34
Emergency language documentation teams: the Cape York Peninsula experience

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Abstract

Language revitalisation and endangered language documentation are complementary endeavours – they feed into each other and both benefit from the support of the other. This idea is at the heart of a community teams approach called Emergency Language Documentation Teams (McConvell et al. 2005). This paper will review the underpinnings of this idea and discuss the successes and difficulties encountered while applying it in the Cape York Peninsula region.

The findings of the Cape York Peninsula Language Documentation project pilot discussed in this paper include that informal approaches to both language worker training and language learning were, across the board, far more successful than more formal approaches (including one-on-one versions of master–apprentice schemes). We also found that the project approach was more difficult in situations where there were more social and linguistic divisions and heterogeneity. There is some irony in this given that often in the Australian context linguistic homogeneity within a speech community can itself be a result of language shift and language loss.

Project approach

Many of the original Cape York Peninsula (CYP) languages are no longer spoken, and many more are on the brink of loss. An amount of what would now be called endangered languages research in CYP was carried out in the 1970s under the rubric

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of 'Before it is Too Late' (BIITL) (Sutton 1992). This was not linked at the time to community language maintenance and revival. Today, a small number of languages on the west coast of CYP are still being learnt by children and have larger numbers of speakers, but most of the still-spoken CYP languages have only a handful of mainly elderly speakers, and many of these languages are only scantily documented and described. The project discussed in this paper, broadly referred to here as the Cape York Peninsula Language Documentation project (CYPLD),[3] was developed in response to a challenge that faces linguists and community members alike working in critically endangered language situations such as these. How do we adequately respond to requests to undertake urgently needed language documentation work and at the same time help establish language revitalisation initiatives? The project's aim was to tackle this dual challenge by piloting a community teams approach to language documentation.

This approach sets out to establish a three-way relationship among the linguist, proficient language speakers and younger community members (ideally semi-speakers or hearers). This is related to the visions of *two-way* research and education encountered by McConvell (1991, 1994) among Indigenous people in which there are two *two-way exchange* relationships combined: between the (usually non-Indigenous) researcher or educator and the community on the one hand; and on the other, between the older community generation and the younger generation. These exchanges are built on complementary skills and knowledge sets: the older generations with greater traditional knowledge, and the younger generations who wish to acquire this knowledge and who generally have better mainstream education and related skills, thus also contributing their own expertise to the exchange. In broad terms, the Emergency Language Documentation Teams model combines documentation work on endangered languages with community language worker training and, to a lesser extent, a master–apprentice approach to language revitalisation (Hinton 2002). As the title suggests this team works closely together to document an endangered language. This complementary approach to documentation and revitalisation came from strongly held community views about language work priorities. The predominant view in CYP speech communities is that revitalisation attempts must happen in conjunction with rich and comprehensive documentary work.

Speakers and Elders talk frequently about creating records that will preserve knowledge of the languages for when they pass away or are no longer able to pass on the knowledge in person. They feel that even if all parties within the community try their hardest, time is running very short for documentation and transmission. Thus, the project aimed to provide on-site language worker training to community members with the idea of increasing opportunities to document these languages, as

3 Discussion of this project and approaches to documentary and revitalisation work in CYP were presented in a paper by Clair Hill, Peter Sutton and Patrick McConvell titled 'Emergency Language Documentation in Cape York' at the Indigenous Languages Conference, University of Adelaide, 26 September 2007.

well as developing a skills base which would encourage the development of renewal programs. Here the line between language worker and language learner is somewhat blurred. Unsurprisingly, those who are interested in undertaking language work projects are also the ones who want to increase their knowledge of their heritage language. These two aims go hand-in-hand for many community members. Lastly, documentation is clearly crucial for development of tools and resources for language revitalisation work, both for current revitalisation work and also any language reclamation work future generations pursue.

