

Collaborations and Connections Between an Aboriginal Organisation and Endangered Language Speakers: Interpreting and Translating in the Kimberley Region of Western Australia, Australia

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Abstract

The Kimberley Interpreting Service Aboriginal Corporation (KISAC) is an organisation founded in 2001 to provide interpreting services in Australian Aboriginal languages of the Kimberley region in the north of the state of Western Australia (WA), Australia. KISAC's role has since changed, and it now provides not only interpreting, but also cultural awareness training and translating services. Interpreting and translating are one way that speakers of endangered languages can have their skills publicly recognised and gain casual employment. Translating jobs involve collaboration between KISAC, the Aboriginal organisation, and the translators, the speakers of various endangered languages. Two examples of translation jobs assigned to KISAC are discussed: 1. translation into Ngarinyin (Worrorran) of a text for a language poster making people aware of their right to an interpreter and showcasing the linguistic diversity of WA; 2. translation into Kija (Jarrakan) and sound recording a script to inform people of the best way to use Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) and make them aware of monetary charges incurred. These kinds of translation increase the domains of use of endangered languages and instill pride in traditional languages, as well as being of interest to linguists.

Résumé

La Corporation autochtone de services d'interprétation (Kimberley Interpreting Service Aboriginal Corporation, KISAC) est une organisation fondée en 2001 pour fournir des services d'interprétation en langues autochtones australiennes de la région de Kimberley dans le nord de l'état d'Australie occidentale (WA), en Australie. Le rôle de KISAC a changé depuis, et il offre désormais non seulement des services d'interprétation, mais aussi de la formation sur la sensibilisation culturelle et des services de traduction. Interprétation et traduction sont une des manières dont les locuteurs des langues en voie de disparition peuvent faire reconnaître publiquement leurs compétences et obtenir un emploi occasionnel. Les emplois de traduction impliquent une collaboration entre KISAC, l'organisation autochtone, et les traducteurs, locuteurs de différentes langues en voie de disparition. Deux exemples de travaux de traduction affectés à KISAC sont abordés: 1. la traduction en ngarinyin (worrorran) d'un texte pour une affiche qui rend les gens conscients de leur droit à un interprète et qui met en valeur la diversité linguistique de WA; 2. la traduction en kija (jarrakan) et son enregistrement d'un script pour informer les gens de la meilleure façon d'utiliser les guichets automatiques bancaires et leur faire réaliser les frais encourus. Ces types de traduction augmentent les domaines d'usage des langues en voie de disparition et suscitent la fierté pour les langues traditionnelles, tout en étant d'intérêt pour les linguistes.

Introduction

Increasingly, in Australia, speakers of endangered languages are being valued by Aboriginal organisations and by the wider world. But the valuing of Australian Aboriginal languages has a long way to go. Despite the existence of many hundreds of languages, including both indigenous and diaspora languages, all are valued less than English. Australia is largely monolingual, there being little bi- or multilingualism amongst the majority mainstream Anglo-Celtic population.

Australian Languages

Australia originally had many languages (McGregor, 2004:1). Within its political borders there are languages of 22 unique genetic groupings that are uniquely Australian (Evans, 2010:17). Only one additional genetic lineage, the Eastern Trans Fly family represented by the Eastern Torres Strait language Meriam Mer, is also found in the neighbouring nation Papua New Guinea.

Northern Australia has the most genetic diversity of the continent, with 21 language families being found in Australia's northwest, Top End and Gulf Country. The 22nd language family, termed by most linguists as Pama-Nyungan, contains many languages and covers a

vast area stretching from the southwest of Western Australia to the tip of Cape York in Queensland. The other 21 language families are termed Non-Pama-Nyungan because they are both structurally and genetically different from Pama-Nyungan languages.

Kimberley Languages

The Kimberley is in the northern-most part of Australia's largest state, Western Australia (WA). It is Australia's driest region that is wholly within tropical latitudes, covering an area of 300 000 square kilometres, but is home to only 45 000 people, many of them Aboriginal. The Kimberley is WA's most linguistically diverse region and this diversity is also mirrored in botany, zoology, geology, Aboriginal cultural practice and rock art (Saunders 2008). The environment and languages of the Kimberley are fragile. The northwest monsoon has shaped an environment unlike any other. Of the 21 Non-Pama-Nyungan language families, 4 are unique to the Kimberley region.

