

Welcome to the first 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 year thus far, 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>

## NYINGARN PROJECT UPDATE

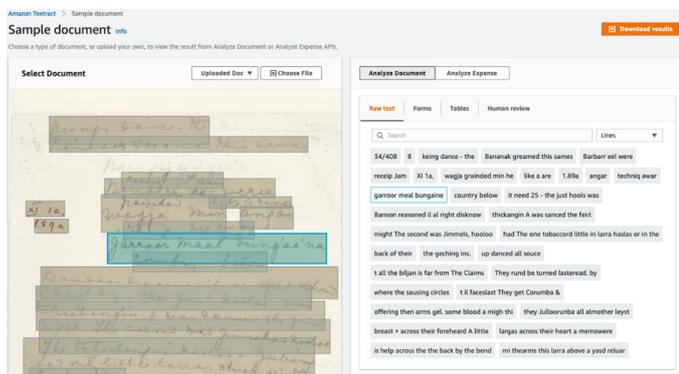


Image: Screenshot of transcription results on a sample handwritten manuscript page.

The Nyingarn Project aims to make manuscript sources for Australian Indigenous languages available as readable and searchable online texts. The team have been building and testing ways to convert images of manuscripts to text using either Optical Character Recognition (OCR) or crowdsourced transcription data. We have tested two systems with differing results for typed and handwritten manuscripts. These platforms allow us to turn manuscript images into text to make them searchable and re-usable.

Once the automated OCR process is finished, the workspace allows the user to view and edit the transcribed text as they wish. Below is a screenshot of the Nyingarn Workspace viewing a manuscript page (left) alongside its transcription (right) from the Daisy Bates collection.

The team have also had manuscripts transcribed through the online crowdsourcing platform, DigiVol, hosted by the Australian Museum. We create manuscript transcription 'expeditions' in DigiVol that allow us to refine transcribing guides for volunteers and then export this language data into our workspace. To date, expeditions of 20-40 pages have been transcribed by volunteers within days.

At Nyingarn, we will continue to refine both these transcription techniques as more manuscripts in state and national institutions are identified by CIs and Steering Committee members. For more technical information check out our [website](#).

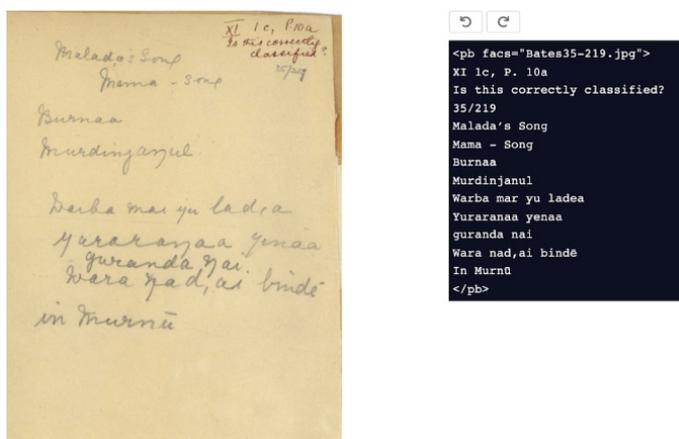


Image: Above is a screenshot of the transcription validation step done by Nyingarn staff after work is completed by the volunteer.

Follow us @indiglang

To hear about upcoming RUIL events and connect with other organisations talking about Indigenous languages





# MURRINHPATHA WRITER'S WORKSHOP

The beginning of 2022 has seen RUIL's Indigenous Language Support team collaborating with the Thamarrurr Youth Indigenous Corporation (TYIC) to run Murrinhpatha Writer's Workshops in Bright. TYIC aims to improve the lives of the Indigenous people of the Thamarrurr region in the Northern Territory through identifying and developing its future leaders. As part of their program TYIC operate the Dumu Balcony Training Café in Bright, Victoria. The café is run as a social enterprise that employs and trains youth from the Thamarrurr region including the town of Wadeye. Whilst working in the café the participants learn valuable employment and life skills.