Within this three-way team model all members have mutually beneficial roles and skills that contribute to the work unit. The linguist has technical and linguistic skills and is able to provide on-site community-specific training in recording, analysing and documenting the local language(s). The speakers provide language and cultural tuition to the linguist and, to a lesser extent, the language worker. The younger community members also often contribute invaluable cultural knowledge, and usually have literacy and computer skills that are important for their role as a community language worker. The speakers and language workers contribute an in-depth knowledge of community needs and priorities for the language work, and this assists in shaping strong language projects that are tapped directly into key community concerns.

The CYPLD project's aim was to pilot this approach in a variety of locations and language situations in CYP, and to assess the effectiveness of the approach, and the outcomes and issues that arose.

Some key parts of the Emergency Language Team Model

Participant roles

An important aspect in the growing body of literature theorising about language documentation, language maintenance and revitalisation (for example, Austin 2003–09; Bowern 2008; Hinton & Hale 2001) is the consideration of the roles, needs, expectations and relationships among project participants. The role of linguist is perhaps the most debated, and views vary widely on the scope and responsibilities the linguist's role should include (for a summary of various perspectives see Walsh 2005). We were also concerned with paying more attention to the human factor of fieldwork and to the multi-faceted nature of the relationship among the linguist(s), speakers and the wider community (Grinevald 2005; Nagy 2000). We kept the following questions in mind in project planning. What implications do participant roles (active versus passive speaker and language worker involvement) have for comprehensive and representative documentation (Himmelmann 1998)? What language records do speakers and community language workers think make for good comprehensive documentation? And, given the often multi-faceted nature of the linguist's work in endangered language situations, in what ways and situations can multiple goals be combined and achieved simultaneously?

Relationship between language documentation and language revitalisation

Language revitalisation intervention and endangered language documentation can be complementary endeavours but often they are seen as in competition or conflict. Views on the relative priority and validity of documentation and revitalisation efforts vary widely, some giving documentation work a secondary priority compared to revitalisation and others the inverse. A minority disfavour documentation in general, or at least have serious misgivings regarding use and access to documentary materials by non-Indigenous people, for example, at least one Indigenous language centre in the Kimberley region (Walsh 2005). In our view, both are urgent tasks in critical endangerment situations. Fluent speakers of the languages are pivotal to both and are usually old and few in number, especially with small languages such as in Australia. There is another element crucial for both undertakings – understanding of the language situation and language ecology so as to be able to plan intervention in ways which are likely to put a brake on language loss and in order to document the range of language knowledge and uses (contexts, registers, gender effects) in the community..

Criticism of 'pure' documentation work from community members often relates to the inaccessibility of the material produced. Products of documentation sometimes languish in archives unbeknownst to community members, or unfamiliarity with archive procedures can make applications for access difficult. Alternatively, documentation material may be physically available but inaccessible due the format in which it is written up. Long stretches of interlinearised transcriptions or untranscribed material are of limited use in a moribund language situation and can be difficult to readily transform into user-friendly resources. From the other perspective, some community projects redo basic work such as collecting basic wordlists often simply due to lack of knowledge of existing documentation or how to utilise such sources. Thus, it is also vital for Indigenous people and organisations to be aware of the importance of documentary work even given these difficult accessibility problems. In this way community initiatives can focus their own documentation and revitalisation efforts on the more important and detailed knowledge that has not been collected and is in more immediate danger of disappearing. As we describe in following discussion of the CYPLD project, active partnership with a wider range of community members, outside the usual linguist–speaker collaboration, can go a long way to making documentary materials and the documentary process more transparent. It also makes community members more aware of where to find existing material, types of documentation, and how to work with them in order to create new resources.

