

## *Embedding training within language documentation projects*

Greg Dickson  
School of Culture, History and Language - College of Asia & the Pacific  
The Australian National University



**Strengthening language maintenance through cooperative training strategies**  
Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity symposium  
Melbourne, August 18-19, 2011

## *Embedding training within language documentation projects*

### Structure

- A bit about me, what I do and how I got there
- A bit about training in general and designing research to incorporate training
- Some specifics about training I've been doing recently and how it helps my research

## Current work

PhD: Semantic comparisons between Marra (endangered language) and Kriol

- When language shift occurs, what is lost and maintained in terms of how speakers describe and conceive their world



## In the deep end...

From University to Katherine Language Centre

- working on language revitalisation projects in Aboriginal communities

Do I look qualified  
to you?



## Learning to swim...

After six months, enrolled in Honours program - back to school (in two senses)

- Community education (8 weeks in Minyerri)
- Western education (completing Honours)

Then, back at the Katherine Language Centre

- 3 years in Ngukurr
- workplace training
- complemented by formal training (Cert 1 & 2 in Own Language Work - BIITE)



## Becoming a trainer

Vocational training

- focus on procedural knowledge

University education

- focus on declarative knowledge

Time intensive, not information intensive

Completed Cert IV in Training and Assessment (CDU - 2009)



## Embedding training – research design

Assumption: researchers working in disadvantaged communities will endeavour to share skills, knowledge and resources and maximise participation.

This assumption is actually our obligation:

- *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies* (AIATSIS 2011)
- *Linguistic rights of Aboriginal and Islander communities* (ALS 1984)



## Embedding training – research design

- PhD research designed to increase potential of training and community involvement
- Acknowledge and build on existing skills and knowledge

### **Constraints**

- *Respond to identified community need (Marra language documentation)*
- *Collaboration and training opportunities*
- *Interpretable research*
- *Ethical guidelines / concerns*

- Does not restrict ability to carry out appropriate scholarly research



## Embedding training – research design

Extra funding to increase time spent in community and participation  
 - Small grant from the *Endangered Languages Documentation Program* (ELDP, University of London)

Engage with registered training organisation (Batchelor Institute)

“On-the-job” training  
 - informal, as-needs basis



## Benefits of embedding training

Community benefits

- increase participation, casual employment
- feeds into language revitalisation
- resourcing

-e.g. reviving Ngukurr Language Centre

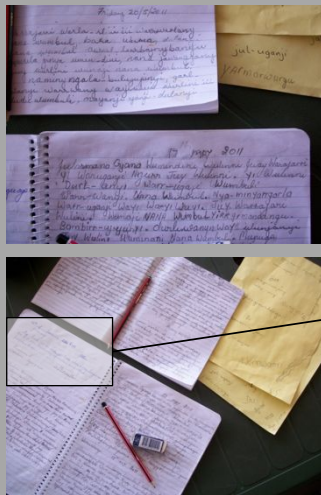
- examples of skills development:

- ELAN skills
- Marra literacy
- Making and using recordings
- IT skills
- Making, using dictionaries

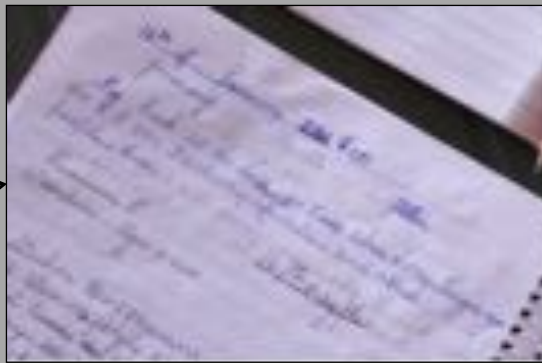
Capacity building - other projects, research, collaborations



## Benefits of embedding training



“Slow Fieldwork”




## Benefits of embedding training

### Research benefits

- enriched knowledge, understanding
- better access to speaker intuitions

Kriol example - young transcribers revealing contractions that look like emerging verbal morphology:

*1.-a* suffix: Past irrealis?

Yuwai, Nungubuyu basis Ropamob **thebina** bigis fait jas ova futbol. 

Yes, the Nungubuyu (people) versus the Ngukurr group were going to have a big fight merely about football.

(AJ\_20100824KRIOLmhajNGUgd01a\_00:08:40)



## Benefits of embedding training

Research benefits



Kriol example

2. *-bin* as a suffix? Transcribers writing *thebin* (3PL.PST), *aibin* (1SG.PST) etc.

3. Negative past contractions: *thanimin* (3pl.NEG.PST) (cf. *thei nomo bin*)

Ola mamiwan **thanimin** ja. **Thebin** ol bisi pleying basketbol. 🗣️

**Thanimin** intristing la mela.

All the mothers, they weren't there. They were all busy playing basketball. They weren't interested in us.

(AJ\_20100824KRIOLmhajNGUgd01a\_00:04:02)

## What are we really achieving?

Few ongoing programs

Training and using acquired skills often depend on my presence

- No language program in school
- Ngukurr Language Centre without funding, staff, programs



If the skills I bring to the field remain mysterious to community members, skills transfer has not been fully achieved.

## Conclusions

As linguists and researchers, whether working in academic spheres or not, we are obligated to pay attention to community needs and ethical guidelines. This includes training provision.

We can do more to understand what training is, how to do it and how to incorporate it into our work.

This can enhance research outputs as well as bring benefits to language communities.

🔊 *I'm very glad that there's someone in the world decided, like main- main boi, (my son) for instance, you, you do care for Aboriginal people, you want to bring that, bring the language back and make it more strong again.*

(CD\_20101214MARRAgrouNUMgd05a\_00:05:59)

## References and acknowledgements

AIATSIS (2011) *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies*. Retrieved August 15, 2011, from <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/research/docs/GERAISjune2011.pdf>.

Australian Linguistic Society (1984) *Linguistic rights of Aboriginal and Islander communities*. Retrieved August 15, 2011, from <http://www.als.asn.au/activities.html>.

### Acknowledgements

John Joshua, Betty Roberts, Freda Roberts, Aaron Joshua, Anthony Daniels, Angelina Joshua, Amelia Huddleston, Dwayne Rogers, Glen Blitner, Richie Bauer, Chris Dixon, Jeanie Bell, Sophie Nicholls, Margaret Florey and many more linguists, students from Batchelor Institute and community members from Ngukurr and other communities.