The Kimberley also has languages of 3 subgroups of the Pama-Nyungan family. Today few languages outside the most arid parts of the region are viable and the land is threatened by mining development. For an overview of Kimberley languages see McGregor (1988, 2004).

Kimberley Interpreting Service Aboriginal Corporation

One way that endangered language speakers can be publicly recognised and used is through interpreting and translating. Interpreting and translating provide opportunities for collaboration between Aboriginal organisations and the outside world.

The Kimberley Interpreting Service Aboriginal Corporation (KISAC, formerly the Kimberley Interpreting Service (KIS)), is an organisation founded in 2001 (McGregor, 2004: 313-316) to provide interpreting services in Australian Aboriginal languages of the Kimberley. Formerly part of the Mirima Dawang Woorleb-gerring Language Centre (see Newry and Palmer, 2003:101-106) in Kununurra, a town in the eastern part of the Kimberley, KIS became independent of Mirima and incorporated in 2013 to become KISAC. KISAC is the only interpreting service in Western Australia. Other interpreting services include the Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service (NT AIS) in the Northern Territory (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2012, 160). Interpreting services are also provided in a limited number of languages in the states of South Australia (Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara) and Queensland (Wik Mungkan) (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2012: 161).

KISAC is based in Broome, the Kimberley's largest town and location of FEL VII. The prime business of KISAC is to provide interpreting services predominantly in the medical and legal/criminal areas. Since its inception, KISAC's role has changed to also provide cultural awareness and translating services.

KISAC sometimes organises interpreters for languages spoken outside of the Kimberley, including Martu Wangka from the Western Desert of Western Australia and Murrinh Patha from the Wadeye region of the Northern Territory. The 2005 National Indigenous Language Survey (NILS) in Australia (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2012:39) used a language endangerment scale paralleling the scale described in Grenoble and Whaley (2006: 17-18). The 23+ languages covered by KISAC vary in their endangerment from 'Safe 5' to 'Critically endangered 1' (the stage before 'Extinct 0'). For some of these languages the endangerment is not known and the results of the NILS 2 conducted in 2012 are eagerly awaited. Interpreting and translating is one way that speakers of endangered languages can have their skills publicly recognised and gain casual employment. Currently KISAC employs 170 interpreters casually and intermittently.

Translating

Linguistically, interpreting and translating are distinguished, interpreting being oral and translating being written. This distinction is also made professionally by KISAC. Generally, non-specialists do not know the difference between the two terms, with interpreting and translating being viewed as synonyms.

Translating is often used by laypeople to mean interpreting, and many laypeople do not even know or use the term.

There are a number of assumptions made about translating involving endangered languages:

1. Everything can be translated from language A into language B;
2. Endangered languages have an established literacy;
3. All members of an Endangered languages group are literate in their language;
4. All members of an Endangered languages group can understand their language;
5. All languages have the same vitality.

Literacy is so pervasive in mainstream Australia that it is assumed, regardless of a person's linguistic and cultural background.

Translation jobs that KISAC is engaged to do have a number of aims:

1. *communication*: aimed at languages where people can speak the language better than English, but this assumes literacy;
2. *recognition*: raising awareness that there are indigenous languages, as well as English and better known languages of diaspora groups;
3. *promotion*: promoting the use of languages in new domains.

Specific translation jobs

Language diversity poster

The Department of Education wanted to produce a poster celebrating the diversity of languages in the state of WA. The Department had already included a number of immigrant languages but wanted also to include WA's indigenous languages, so they contacted KISAC. The other aim of the poster was to highlight the right of people to an interpreter in languages other than English. The poster would serve 3 purposes:

1. raise awareness of the right to an interpreter;
2. 'showcase' the linguistic diversity of WA;
3. by the inclusion of indigenous languages on the poster promote their use in the public sphere.

The text for the poster is given in Ex.1.

'Welcome. Please indicate which language you speak and we will organise an interpreter to help.'