Project details

The CYPLD project work officially ran from December 2004 to the end of September 2005,[4] involved five researchers and associated collaborative community

4 Work started during this project with community language workers has been ongoing in some instances – particularly in the Lockhart River case. In Lockhart River, work of this type continues by David Thompson and Lucy Hobson as part of the Online Language Community Access Pilot

partnerships,[5] and supported ten languages in total. Each of these linguists undertook fieldwork, for the most part based in one community and supporting one or more languages: Barry Alpher worked on Kuuk Thaayorre and Kuuk Yak in Pormpuraaw; Alice Gaby worked on Kugu Muminh, Kugu Mu'inh, Kuuk Thaayorre and Wik Mungkan in Pormpuraaw; Clair Hill worked on Umpila and Kuuku Ya'u in Lockhart River, and Kaanju in Napranum, Cairns and Yarrabah; Erica Schmidt worked on Kuku Thaypan in Laura; and Jean-Christophe Verstraete worked on Mbarrumbathama (also known as Lamalama), Umbuygamu (also known as Morrobolam) and Umpithamu (also known as Umbindhamu) in Coen. On the ground project work ran from between two weeks and seven months in each of the community locations with overall fieldwork totalling about 12 months. The project was managed and coordinated by Hill. In addition to the five linguists, scientific and research guidance was given by two advisors, Patrick McConvell and Bruce Rigsby. Community collaboration in all participant communities totalled 85 people. This included language speakers, cultural experts (for example, singers and musicians), semi-speakers, hearers and younger interested community members as language worker participants. Throughout the project 23 people received language worker training.

Researchers' field trips varied in length, and thus, the extent and scope of both the documentation and time available to collaborate with language workers and incorporate them into the work model also varied.[6] The longest time spent working on the project was by Hill at Lockhart River. Therefore, in this case there were more participants involved in the training, and there was the opportunity for a variety of approaches to the team model to be tried out. The bulk of the comments that follow in this paper are based on the Lockhart River experience.

The documentation element of the project was straightforward and produced good results. Ten languages were documented, resulting in just under 100 hours of audio-recording and a little less than 20 hours of video-recording, as well as collections of photographs and field notes, and ancillary materials like transcriptions. These documented a wide range of linguistic material: elicited lexical and grammatical data; narrative and interactional data from a variety of contexts and genres; song recordings;

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project (coordinated by Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies), and informally as part of continuing documentation work by Hill. Documentation work on many of the languages supported by the CYPLD team continued in 2006 till the present via a major documentation project, Documentation of Five Paman Languages, sponsored by the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project.

5 The nature of these partnerships and collaborative teams varied widely between locations. See following discussion.

6 The stage of the linguist's work with the community or language also impacted on the feasibility of the community teams approach. The work undertaken by Alpher (on Kuuk Yak) and Schmidt was preliminary and exploratory, and so a more traditional approach to documentation was taken.

video footage of important sites, cultural events and practices; and annotation of archival materials. This material has contributed to the ongoing production of a range of descriptive and community resources. For example, for Umpila, Kuuku Ya'u and Kaanju, lexical data contributed to ongoing work on a user-friendly dictionary, textual material to production of literacy booklets, and grammatical elicitation material to continuing work on a scientific grammar.

The bulk of the work undertaken within the linguist–language worker partnerships focused on building confidence and further developing the considerable linguistic skills the language workers already possessed. Most of the language workers were semi-speakers or hearers of the language being documented and had a lot of existing knowledge to contribute to the sessions. As a result they had more of a co-researcher role as opposed to a trainee/trainer relationship with the linguist. Much of the training centred on core documentation tasks like how to use a variety of recording equipment, elicitation and recording techniques, and transcription. Trainees were most keen to acquire transcription skills in all the participant communities. They repeatedly expressed a desire to be literate in their traditional language understanding the benefits this would generate for revitalisation work and the production of resources, thus ensuring permanent and accessible materials.

Successes and difficulties

Outcomes of the involvement of community language worker 'trainees' were highly variable depending on the community situations in which the work was undertaken. As is often the case, some of the elements contributing to the success of the training in one community were often not transferrable or relevant in a different situation. It is not possible in this space to outline all the combinations of timing, personnel and so forth that caused one situation to be more successful than another. Instead, we discuss some of the major factors in broad cross-community terms[7] that contributed to successes and difficulties.

