News from the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language

All systems are go for the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language (CoEDL) with the signing of the final funding agreements. The Centre is a seven year collaboration between the University of Western Sydney, the University of Queensland, The University of Melbourne, and the Australian National University, with another thirteen partner organisations in Australia and overseas.

The Centre of Excellence officially started on September 15th, and will be holding its official launch in Canberra on November 24th. Refurbishments for a dedicated Centre space are nearly complete in the Coombs building and should be ready by November 21st.

Under the directorship of Nick Evans, Centre researchers will address some of the most critical questions about language: How do languages (and other adaptive self-organising systems) evolve? How different can languages be? How do our brains acquire and process them? How can technologies deal with the complexity and enormous variability of language in its central role in human information processing?

The launch is scheduled for Monday 24 November, at 1.15pm. For further details: coedl@anu.edu.au

Centre of Excellence Related Appointments

The Centre welcomes two new recent appointments who complete its administrative team.

Publicity and Outreach Officer: Piers Kelly, who brings a longstanding interest in making linguistics more visible to the general public, most notably through his founding of the blog Fully (sic) on Crikey and recently received the Wurm Prize for his PhD The word made flesh: an ethnographic history of Eskayan, a utopian language and script of the southern Philippines.

Senior Data Management Officer: Julia Mille obtained her PhD last year from the University of Washington (Seattle) with a sociophonetic study of the Beaver language (Athabaskan), and has worked on DoBeS projects on Beaver in Canada, and Nen and Tonda in Papua New Guinea. As well as her fieldwork and archiving expertise (with PARA-DISEC), Julia has experience in developing community-access portals to linguistic data archives — see here.

Nick Evans on site.

Before and after shots of the Centre of Excellence.
**Publication and Media News**

*The Routledge Handbook of Historical Linguistics*, which Beth Evans co-edited with Claire Bowern, was launched on August 20th in the Coombs Building. The edited book contains many contributions from researchers in CAP CHL, as well as from researchers at the ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences.

Waya Arka has recently published an edited collection of paper with co-editor Ni Luh Ketut Mas Indrawati. Titled *Argument realisations and related constructions in Austronesian languages: papers from 12-ICAL*, it was published by Pacific Linguistics.

The *Handbook of the Austronesian Languages* is approaching completion. The 2 volumes edited by Mathias Jenny (University of Zurich) and Paul Sidwell are expected to be officially launched early next year, with a publication year of 2014.

Bruce Birch has been working on a language documentation app development project with Dr. Linda Ford of the Northern Institute. This project was recently picked up by the ABC: view the report [here](#).

**PhD News**

Greg Dickson inches ever closer to finishing his PhD thesis. On October 2nd he gave a public seminar in Katherine: *An introduction to the Kriol language* aimed at local speech pathologists and other professionals. On November 6 he presented at the Top End Linguistics Circle meeting in Darwin. There, he gave a revised presentation of an earlier talk, *Revisiting the substrate influences of Kriol: the case of Marra* which has now been developed as a chapter for publication in an upcoming Mouton volume on contact language phenomena in Australia.

Owen Edwards returned from a successful field trip in West Timor, early November. He will be presenting data from his trip at the talk *The structure of metathesis in Amarasi* (see back of newsletter for details).

Kate Naitoro has successfully completed her TPR seminar titled *Morphs in search of meaning: Patterns of transitive marking and thematic consonants in the transitive suffixes in Southeast Solomon languages*. She is now preparing for her 6 month fieldwork trip to the Solomon Islands, departing in December. She will return in May 2015.

Matt Carroll, Kwang-ju Cho, and Chris Weedall are all currently in the field. Matt and Kwang-ju are expected to return in December.
There is a strong interest in the region in seeing documentation of other languages, and during the two months Nick was in Bimadbn individuals or groups from other communities walked to the village – usually for two or three days – to place requests to find a linguist to work on their language. Anyone looking for an interesting field site should contact Nick for further information.