Ex. 1 Poster text

I and other KISAC employees contacted a number of language speakers and organisations in the Kimberley towns of Broome, Derby, Fitzroy Crossing and Kununurra to undertake this translation task. In total,

poster texts were translated into 7 languages representing all 5 language families of the Kimberley (and therefore WA), as well as the post-contact language Kriol, an English-based creole language. The languages and their language families are given in Table 1.

The original poster text is so short it can be discussed in full. I will discuss the translation into Ngarinyin, a language of the Worrorran (also known as North Kimberley) family. There are a few challenges in translating this seemingly simple text.

Language	Language family
Yawuru	NYULNYULAN
Ngarinyin	WORRORRAN
Worrorra	WORRORRAN
Gooniyandi	BUNUBAN
Miriwoong	JARRAGAN
Walmajarri	PAMA-NYUNGAN
Kriol	Post-Contact (English lexifier creole)

Table 1 Languages used for poster text

The first word on the poster, ‘Welcome’ is an English greeting designed to make a new person feel at ease. Aboriginal people speaking language, however, do not greet each other like this. They do not say ‘hello’ either. Greetings are highly culturally specific. Ngarinyin speaker Paddy Neowarra chose to use the Ngarinyin equivalent which is said when people encounter each other. The translation with morpheme by morpheme gloss is shown in Ex. 2. I use the item and process morphological analysis for Ngarinyin, an agglutinating language with lots of morphophonemic variation and vowel assimilation (between roots and affixes)⁸

<i>Gurramurlarr</i>	<i>mingiya</i>
<i>Gurra2-amurlarr</i>	<i>munga2-iy-(r)a</i>
2pl bpp-forehead	3mcO1sgA-fut.-go.to
Literally: ‘I will/want to go to your foreheads’	

Ex. 2 Ngarinyin translation of poster text l. 1

Lexically, the Ngarinyin greeting in Ex.2 is very different, but it is functionally equivalent to English ‘welcome, hello’.

In Anglo-Australian society ‘welcome’ is usually accompanied by the shaking of hands. However, in traditional Ngarinyin society strangers would touch their foreheads together.

⁸ For more information on Ngarinyin morphophonemics and underlying forms of morphemes see Rumsey (1982: 16f).

Ngarinyin is also a language that demands the speaker be specific about the gender of the person being greeted. Grammatically, Ngarinyin has four noun classes, masculine, feminine and two others w-class and m-class (Rumsey 1982: 37-41). Neowarra in Ex.2 uses the greeting that specifically addresses a group of people. To address a single person in Ngarinyin the speaker has to take into consideration the gender of the hearer, which is expressed grammatically:

<i>Amurlarr mingiya a-amurlarr</i>
3M bpp –forehead
Greeting to a man
<i>Nyamurlarr mingiya nya-amurlarr</i>
3F bpp -forehead
Greeting to a woman

Ex. 3 Ngarinyin gender specific greetings

<i>Anja wurlan wurla gudma?</i>
<i>gurr-ma-0</i>
What language speak 2plS-say/do-pres
What language do you people speak?

Ex. 4 Ngarinyin transl. of poster text l. 2, 1st clause

The translation of the next part of the poster text appears straightforward. Neowarra has specified the number of the second person subject as plural, allowing only one interpretation, unlike English where ‘Please indicate which language you speak’ could be aimed at one person or a group of people. Neowarra gave another translation of poster text line 2, clause 1 in Ex 5.

<i>Anja jarragun yalan gudma?</i>
<i>gurr-ma-0</i>
What language speak 2plS-say/do-pres
What language do you people speak?

Ex. 5 Ngarinyin transl. of poster text l. 2, 1st clause

Ex. 4 and 5 are structurally equivalent to each other, but are lexically different. In Ex.5 the noun and the coverb have different forms from those in Ex. 4. So what is the difference? Ex.5 is in a register of Ngarinyin that Paddy Neowarra calls ‘Big Words’ in English and *Wuned di* in Ngarinyin. The noun *Wuned di* is probably derived from the adjective *wunerr* ‘great’ (see Rumsey 1982: 54). Neowarra insisted that translations in both *Wuned di* and *Ungarinyin di* (“Ordinary Ngarinyin”) be included on the poster.