A key contrast between the situations in which the training was successful and those where the training proved more difficult was the degree of homogeneity in both the linguistic situation and local government and community infrastructure.

Across the communities and language groups involved in the project, language workers[8] had to be of the appropriate linguistic and social group affiliation to work

7 We do not discuss these details in terms of specific communities or language groups. Difficulties noted as due to particular community situations do not mean, of course, that language programs will not work in such communities, just that they may need modification or a different approach.

8 For ease of reference, we will refer to the participants who were simultaneously community language workers, language consultants, and language learners in the teams as (community) language workers.

on a language. That is, they had to be viewed by the wider community as having the right to access linguistic and cultural knowledge on the language being documented. This has been widely cited as a factor in the organisation of Indigenous language programs of all types across Australia, and relates to the notions of inheritance rights in languages amounting to *ownership* in Australia generally, but more especially in CYP (Tsunoda 2005, p. 137, 211; Sutton 2001, p. 462).

Given this restriction on the community members who can legitimately engage in work on a specific language, a larger pool of potential and appropriate community members could generally be recruited as language workers in situations with fewer language differences (more linguistically homogeneous situations). However, involvement and training of language workers on minority languages in communities with a number of different languages (linguistically heterogeneous situations) was often difficult simply due to a lack of appropriate potential participants. Similarly, in such situations, much of the weight and demands of the project rested on just two or three elderly speakers – clearly a less than ideal scenario. The extra demands of this project on top of regular documentation work were sometimes too much, even given the strong commitment of all individuals. And, more often than not, it is this same small group of speakers who are the key traditional owners and target participants for many community initiatives. It was also more difficult to build up links with the school in linguistically more heterogeneous situations, widely viewed within communities as one of the most practical and important community applications of language worker skills. This would require serving several language groups at the same time, or dealing with cultural and political issues which can arise around a language program being provided in one language to groups of children of multiple language and social group affiliations.

The training component also proved more successful in situations and communities with strong local government and community organisational structures. The support offered by community councils led to a wide variety of benefits and generally assisted in promoting and validating the team approach. These ties played an important role in increasing the researchers' visibility and approachability. This was especially important for opening up the language work to younger community members who prior to this generally did not feel they had a place participating in traditional documentary work. Organisational support also facilitated access to community resources that contributed to the attractiveness of the initiative to potential language workers, for example, access to computers and use of vehicles for language work related excursions. This sort of access to resources can increase the perceived validity and prestige of the work in the eyes of the wider local community. Both linguistic and organisational homogeneity meant that there was less slicing up the pie of community resources. Additionally, it is quite natural that programs of all types have more chance of success when they are relevant to, and therefore supported by, a substantial portion of the population.

The other factor contributing to variation in success was simply the practicality and feasibility of being flexible with the timing, content, location and participants of a session. Informal on-the-job involvement of language workers generally achieved better outcomes than more formal approaches – that is, having language workers actively involved in the documentation sessions with the language speakers and linguist. With very few exceptions formal training/language-learning sessions and workshops proved inappropriate and ineffective. Coordination of language workers proved difficult and so room for flexibility in all regards increased chances of success and engagement. Unpredictability and the subsequent need for flexibility is a basic lesson of any fieldwork experience. Documentary plans adapted on-the-fly to suit the interests and talents of various combinations of speakers available at any one particular time is a daily event in most field situations. The addition of the language workers to the mix added another level of potential complication to this coordination, especially since the involvement, skills development, and language interests varied among language workers. While not being able to definitively plan the who, when or what of sessions was sometimes frustrating for all parties involved, it was far more productive than any of the more formal approaches attempted, such as workshops or language lessons.