The Murrinhpatha Writer's Workshops are aimed at developing trainees' literacy skills through their first language Murrinhpatha. The trainees work to strengthen their Murrinhpatha reading and writing skills and learn to use resources to support their literacy learning. The trainees then apply these skills to their work in the café. Across February and March participants worked alongside RUIL trainer Bill Forshaw to create a new Murrinhpatha resource outlining the steps for making a latte. Trainees worked together to draft and edit the text as well as photographing the process. These were then used to create a poster to be used in Bright and Wadeye as a future training resource.

RUIL will continue to collaborate with TYIC throughout 2022 to support first language literacy learning and to develop a Murrinhpatha café series. This project is also supported by the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language. If you're passing through Bright make sure to stop into the Dumu Balcony Training Café, grab a coffee and support the trainees. If you're lucky you might even catch a workshop in action!



## RESEARCH UPDATE

Joel Little Perrurle is a member of RUIL and a PhD Researcher with the University of Melbourne in the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences. His research focuses on the role of mental ill-health as a contributing factor to the significant social and occupational disadvantage experienced by many young Aboriginal men in Central Australia. Despite having the worst health outcomes of any population in Australia, Central Australian Aboriginal men chronically underuse primary health care services. Joel's research project is based on the hypothesis that interventions aimed at ensuring cultural continuity through identity-strengthening will address a critical mental health gap for young men. He is investigating the role that kinship, language, and religious and economic activities can play in restoring traditional knowledges. His research also focuses on ethnographic archival cultural collections and their value in building bilingual and bicultural curriculums and engagement materials for young Arrernte people in order to promote positive identity and enhanced mental health outcomes. As part of the research Joel is interviewing senior *akngerrepate* (elders, both men and women), community leaders, and young men from Arandic and Warlpiri speaking communities in central Australia.



Image: Joel Little with Kathleen Wallace Kemarre and Veronica Dobson Perrurle.



Pictured: Akarre/Akityarre language team (from left to right): Betty William, Carol Turner, Andrena Webb, Jenny Green (on laptop), MK Turner, and Beth Sometimes.

## AKARRE/AKITYARRE LANGUAGE PROJECT

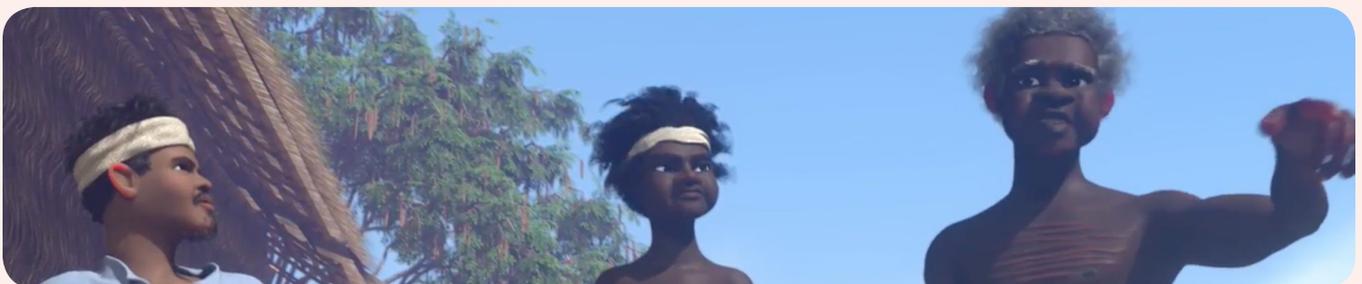
The Arandic languages Akarre and Akityarre (Ikngrerpenhe) are spoken to the north-east of Alice Springs in communities such as Harts Range, Bonya, Atul and Alcoota. There is little documentation of Akarre and Akityarre, although a list of 50 words in this language recorded by one of the most senior knowledge holders of these languages, Margaret Kemarre Turner (MK) (OAM), appears on RUIL's [50 words site](#). These languages are highly endangered - in 2003 it was estimated that there were only around 40 speakers.

