Welcome to the fourth newsletter of the Research Unit for Indigenous Language. This newsletter is published twice-yearly and contains details of the research activities, latest news and other achievements of the Research Unit.

Launched in May 2013, the Research Unit consists of a team of researchers from the School of Languages and Linguistics. Led by Associate Professor Rachel Nordlinger (Director) and Professor Gillian Wigglesworth (Deputy Director), the Research Unit is advised by a distinguished Steering Committee consisting of language experts from a range of government, academic, community and other organisations.

Staff within the Research Unit have been active in research into Indigenous languages and the communities where they are spoken. This newsletter presents some of the highlights for the first half of 2015, and focuses particularly on events, fieldwork, new and continuing projects, and new grants and publications.

MORE INFO: Full list of all publications, conference presentations and current grants - http://arts.unimelb.edu.au/indiglang/

REPORT: FIELDWORK

Documenting Sugarbag (Honeybee) Knowledge in Maningrida

Over three fieldtrips lasting around six months (2014-15), Aung Si has been working with speakers of Kune, Rembarrnga, Djinang, Burarra and Njdjebbana to document the various names for sugarbag or bush honey in these languages. An exciting challenge is to try and figure out what criteria the speakers of these languages use to identify the different sugarbag types – the bees look very similar, so that doesn’t help! Dr. Anne Dollin, a honeybee taxonomist based in Sydney, has been identifying the samples collected by Aung Si in and around Maningrida. Charlie Brian (pictured), traditional owner of Buluhkaduru outstation, is an expert sugarbag finder, and has played a leading role in locating and naming all the different types.

Aung Si has been helping Kune speakers such as Jill Yirrindilli and Carol Liyawanga, both working at Maningrida Community Education Centre, to write children’s books. Some are translations of books in other languages from the school’s library, but others are original works by Jill and Carol. Aung Si also carried out some fieldwork for Ruth Singer and Isabel O’Keefe’s project to document Kun-barlang, an endangered language of West Arnhem Land. Rita Djitmu and Millie Djamudjan, possibly the only two Kun-barlang speakers currently in Maningrida, very patiently explained the intricacies of tri-relational kinship terms to Aung Si.

New funding initiative for Indigenous Researchers

In October 2014 RUIL launched a new funding scheme aimed at supporting Indigenous researchers working in collaboration with our RUIL research staff. Our Indigenous Researcher Small Grant Scheme (IRSGS) provides up to $5000 to projects such as facilitating a co-authored publication or joint conference presentations. Our first project funded by the IRSGS was undertaken in March 2015 (see story on page 2).
Indigenous linguists Janet Marbinda and Rachel Meiyinbara visit Melbourne University from Warruwi Community

In March, Janet Marbinda and Rachel Meiyinbara visited Melbourne University to work with Research Fellow Ruth Singer. The visit was supported by the RUIL Indigenous Researcher Small Grant Scheme. The six-day visit was action-packed and included training, research and a bit of sightseeing. It was Janet’s first visit to Melbourne and Rachel’s second visit, the earlier one being in 1984.

Janet is a research assistant on Ruth Singer’s DECRA project ‘What makes a multilingual community? The life of languages at Warruwi community’ (2014-2017). As well as making recordings in the field, she transcribes recordings in Mawng, Kunwinjku and Kunbarlang using Elan, a program which aids in language documentation. Ruth and Janet did some training to improve Janet’s transcription and translation skills. Hywel Stoakes also worked with Janet on her Kunwinjku spelling. In addition, both Janet and Rachel, made recordings at the Horwood recording Studio, a facility of the Arts Faculty of Melbourne University, with the help of Hywel and Gavin Nebauer.

Janet was very impressed by the state of the art recording facilities. Janet made recordings in Kunwinjku and Rachel made recordings in Mawng. They recorded some narratives for ongoing research into Mawng and Kunwinjku carried out by the School of Languages and Linguistics Phonetics Laboratory and also recorded some conversations that will be used for studying multilingual interaction in Ruth’s projects. Janet and Rachel also attended a lecture by Rachel Nordlinger for the subject ‘Language in Aboriginal Australia’ where they got to hear how English speakers learn the sound distinctions in Australian Indigenous languages. They enjoyed seeing the university campus and Janet particularly liked the view from the Babel building. Other activities on campus included a lunch with RUIL staff at University house and a visit to Murrup Barak, the University’s Indigenous centre.

Both Janet and Rachel found Melbourne rather chilly but did a bit of sightseeing including visiting the Melbourne Zoo, Victoria markets and seeing Cirque du Soleil. Writing to Ruth on her return, Janet mentioned that she was already missing Melbourne. Her favourite part of the Cirque du Soleil was the performance of a Native American hoop dance. Janet mentioned how much she liked the campus at the University and hopes to visit Melbourne again in 2016.