In the same vain, being able to adapt the team format to suit evolving community situations and dynamics was important. Training and language learning was less team-like than planned, that is the language workers and speakers did not form master–apprentice style teams or work units in the way that was anticipated. The logistics and coordination involved in arranging for language workers to consistently work with one or two speakers in a team was generally difficult and problematic – for the same reasons that attempts at formal training sessions were also ineffective. Due to the more informal on-the-job training approach adopted, language workers worked with a range of speakers (often working with three or four speakers at once) in the same way the linguist did, as opposed to working in a concentrated one-on-one fashion. In most circumstances, the speakers preferred to work together in groups so they could assist each other. Apart from providing a cooperative and sociable working environment language speakers have a 'real' conversational partner for the language work – documentary material will be richer if it is also a genuine communicative act shared between interlocutors of comparable proficiency.

The group work option was particularly preferred in the more critically endangered language situations. Some speakers were not completely comfortable with taking sole responsibility for the language tuition of a language worker, and this would tend to rule out the one-on-one version of master–apprentice schemes. This may change over a longer period of time with an increase in speaker confidence, but within the project time frame the one-on-one model did not suit the majority of speakers.

It is easy to proclaim that flexibility is the key. However, in practice, there are complications. A small minority of speakers felt uncomfortable with the regular participation of language workers in documentation sessions. Some speakers, after

trying out the various permutations of this approach, preferred a clearer division among the documentation endeavours, the language learning, and the linguist's general training of language workers. Once again the availability of human resources factor in here. In some situations there were just not enough speakers and language workers for on-the-fly arrangements to work. If there are only two or three speakers then sessions by default end up needing more organisation. Another factor is the accessibility of the linguist, often at a moment's notice. If the linguist did not have a readily available public workspace in which they were based then it was difficult for sessions to develop organically depending on the availability and interest of combinations of language workers and speakers. Availability of a good public workspace can often be a by-product of homogeneous local organisational infrastructure, as discussed above.

Lockhart River case study

In this section we discuss some of the project experiences in Lockhart River, in particular the positive effects the involvement of language workers had on the documentation and language work efforts in general. As described above, the most successful training and language learning approach involved on-the-job participation of language workers in run-of-the-mill documentation sessions.[9] The involvement of the language workers in everyday recording sessions also had positive effects on the documentation. This was most strongly the case in Lockhart River.

In Lockhart River, there were two main language workers who were involved in the project over a four to five month period in 2005. They usually participated in three or four sessions with speakers per week. Additionally, there were around a dozen other people intermittently involved in a language worker capacity, either in recording sessions or the more formal workshops. Here the target language for documentation was the Kuuku Ya'u and Umpila dialect group. This language is moribund with a micro-speech community of a handful of elderly speakers who use some language with each other. There are quite a number of younger semi-speakers or hearers, and in some circumstances, elderly speakers also use traditional language with them (replies are made in creole and mixed language varieties).

Both main language workers are semi-speakers and so were able to contribute considerable linguistic and cultural knowledge to the documentation. Because of their existing language knowledge and close family ties with speakers they were often able to elicit and document more culturally sensitive material than Hill could as an outsider. They were fluent in Lockhart River Creole (the community vernacular) and had received more of a mainstream education than the speakers, and so were able to translate between the linguist and speakers where necessary, explaining any unfamiliar and foreign concepts. This resulted in more informed discussion among all members of the team surrounding documentation issues, such as intellectual property rights, access conditions to archived materials, and use of materials in further research.

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9 Though some one-off formal workshops had the benefit of drawing a number of people who did not have time or interest for regular involvement in the project.

The interests of the two language workers influenced the material documented and at times both broadened and restricted the scope of the data gathered. The documentation work under this project approach was determined by the key dual imperatives of: (a) supplementing existing records of the languages concerned in order to produce fuller documentation, and (b) practising elicitation, transcription and other documentary techniques appropriate to the learning stage and interests of the language workers. Where these aims came into conflict (for example, in the collection of already documented words) priority was given to the needs and interests of the language workers. It was hoped that maximising their documentation skills and confidence would result in a fuller documentary record in the long term.