Wuned di or ‘Big Words Ngarinyin’ is a register that was originally used in formal settings by Ngarinyin people and in interaction between certain kin members e.g. a woman and her daughter’s husband and by people of a certain age, e.g. teenage boys. I am still in the

process of learning in detail its linguistic characteristics and exact domains of use.

Broadly speaking, some parts of the use of *Wuned di* fall into the ‘avoidance language’ category, varying from ordinary language mostly in vocabulary, but also partly in grammatical structure (see Alpher, 1993:97f) for a parallel example from a totally different part of northern Australia). *Wuned di* vocabulary that differs from ordinary Ngarinyin includes the word classes nouns, coverbs and inflected verbs. Semantically the lexicon covers commonly used words such as ‘to eat’, ‘to walk’, ‘water’, ‘spear’. Some words are borrowed from neighbouring languages: compare *jarragun* ‘language’ in Ex.5 to Kija *jarrak* ‘to speak, to talk, language, speech’ (McGregor 1988:31). Other words are unique to *Wuned di*.

Paddy Neowarra’s motivation for using Big Words appears to be various. He wanted to demonstrate that Ngarinyin has a formal register equivalent to ‘High English’. High English is a term used by Aboriginal people in the Kimberley to refer to the type of English containing complicated words and jargon used by government departments and the corporate world. He is also fond of *wuned di* and is proud of his knowledge of this special register. Also, I think, because he knows that I am a linguist, he knew that I would be interested in this register.

<i>Admara</i>	<i>gule</i>	<i>jirrimu</i>
<i>Arrma(ra)</i>		<i>jirri-mu</i>
3MO1plinclause-take/bring first PN.M-EMPH		
<i>wurlabardangarri</i>		
<i>wurla-barda-ngarri</i> ⁹		
speak-NOMSLR-ASSOC		
Literally: First we will get/bring <u>him</u> , the one associated with speaking		
Free: First we will get the interpreter.		

Ex. 6 Ngarinyin transl. of poster text l. 2, 2nd clause

Ex. 6 gives some insight into the coining of new words. *-barda* is a suffix that derives new nouns from coverbs or nouns. The resulting nouns have a human referent indicating somebody who does something often or is skilled at something (See Rumsey, 1982: 123 for more). Hence *wurlabarda* is someone who often speaks or is skilled at speaking. *-ngarri* has a number of functions in Ngarinyin both as a nominal and a verbal suffix. In Ex.6 I have glossed it as associative. So *wurlabardangarri* is a noun meaning ‘he who is associated with skill at speaking’, an apt description of an interpreter.

<i>ayal</i>	<i>nyumure</i>
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⁹ *-ngarri* has a number of functions in Ngarinyin, both as a nominal and verbal suffix. In these examples I have glossed it as ‘associative’.

<i>a-ayal</i>	<i>nya2-ma(ra)-yli</i>
3mbpp-forear 3FO3sgA-take/bring OPT	
<i>Admara</i>	<i>wurlan.gu</i>
<i>Arr-ma(ra)</i>	<i>wurlan-gu</i>
3MO1plinclause-take/bring language-DAT	
Literally: Let him take his forearm, we will get him for language.	
We will get him and he will guide you with language.	

Ex. 7 Ngarinyin transl. of Poster text l. 2, 2nd clause
2nd part

Ex.7 is more complex than the English phrase ‘to help’. The meaning of ‘help’ is translated by the figurative sense ‘take by the forearm’.

As linguists we are taught to record texts, examples of connected speech, as well as doing elicitation to obtain authentic examples of the language. Translation is in a sense a form of lengthy elicitation. While translation may not always reflect natural speech, it can provide an example of the creative ways that a language deals with new concepts by coining new vocabulary as in Ex. 6.

Automatic Teller Machine (ATM) awareness

Another job that KISAC was contracted to carry out was the translation and sound recording of a script to inform people of the best way to use Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) and make them aware of monetary charges that could be incurred.