The Southern New Guinea project team from Nick Evans’ Laureate project Wellsprings of Linguistic Diversity has just returned from the field. Postdoc Dineke Schokkin was established in her new fieldsite working on the Idi language, and PhD student Eri Kashima working on Nambu. Nick Evans continued his work on Nen and other languages of the area. Highlights include the documentation of a previously unreported language, Dre, spoken by just one old man in his 70s (Dayaku Irfai), helped by his nephew. Dre belongs to the same family as Nen, though not close – roughly like Italian and Rumanian – and retains a number of interesting features lost in all other languages of the branch, such as initial velar nasals and final high vowels which can now be understood to have conditioned palatalisation of velar stops in some other languages of the family. Nick and UNE PhD student Emil Mittag spent an intense week working out the essentials of the language, working through a linguistic goulash of Nen, Nambu, Dre and Arammba, the language Dayaku uses in daily communication.

Another highlight was the filming of two traditional ceremonies in Bimadbn village, the Makamaka ceremony which releases widows from their bereavement restrictions, and the Sakr ceremony which recounts the origin of different languages and human possession of fire. These two beautiful and spectacular ceremonies, full of linguistic and musical interest, had not been performed for many decades due to a perception that they clashed with Christian teachings. Memory of how to perform them was restricted to just a few old people, keen to pass on their knowledge to the next generation. High-quality film footage was made by Darja Hoenigman and Penny Johnson.

The trialling of ‘coconut interviews’ as a means of gathering naturalistic, comparable data across a wide range of individuals as part of the Wellspring Project’s goal of putting individual variation in small-scale multilingual speech communities under the microscope. Members of the newly-established Nen Language Committee were trained in interviewing and recording methods, and carried out over 85 such interviews, in Nen, Nambu and Idi.

Southern New Guinea Field Trip

Dayaku Irfai (right) and his nephew.

Get them while they’re young. Jamyang Tshering sporting ANU colours.

Eri working with enthusiastic locals of Bevdvn.
Bhutan Fieldwork Trip

Mark Donohue expanded his work with Bumthang speakers in Canberra by travelling to Bhutan and, with the assistance provided by the Firebird Foundation, setting up a project under the auspices of the Bhutan Oral Literature Project (BOLP). Travelling to the main valleys of Bumthang, he managed to recruit and train two local workers in the Tang and Ura valleys to collaborate with the production of Oral Literature and Verbal Art materials. The hope is that some of these materials can be adapted for use in the Early Learning Centre in Ura and at other local schools.

The team aim to extend the collaboration to include the Bhutanese Ministry of Education and their new ‘reading strategy group’. Initial work can be viewed on the Bumthang web pages, here and here.

In Tang Mark and Ratu stayed at Ogyen Chöling, a traditional manor house with a magnificent outlook on the Tang valley and surrounding mountains (link). There they worked with Ashi Kunzang Choden, Bhutanese visionary and author, who has set up a museum and is a fountain of traditional knowledge and history.

Language Evolution Field Day

An informal Language Evolution Field Day was held at the ANU School of Biology on August 20th. The one day series of talks and discussion brought together scholars from biology (Lindell Bromham, Marcel Cardillo, Emma Day, David Duchene, Xia Hua, Bill McAlister, Camile Moray, Dan Rosauer, Craig Moritz), Philosophy (Justin Bruner, Liz Irvine, Kim Sterelny), and Linguistics (Mark Ellison, Beth Evans, Nick Evans, Tom Fitzpatrick Simon Greenhill, Eri Kashima, Dineke Schokkin). The aim of the workshop was to stimulate discussion to lay the foundations for future projects in cross-disciplinary research on language evolution.
Workshops and Presentations

Malcolm Ross spent part of July at Academia Sinica in Taipei, where he taught a short course on Austronesian historical morphology at a historical linguistics summer school for Taiwanese graduate students. Malcolm was at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig between late July and the end of October, working on various aspects of the histories of Pacific languages. From 16th to 18th October he participated in the workshop “Grammatical hybridization and social conditions” at the Institute, where he was one of two keynote speakers.

Mark Donohue was in Europe to work on a collaboration with Tom Owen-Smith about language contact and change in Nepal, and presented a talk at the workshop on “Grammatical Hybridization and Social Conditions”, held at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig. This workshop aimed to develop an empirically based typology of the kinds of social encounters and their structural outcomes, with special reference to grammatical change. Mark’s talk was titled “Social histories and their different linguistic consequences.”

Mark also delivered an invited talk at the three-day workshop on “big-data linguistic research”. Called “Language Comparison with Linguistic Databases: ReFlEx and Typological Databases”, the workshop was held in Nijmegen on October 7-9. The aim of the workshop was to discuss how to optimise the making and use of databases, involving both lexicon and grammar, for linguistic research. The workshop focussed on scientific results obtained through the use of existing databases; Mark’s talk was entitled “Typological and other databases: empirical findings and comparative hypotheses.”