In Lockhart River the documentation teams model generated feedback and positive effects between the documentary efforts and a variety of revitalisation related work . A good example of this was the traditional song documentation work:

- The project attracted the attention of local Aboriginal teachers, who were enthused by the potential applications of the language work and documentary material to their school activities and duties to their local culture program.

- One of these teachers participated in the project as one of two key language workers. This teacher used the skills learnt and support from the project to start working on establishing a small language program within the culture classes at the school.

- Hill became involved in wider cultural retention activities that are part of the school's culture program. Hill had increased contact with a group of traditional singers and musicians also involved in cultural tuition at the school.

- Singers asked Hill to assist them by documenting *malkari* (shake-a-leg style) and *thaypu* (Island style) songs. This lead to a series of recording sessions with a wide range of performers who had not previously been involved in language or cultural documentation activities.

- From these sessions a number of CDs were produced and widely distributed in the community.

- The enthusiasm generated both by the documentation process and tangible by-products lead to increased involvement in ongoing song recording work, which continued to increase the visibility of the project and open up language work to younger community members who were stimulated by the increased access to, and the rejuvenation of, cultural practices.

- These song sessions then stimulated further language documentation work with speakers on production of dance paraphernalia and associated material culture, paint designs used in dances, for example, recording descriptive and procedural texts on production of items and on the cultural import of designs.

- This documentation fed directly into language workers' training and production of lessons and pedagogical resources for the school culture program.

Some concluding remarks: language ecology and language intervention

One aim of the CYPLD project was to explore the interaction between documentation and capacity-building practices in a community teams approach. This interaction generally had substantial mutual benefits for both the language documentation and a range of applied goals. We found that documentary and revitalisation work can inspire and provide positive feedback to each other (see Ward 2003 for similar points). The project approach stimulated increased awareness of the language situation and documentary goals, increased community involvement in the documentation, widened the range of information and language phenomena recorded, and thus resulted in a more complete picture of the language community's ecology.

The main contrast between the more and less successful incorporation of language-worker training and language learning into the documentation work was the degree of linguistic and infrastructural homogeneity – the more languages and different groups and organisations, the less these aspects tended to come together well. This finding both parallels hypotheses about the conditions for language maintenance and shift, and reveals possible contradictions between the necessary conditions for language maintenance and the necessary conditions for language maintenance intervention.

There is evidence that linguistic homogeneity, at some stage(s) of obsolescence in threatened language situations, tends to favour retention and transmission of at least some of the old language, whereas linguistic heterogeneity favours rapid and complete language shift (McConvell 2008).[10] This is not to say that multilingualism and diversity in speech communities is necessarily a problem for language maintenance. It is well documented that multilingualism was the norm in Aboriginal Australia, and people often maintain languages precisely to maintain distinct identities in such heterogeneous situations (Brandl & Walsh 1982, p. 75). Multilingualism is still found in some speech communities, with English and creole being added to repertoires. However, in the situation of very small languages which have been historically embattled and are under even greater pressures today, heterogeneity tends to give way to monolingualism in the new language – a form of English or a creole in most cases, but a lingua franca based on a form of a regional traditional language in some cases.[11] So, often contemporary situations of increased linguistic homogeneity are a

10 Meakins (2008, p. 88) criticises the hypothesis on the basis that Kriol was not adopted at Wadeye, originally a highly multilingual community. However, just as Kriol was a lingua franca in other areas, at Wadeye the traditional language Murrinh Patha became the lingua franca and language shift to Murrinh Patha occurred. This is consistent with the hypothesis that a lingua franca becomes the first language in a linguistically heterogeneous community.