One language that the ATM script was translated into was Kija, another Kimberley language, but of the Jarrakan¹⁰ language family. Kija is a complicated language that has many fused affixes and suppletive simple verb roots. A basic introduction to Kija is found in KLRC (1996). For simplicity I have only given free translations of the Kija lines in Ex.8-11. Although oral, this job is counted as a translation because the Kija speaker, Betty Walker, was able to think about each line and go back and change it, essentially editing it. Although she did not write it down - I did - it is essentially translation. The Kija translations are given in Ex 8.

Original script line: Careful- take care with ATMs
Kija translation: <i>Murru murru yampirija yurriyangem merntam</i>
English back translation: We look after our money.

¹⁰ This language family also includes the Miriwoong and Gajirabeng languages (See Newry and Palmer 2003). See above for an explanation of *jarrak*.

Ex. 8

We would expect a translation into Kija that more closely resembled the original English script line. Certainly that would be required be in interpreting. One of the tenets of the interpreters' code of ethics is accuracy. Betty Walker does not mention ATMs in her translation, but rather concentrates on *merntam* 'money', the important product of ATMs, choosing to introduce the topic ATM later in her translation (see Ex 11).

Original script line: Don't give anyone your card or PIN number

Kija translation: *Nguwan yampirrija pirri cardpu PINnumberm yurriyangem merntampurru yuwurru. Yimele pimpirriju*

English back translation: Don't give anybody our cards or PIN numbers for money (i.e. to get money). They will steal it.

Ex. 9

Betty Walker has adapted loanwords to fit Kija semantics. Hence she says: PINnumberm. -m is the non-singular noun class marker (Bythe 2003). This is one of three Kija noun classes, the others being masculine and feminine. The non-singular (n.s.) covers plural function e.g. *jilem* 'men' and *yawardam* 'horses', but is also used to mark nouns such as body parts that could be plural or singular *marlam* 'hand(s), finger(s)', *therlam* 'back', and 'non-count' nouns that are neither singular nor plural, e.g. *kurlum* 'water', *thumpam* 'fire', and nouns that are hard to quantify, e.g. *daam* 'country, camp'. Another n.s. marker is -pu which has been suffixed to loanwords such as *cardpu*.

Original script line: They could withdraw all your money.

Kija translation: *Drawem pimpirriju yu merntam. Ngurlugpupurru tulngunpupurru warawiny merntam melakawum*

English back translation: They will withdraw all our money for grog, smokes and ganja.

Ex. 10

Betty Walker uses a borrowing from Kriol in Ex. 10. A transitive Kriol verb 'drawem' becomes a coverb to form a Kija complex verb, *drawem pimpirriju*, 'they will withdraw it (the money)'. *Merntam* is a neologism meaning 'money'. It is formed from adding the n.s. suffix -m to the noun root *mernta* 'paperbark'. *merntany* with the masculine suffix -ny refers to a discrete 'paperbark tree'. Presumably Kija people thought that banknotes looked like sheets of paperbark. Banknotes, varying in number and being present in bundles, were assigned to the non-singular noun class.

In Ex. 10, rather than just suggest the possibility of somebody withdrawing money when having access to the PIN number, she says it will definitely happen and gives the consequences of these actions: that people will

abuse the keycard and use the money for alcohol, cigarettes and drugs. Walker has adapted her translation to fit the culture of the target audience.

Original script line: You could be charged a fee every time you use an ATM, even for checking your account balance.

Kija translation: *Merntam thekharri yampirriya bankjin ATM ngenengka la lil lil job machinepu nguwanngenan merntapawurrem. But ngiyak kumpa Still merntam Chargem impirrinpu dollar fifty wiji pimpirrinpu*

English back translation: When we look at our money at the ATM at the bank and you've got no money they still charge us. They take out \$1.50.

Ex.11

The English original in Ex. 11 is essentially a euphemism. Being charged to use an ATM is a certainty, not a possibility. In Australia, ATMs not affiliated to a bank, do charge fees to use them. Usually, only the bank that a person belongs to will not charge fees for use of their ATMs. Betty has decided to change the line to 'a dollar fifty *wiji pimpirrinpu*': 'They take out \$1.50' to warn the audience that the charges *will* happen - it is not just a possibility. Typically, ATMs in Aboriginal communities do not belong to banks, so users will be charged fees.