In 2021, supported by the Leary Trust, a grant from First Languages Australia, and in partnership with [Childrens' Ground](#) a team of Akarre/Akityarre language experts, linguists and a sound recordist got together to record the words in the Akarre/Akityarre wordlist, along with example sentences. Jenny Green (RUIL) zoomed into the recording sessions from Melbourne. The audio resources will be the basis for making several published resources including a picture dictionary, and other language resources for schools.

## YANYUWA SONG POETRY: *an intimate window into kin & country*

Please join us Tuesday, May 24, for RUIL's first live public lecture in 3 years presented by Associate Professor John Bradley (Monash University). This presentation will explore Yanyuwa song poetry including an innovative use of animation to help the community record and preserve important traditional knowledge.

[Register](#) your attendance online. For further information please visit the Yanyuwa song poetry [event page](#).



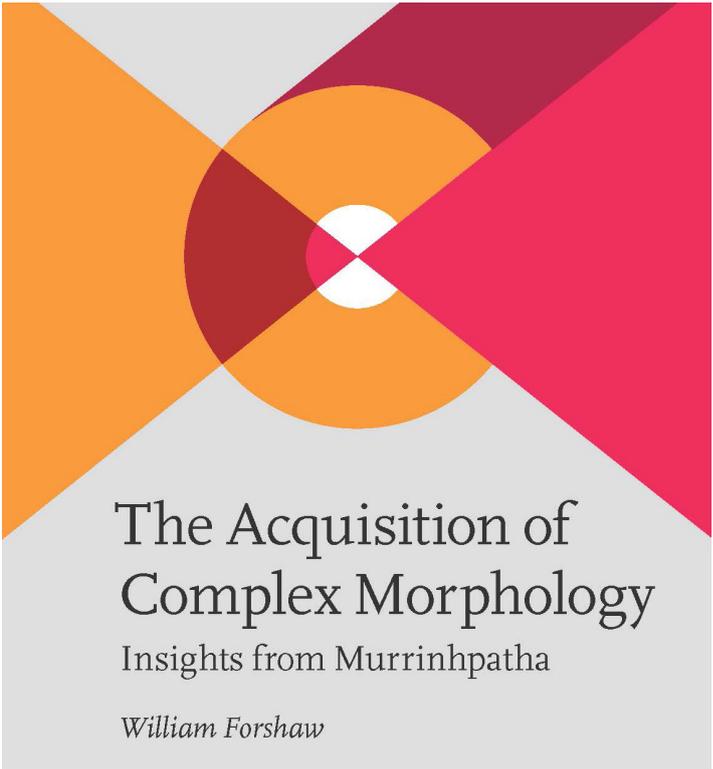


# NEW RELEASE

## *The Acquisition of Complex Morphology*

In November 2021 ‘The Acquisition of Complex Morphology: Insights from Murrinhpatha’ by RUIL member Bill Forshaw, was released. This book is the result of Bill’s PhD research which formed part of the previous RUIL project *From little things, big things grow: How children learn a morphologically complex Australian Indigenous language*. It examines the acquisition of Murrinhpatha’s complex verb morphology by five children between the ages of 1 and 6 over a two-year period. Children were recorded interacting with their families on bush trips near the town of Wadeye, NT.

This book provides a new perspective to the field of language acquisition. Our understanding of how children acquire language is based on data from only around 2% of the world’s languages, and research is dominated by languages such as English. This is despite the fact that we know that different languages pose different challenges for acquisition. This book challenges current theories of acquisition to better account for how different morphological systems and the way in which children use them impacts acquisition. It demonstrates once again the importance of languages with smaller speaker populations in contributing to our understanding of language more generally.



### *Language Word Search*

We have created a word search using the 50 words website as the resource. You can find 15 words in **Garrwa** – good luck!

- |                |                |               |
|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| miku (no)      | yu yu (yes)    | jangu (fire)  |
| julurr (ashes) | yunkurr (wind) | janja (rain)  |
| yakal (moon)   | marni (hand)   | yami (eye)    |
| mulu (nose)    | nukami (foot)  | kurnda (tree) |
| kaku (fish)    | julaki (bird)  | bajangu (dog) |