11 For instance, Wik Mungkan at Aurukun in Cape York Pensinsula, Djambarrpuyngu and Dhuwaya in North East Arnhem Land, and Murrinh Patha at Wadeye mentioned in the previous footnote. While these are lingua francas they are still to some extent associated with a particular ethnic group and are not 'neutral' in the same way that creole and English varieties are. While the strengthening of these languages by becoming a community's standard language may

stage in the process of linguistic and cultural shift being undergone by these speech communities. For example, groups isolated by sedentary mission or community-based life no longer learn each other's languages or, as above, a dominant traditional language in an imposed community setting becomes a lingua franca at the expense of other languages. Thus paradoxically, conditions for more successful project outcomes, such as less linguistic, social, political and infrastructural divisions to navigate, may be a result of the shift and loss process itself. This presents interesting questions about the nature of the interaction among forces contributing to language loss in the first instance and our ongoing revitalisation efforts through various stages of loss. Relatedly, one of the major challenges facing those working for language revitalisation is, how do we minimise the impact on our revitalisation efforts of the very pressures which contributed to the language loss situation we are trying to reverse? Another challenge these project findings highlight is how to create policy and infrastructure that supports practitioners and communities to work in organic and flexible ways. In our experience, room for flexible on-the-job involvement of the language worker was a key prerequisite for successfully integrating documentation, language learning and language worker training.

A wide range of benefits were generated by increased awareness and the opening up of language work to the wider community. However, for the linguist it was sometimes difficult to manage the increased community demands and the heavy documentation workload. At times the training needs, language maintenance and other applied work in the community overshadowed the documentation component of the work. The desire to respond to community needs and the desire to undertake quality language documentation tasks that include substantial elements of descriptive and analytical work can be difficult to balance.

This project was not straightforwardly a revitalisation project. It indirectly targeted increased language use while more directly responding to documentation needs and community requests to have younger community members engaged in language work. So, revitalisation in this case was not targeted through the standard approach of language classes in the local school or adult language tuition classes, or through one-to-one master–apprentice schemes, but was instead mediated through other project aims. This approach did not aim to generate new full speakers of the language but to generally increase language use and language awareness in the community. Aside from the obvious connections between documentation and revitalisation, the approach we adopted had quite a number of positive points as a model of revitalisation. Having language workers involved in the planning of a documentation session, elicitation of data, and then working on transcription skills via playback of session recordings, provides multiple reinforcement of language input spread across days or weeks. This involvement in the entire documentary process right through to resource production, results in more engagement and feelings of ownership of the language material than would be expected with a formal teacher–student language learning situation.

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increase their survival chances, the loss of smaller local languages is also a cause for concern within these communities.

This approach makes it more possible to sustain documentation and language learning that is less reliant on the linguist. It also takes some pressure and focus off language learning and hence mitigates some of the difficult social dynamics that can go hand-in-hand with this (Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer 1998; Hill 2001). In a number of the participant communities language learners talked of finding the expectations of the speakers paralysing, while some speakers were frustrated and disappointed by the language worker/learners' 'slow' progress. The speakers feel pressure to be adequate teachers with enough knowledge to do justice to the language and *old people*,[12] and the language worker/learners in their ability to learn quickly and satisfy the speakers' (and wider community) expectations.

The community team design also gives much deserved credit to the language worker. Built on a three-way sharing of expertise the language worker/learners are able to contribute their already considerable language knowledge to the documentation process. Most language workers involved in the project were semi-speakers and so in this process they were simultaneously language expert and language learner. Many semi-speakers are reluctant to admit gaps in their knowledge and understanding but we found, in a more informal documentation setting, that some of these anxieties were put to rest when they realised their knowledge was more extensive than the outside language researcher, and that they could help the speaker with instruction of the linguist. These experiences help build a community network of language teams that have a life after the linguist has gone.

Acknowledgements

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12 Speakers often invoke responsibilities to ancestral elder generations.

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