Rachel Nordlinger featured on the LINGUIST List

RUIL’s Director Assoc. Prof. Rachel Nordlinger was recently a featured linguist on the official blog of The LINGUIST List. Rachel takes a look back over the journey that led her to linguistics, and the wonderful experience of working with Indigenous communities to describe and document their languages. Her story starts with French, then progresses to Bilinarra (Victoria River Downs, NT), Wambaya (Barkly Tablelands, NT) and the languages of the Daly River region (NT), with a stopover at Stanford University, California where she completed her PhD. For the complete version go to: http://blog.linguistlist.org/fund-drive/featured-linguist-rachel-nordlinger.
REPORTS: RNLD Student Volunteers

Katerina Forrester

In November 2014, (now) Honours student Katerina Forrester accompanied Senior Linguist Margaret Florey to two DRIL (Documenting and Revitalising Indigenous Languages) training sites: Adelaide and Port Augusta. Each site is the language base for two neighbouring languages from around the Flinders Ranges: Adnyamathanha and Dieri respectively. Being able to participate in two language programs in two areas of South Australia gave Katerina proper insight into the diversity of Australian Aboriginal languages. RNLD works with a small Adnyamathanha family group in Adelaide who have created many language resources, such as the animated film Wadu Matyidi. The aim was to implement a cataloguing system for their extensive resources, which would enable to participants to easily find resources for teaching.

In Port Augusta, the Dieri group are in the process of establishing Master-Apprentice language learning program (MALLP) teams. The MALLP method was developed in the USA by Prof. Leeann Hinton for reclamation and revitalisation language purposes which focuses heavily on language immersion and tactile learning. The workshop focussed on documenting language, creating and editing resources, and using technologies. Katerina noticed that RNLD’s approach to language work enables community members to step-up into leadership/mentoring roles, bringing a sense of community autonomy to language work. She feels that this is a huge step to enable positive future results in language work in Australia.

Karen Mezentsef

In early December, Honours student Karen Mezentsef participated in a community-based training workshop led by DRIL trainers Margaret Florey and Emma Murphy at Mabu Yawuru Ngan-ga, Broome. There she met a group of passionate people focused on revitalising the Yawuru language, aiming to ensure the younger generation, and critically children, continue to speak Yawuru.

RNLD’s DRIL training model helps to build participants’ autonomy as the tasks are at all times in the hands of the participants. Utilising a tactile learning approach, trainers facilitate learning through guidance whilst allowing participants to take charge of their own learning.

Karen assisted DRIL trainers in teaching participants how to correctly record metadata for their resources, how to use various programs to create and edit language resources such as wordless books for language teaching exercises adjustable to differing learner levels, and how to use the Zoom Q3 and Zoom H1 devices to create good quality recordings.

Karen is grateful to RNLD and RUIL for providing the opportunity to engage in community-based training, and for the staff and community at Mabu Yawuru Ngan-ga for welcoming her into their language centre. The experience solidified her wish to focus on similar such endeavours in her future linguistic career.

The RUIL/RNLD student volunteer program is continuing in 2015.

MORE INFO: http://www.rnld.org
RUIL's first National Close The Gap Day morning tea

On 18 March we held our inaugural morning tea to raise awareness of the Oxfam National Close The Gap Day campaign, aimed at addressing Indigenous health and wellbeing. Held in the Babel building at the University of Melbourne, Emily Poelina-Hunter gave an Acknowledgement of Country, and our Director, Rachel Nordlinger, spoke on the importance of language knowledge for ensuring positive cultural identities and individual wellbeing, and helping to close the gap.

Dean’s Lecture by Professor Nicholas Evans

On 21 May Professor Nick Evans (Australian National University), gave a Faculty of Arts Dean's Lecture at the University of Melbourne. “Unspoken, unheard: when our languages fall silent, what do we lose with them?” examined some of the key areas of knowledge lost when Indigenous languages die — of the natural world, of the possibilities of language and the human mind, of deep history, of how to decipher ancient scripts. Nick concluded the lecture by asking what we can do to safeguard the rich linguistic heritage of our region, where a quarter of the world’s endangered languages are spoken, as language loss is running faster on this continent than on any other.

National Reconciliation Week 2015 (28 May- 3 June) events

RUIL hosted three events during National Reconciliation Week 2015. The first was a RUIL research seminar presented by Dr Alice Gaby (Monash University) on Friday May 29 with the title “Communicating wanting in Kuuk Thaayorre”. The paper addressed the balancing act speakers of Kuuk Thaayorre face when wanting to have a conversation of a sensitive nature without causing offence to their addressee(s). Following Alice’s seminar RUIL hosted a social event for all School of Languages and Linguistics staff and students to raise awareness of for the important work that Reconciliation Australia does.

The third event we hosted was a screening of the first episode of the documentary Language Matters, with Bob Hollman on Monday June 1. We were lucky enough to have permission to show this from David Grubin, the Director/Producer/Writer of the film, as it is not released in Australia yet. The first episode was filmed on Goulburn Island, and features key Indigenous people in the community who work with non-Indigenous linguists, including RUIL’s own Ruth Singer. In an island community of approximately 400 inhabitants 10 languages are spoken, making this location a significant place for Indigenous linguistic diversity and ability to prevent the further destruction of Indigenous Australian languages.