIL students for submitting their PhD theses:
- Ivan (Vanya) Kapitonov, A Grammar of Kunbarlang
- Daniela Diedrich, A Grammar of Paku, a language of Central Kalimantan
- Jonathan Moodie, A Grammar of Lopit

Congratulations also to Lucy Davidson who graduated with her PhD in Linguistics for her thesis titled Allied and Adversaries: Categories in Murrinhpatha speaking children’s talk.

Image: Dr Lucy Davidson (pictured left) with Professor Gillian Wigglesworth

Image: Rachel pictured with Heather Wilson and kids at Elliott, Northern Territory (1991)