Mark Ellison presented a talk entitled “Egocentrism as a Key Component of Cultural Evolution” at the first conference of the Polish Society from Human Evolution in Wrocław Oct 23-25. The presentation focussed on the tendency uncovered in a number of semiotic experiments which drives interlocutors to communicate using representations they themselves have used previously, and leads them to disregard opportunities to coordinate with their partners.

Owen Edwards and Chuck Grimes waved the ANU flag, presenting papers at the “Seminar Internasional dan Workshop Teater Nasionalin, Kupang”, west Timor on October 27th. An audience of around 500 staff and students from several tertiary institutions and several islands were in attendance. Owen’s talk was titled “The structure of metathesis in Amaras”, and Charles’s titled “Eastern Indonesia & Timor Leste: a strategic zone of contact for people and languages.”

Nick Evans presented the opening Plenary at the AILA Congress in Brisbane on the topic “Hearing the Inside: The Landscape of meaning in Australian Indigenous languages.” He also gave a talk on Multilingualism as the primal human condition: what we have to learn from small-scale speech communities at a workshop at the University of Western Sydney celebrating the opening of the new Bilingualism Research Lab there. See here.

Mark Ellison presented a talk entitled “Morphological Complexity Responds to Multilingualism Not Age-of-Acquisition”. His UWA collaborator Nic Fay will present a second joint paper entitled “Human Communication Systems evolve via cumulative cultural adaptation: an empirical demonstration.”

Matt Carroll and Dineke Schokkin will also be presenting.

Upcoming Conference Presentations

Siva Kalyan will be presenting a paper entitled “Intersecting subgroups in Indo-European” at the Australian Linguistic Society conference, to be held at the University of Newcastle from December 10–12.

At the same conference Mark Ellison will be presenting a talk entitled “Morphological Complexity Responds to Multilingualism Not Age-of-Acquisition”. His UWA collaborator Nic Fay will present a second joint paper entitled “Human Communication Systems evolve via cumulative cultural adaptation: an empirical demonstration.”
Linguistics
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College of Asia & the Pacific
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The Asia-Pacific is the most complex and varied linguistic landscape in the world, with three thousand of the world’s 7,000 languages. Many are endangered and in coming decades the region is confronting an epochal narrowing of the human knowledge base through language loss.

Linguistics in the College of Asia and the Pacific promotes the study of this linguistic diversity in its fullest sense, including documentation and description - producing grammars, dictionaries and collections of textual materials, usually from on-site fieldwork – work that is equally important for small speech communities themselves.

Minority languages researched in the department cover sites ranging from Vanuatu, New Caledonia, PNG, Australia, Indonesia, Timor Leste, the Philippines, Taiwan, India and Japan. Other research focuses on national languages of the region, such as Japanese and Indonesian.

Our postgraduate training aims to produce descriptive linguists of the highest quality. We teach into all levels, including undergraduate courses in Japanese, Indonesian, Linguistics and Pacific Studies, Master's Courses in Linguistics and Applied Japanese Linguistics, and advanced doctoral training. We co-host Paradisec, a digital archive dedicated to recordings of languages and cultures of the Pacific. We also publish the monograph series Pacific Linguistics, which has produced over 600 publications.

Events Upcoming and Just Passed

Seminar: The gift of participatory action research: Algonquian dictionaries and linguistic research - Professor Marie-Odile Junker (Carlton University, Canada) (link)
November 14
3:30PM - 5:00pm
Seminar Room B

Seminar: The structure of metathesis in Amarasi - Owen Edwards (link)
November 19
11:00am - 12:30pm
Seminar Room B

Seminar: Numeral systems of the world's languages - Eugene S. L. Chan (link)
November 19
11:00am - 12:30pm
Seminar Room B

Summer Course: Mongolian 1A: Intensive Course—Li Narangoa (link)
January 27 - February 6,
9:00am start, 4 hours daily

Launch: ARC Centre of Excellence the Dynamics of Language launch. - Various (link)
November 24
1:15pm - 3:00pm
The Lotus Hall, China in the World Building (188), Fellows Lane

Have a happy festive season, and see you next year!

Farewell feast dancing in Bevdvn, Papua New Guinea. Photo: Eri Kashima.