Another interesting way in which the Kija translation differs from the English original is the use of addressing the hearer of the message. Walker uses phrases like *yurriyangem merntam* 'our money', *cardbu PINnumberm yurriyangem* 'our cards and PINs' and says in Ex. 11 *Merntam thekharri yampirriya bankjin* 'When we look at our money in the bank'. This contrasts with the English original using 'your money', 'your PIN', 'checking your account balance'. Although 'you' can be interpreted as singular or plural, I believe in this ATM text that the intended hearer is second person singular. Aboriginal societies even today are more group-orientated, rather than individualistic, hence the use of first person plural pronouns and inflected verbs in the Kija translation. To a certain extent the referents of the statements in both English and Kija are not specific. English uses 'you' and 'one' for a non-specific agent, whereas Kija uses 'we' forms. I have also noticed this in Ngarinyin, a favouring of 'we' pronouns and prefixes where the referent is not specific in example sentences explaining typical uses of objects, plants and typical activities without referring to a specific event.

Betty Walker has not only translated a text into her language Kija from the original English, but has also taken some licence to make the translation culturally appropriate. Rather than abstractly suggesting the consequences of not using an ATM correctly she has expressed very real outcomes as a result of these actions.

One anonymous reviewer of the abstract for this paper doubted the usefulness of an ATM awareness text in an endangered language, because most people would be able to understand English anyway. Such reasoning is not unusual in the history of endangered and minority languages' struggles for recognition, but I believe it misses the point. Whilst it is true that effective communication is the main purpose of a language, it is by no means the only one. Showing solidarity with people, as a mark of identity and an increase in domains are other reasons to use a language. This is especially important for endangered languages.

Yes, it does appear that Kija people are shifting from speaking Kija to Kriol and Aboriginal English, but this does not necessarily mean that they can understand 'High English'. If a language is declining in use, due to both a decrease in the numbers of speakers and a reduction in domains, it is important for the language's survival to take advantage of any opportunity to put the language to use.

In the context of New Zealand, Mato (2012:100) talks about increasing the interface of the Maori language, into technologies including ATMs, despite only 23.7% of Maori people being able to speak Maori (Mato, 2012:103). Obviously having ATM instructions in Maori is not just for communication.

Loans

Kija speakers code-switch and use lots of loanwords. I am not sure if the code-switching and borrowing is a result of the decline in language use or if it was always part of Kija¹¹. The loanwords are from English and Kriol but are skilfully integrated into Kija with Kija morphology. Borrowed nouns get Kija noun class suffixes. Conversely, many Kija people when speaking Kriol use Kija words. (For a good example of this see Blythe 2003:75). These Kija words are usually nouns and coverbs. Nouns may be used without Kija noun class markers and other morphology e.g. *mulungku* instead of *mulungkum*, 'fat'; gata *karlumpu* instead of *karlumpupany*, 'with a spear'. Kriol morphology may be used with Kija words, e.g. 'Tufela bin *ngurlukbat*, 'Those two kept on drinking'. For more on Kriol grammar and morphology see Hudson (1983).

Conclusion

These sorts of translations, although primarily meant to promote awareness of certain issues, also contribute to promoting awareness of endangered languages and challenge speakers to use their languages in new and unusual ways which are of great interest to linguists.

Speakers of endangered languages get more rewards doing translation work than just payment. It provides

intellectual stimulation and instils pride that their languages are valuable enough to broadcast on radio or display on a poster. This kind of work also increases the number of domains and genres of text, providing new linguistic insights amongst endangered languages.

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this paper are my own and do not necessarily represent the views of KISAC or any interpreters and translators.

¹¹ Some Kija loans come from other Aboriginal languages such as Ngarinyin, so they must have occurred before contact with English while the language was fully viable.

Ngarinyin morphological abbreviations

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
sg	singular number
pl	plural number
S	intransitive subject
A	transitive subject
O	transitive object
incl	inclusive
mc	m-class noun class
M	masculine noun class
F	feminine noun class
bpp	body part prefix
pres	present tense
fut.	future tense
OPT	optative mood
NOMSLR	derivational nominaliser, to derive noun from coverb
ASSOC	associative suffix
PN	pronoun
EMPH	emphasis
DAT	dative

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