

Welcome to the second newsletter from the Research Unit for Indigenous Language for 2022.

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 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>

## THE TOP END LANGUAGE FORUM



*The forum brought together representatives from 10+ communities.*

We have now entered the [UNESCO International Decade of Indigenous Languages](#), 2022-2032, and Aboriginal language advocates in the Top End are taking advantage of this to focus on the future. On 6-7 June 2022, 60+ delegates from 10+ Aboriginal communities in the region gathered in Darwin to discuss what they want for their languages by the end of the decade. The meeting was held entirely for and by Aboriginal community representatives, facilitated by Rarrtjwuy Melanie Herdman. At least a dozen Aboriginal languages are still spoken fluently in the Top End, and this was reflected in the variety of languages used in the meeting. Keynote and closing addresses were delivered by MLA Yinija Mark Guyula.

Delegates at the meeting spoke of the central importance of language on every level of their lives, from education and community development through to spirituality, well-being and sovereignty. Over two days of passionate discussion and sharing of stories, delegates articulated a shared vision for the maintenance and strengthening of Aboriginal languages in the Top End. There was a particular focus on issues of... **Continued on pg. 2**

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**Continued...** bilingual education, community based language practices, building connections between communities, and raising the profile of Aboriginal languages more widely. An initial statement of collective goals for 2032 was drafted, and this will now be discussed within a wider network of community representatives, to be finalised in the coming months.

This forum was supported by RUIL, along with Charles Darwin University and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education.



Images:(Left) Jenny Manmurulu speaks to Judy Lalara and others. (Right) Pirrawayingi Marius Pupuntatameri speaks to Tictac Moore.

## WORKING ON SIGN WITH WANGKA MAYA

In July Jennifer Green travelled to Port Hedland, WA, invited by [Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre](#) to work on their Wurtungu Pilbara Aboriginal Sign Language documentation project. There is little documentation of Pilbara sign languages, and the language centre secured an ILA grant to record them. Jennifer worked with Wangka Maya’s language team, including Yulparija Language Worker Vincent Thomas and Senior Linguist Annie Cameron. Together they made video recordings with signers/speakers of Thiinma, Warriangka, Manyjilyjarra, Yulparija, Warnman and Nyangumarta. People from [Bundiyarra Irra Wangga Language Centre](#) in Geraldton travelled over 1300 kilometers to join in the workshop. It has been a strong start on documenting Pilbara sign languages, and the advice and support from RUIL is greatly appreciated.

Sign is used for many purposes. As Vincent Thomas explained, “Yulparija people use sign language, and we call it Mara Wangka. Today’s sign language used by young people is different. Older people used sign languages especially when hunting for *kuka/kuwi* meat”.

RUIL has also offered to provide additional support to annotate these first recordings, in preparation for further workshops in the future.



Image (above): Vincent Thomas and Annie Cameron.



Image (above): Warnman Language Specialists Barbara Hale and Sharon Hale with Jennifer Green and Wangka Maya manager Lorraine Injie.



## PARADISEC VISIT THE CHEROKEE NATION

The Cherokee are one of the biggest Native American groups, and there are some 3,000 speakers of the Cherokee language. As with many other indigenous languages, there is a desire for younger people to speak and pass on the language. There is also a need to make recordings with current speakers that can be used to create language teaching materials. As with many similar projects, the task of recording and managing this mass of information can be daunting.

In Australia, our work in the [Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures](#) (PARADISEC) curates a major collection of language records in indigenous languages of the Pacific, PNG and other places. We have an established system for applying licences for use of the material, as specified by depositors. As a result of this work, the Cherokee Language Project got in touch and we had online meetings to show how we managed digital audio, transcripts, images, and video. Like many similar projects, they have been amassing recordings, transcripts, manuscripts, and texts, all stored on hard disks and computers in a range of locations. They now have a major effort to record each current Cherokee speaker. Keeping track of all of this material is not easy and requires a methodology that we have had some experience with in PARADISEC.



*Image: The Cherokee Language Program members who hosted the visit by Nick and Marco.*

It is important to create research objects that can be used in the future, and to not use content management systems that make it difficult or impossible to access the data itself. With recordings of performance we want to be able to include transcripts time coded to the media, so we can then search the transcripts and find the associated piece of media. Within the PARADISEC collection of 15,500 hours of audio a user can find a single sentence and instantly hear it played. There is text or media in over 1,300 languages in this collection that takes up 180 terabytes.

This model of curating language data in open formats, using relevant standards for metadata, appealed to the Cherokee Language Program so in June 2022 Marco La Rosa and RUIL Deputy Director Nick Thieberger traveled to Talehquah in Oklahoma for a week of training and developing a system for describing their existing collections. We trained them in the use of transcription software (Elan), regular expressions, metadata creation, naming, and set up an instance of the open-source Omeka system, to allow them to begin describing their collections using standard terms. Marco wrote an exporter from Omeka to Research Object Crate (RO-Crate) format in which files have their catalog descriptions stored with them, allowing each directory to be self-describing, and so allowing a file directory to be extracted from the collection without losing its description.

This model of creating self-describing research items allows them to become part of what we could characterise as a data commons, in which research materials each state what their contents are, and what licences are in place for their use. All of this is done without using proprietary systems that lock up the data in inaccessible formats.



## RECENT KEYNOTES

### *Clark Webb presents at the Indigenous Knowledge Institute symposium*

Clark Webb (pictured right) gave an inspirational talk at the Indigenous Knowledge Institute's International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples Symposium, co-sponsored by RUIL. Clark spoke about the establishment of the Gumbaynggirr Giingana Freedom School in Coffs Harbour – the first bilingual school of an Aboriginal language in NSW, and the many related activities they are undertaking to use, promote and revitalise the Gumbaynggirr language. From a base of a few older speakers a decade ago there are now 20 proficient speakers, of which two are qualified teachers in the community's independent school. There is a bilingual preschool that started in 2021 and children are encouraged to use Gumbaynggirr in their play as well as in class. At the Gumbaynggirr Giingana Freedom School 60% of the day's activity is carried out in Gumbaynggirr and they are aiming to increase that to 80%, while teachers model speaking Gumbaynggirr all the time. At least one day per week in the school is spent on country and out of the classroom, and part of this work includes an effort to develop new terms for everyday items.



### *Debbie Loakes presents at SocioPhonAus3 workshop*

On the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> of July, Griffith University held the [SocioPhonAus3 workshop](#) in Brisbane. Debbie Loakes gave the keynote on the first day, called *Sociophonetics in Australian English: exploring social and regional variation*. This presented findings from Debbie's postdoc work in the [ARC Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language](#), also supported by RUIL.

Debbie talked about the findings of three studies which involved Aboriginal English and mainstream Australian English spoken in Victoria. All studies looked at gender, age, region and variety (Aboriginal English or mainstream Australian English) and the role they played in how people talk (and how they listen). In the keynote, Debbie reported that variety is the strongest driver of sociophonetic variability, followed by age, then region, then gender. This is interesting, because Aboriginal people in Victoria speak English as a first language, but this English has special features that make it unique and different from the mainstream (which is what participants talked about a lot during data collection).

Some specific linguistic findings she mentioned are that Aboriginal English in Victoria has a more creaky voice quality, greater variability in how people pronounce consonants, as well as some regional variation in the way people talk between the south of the state (Warrnambool) and the north (Mildura).

The findings of one of the studies has recently been published – it is open access, and you can find it easily [online](#).

