

VACL

Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages

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April 2007



The Aboriginal Choir from Healesville performed at Federation Square singing songs translated into Woiwurrung and Yorta Yorta.

also
Policy Development Workshop
VACL Promo DVD
Intellectual Property of Language
Miromaa



A message from the Chairperson...

Hello and Welcome to the first 2007 edition of the VACL newsletter. After a great year in 2006, we are

o f f to a good start in the new year with a number of new events and projects coming up soon. Last year, with the support of VACL I saw language taking off around the state with new Community Language Programs, workshops to coordinate community discussion on moving language programs forward, the development of two dictionaries which are to be published this year (Waywurru/Dhudhuroa and Wathaurong) and the development of language resources including the Gunnai Storybooks.

Last year the South-west Aboriginal Language Corporation (SWALC) in Warnambool became the fifth VACL Community Language Program. The Keeray-Wurrung community has already published a dictionary but SWALC is committed to involving other languages from the surrounding area in its language program. This year we look forward to seeing that program engaging a Language Worker to begin work with their languages in that community.

Last year VACL was successful in receiving funding to hold a State Language Forum which it has chosen to use to hold a forum on the development of a Language Policy for Victoria. Details about the State Language Policy Forum are to be found in this issue of the VACL newsletter.

Funding awarded last year for a project to record a Children's songs CD will also be put into practice this year. VACL hopes to bring children from different parts of Victoria together to record songs in their languages to showcase the diversity in Victoria's Indigenous languages and the work of communities today.

Last year we saw Indigenous people all around the state engaging new technologies to make their ancient languages relevant to people today. We had children developing their own digital stories on computers, language workers creating innovative computer games with language, the VACL touchscreen, an interactive computer portal to be used to display Victorian languages and also the VACL short film soon to be distributed on DVD.

I would like to thank the VACL staff and Language Workers for a very successful 2006 and I look forward to the new developments in language in Victoria this year.

WELCOME S.W.A.L.C.

We would like to take this opportunity to welcome the South-West Aboriginal Language Committee as part of the VACL Community Language Programs. the recognition of the the need to share resources and the need for direction and planning has seen the recent establishment of this regional committee representing the following communities: Gadubanud Gulidjan, Gadubanud, Djargurd Wurrong, Keeray Woorroong, Woolwoowurrong, Koorn Kopan Noot, Kee Wurrong, Peek Wurrong, Dharwurd Wurrong.

AIATSI TAPES

VACL has recently digitised tapes obtained from AIATSI in Canberra recording interviews done between the 1960's and 1980's. Some of the languages featured in these tapes include; Wemba Wemba, Ngarigu, Woiwurrung, Yorta Yorta, Wadi Wadi, Wergaia, etc.

Copies of these tapes can now be burnt to CD in MP3 format for community members to listen. Contact the VACL Office for more information.

“From FATSIL Magazine, Voice of the Land”

Northern Territory delegate, Merlyn Bandaynga, best summed up the feeling of FATSIL’s National Indigenous Languages Forum last November, when she spoke about her work for the NT Interpreting service; “strong language, strong culture, strong mind, strong spirit”.

Along with her colleagues, Colleen Rosas and Mildred Inkamala, she was one of 50 participants from around the country who gathered at Port Hedland, WA, to exchange and explore local experiences in Indigenous language development. This year the Kariyarra people hosted the Forum. Aunty Diane Robinson welcomed delegates to country and, with local Elder Bruce Thomas, talked about language development at the Wangka Maya Aboriginal Language Centre.

Other presentations included; the Traditional Knowledge Recording Project by Victor Steffenson, reclaiming the Nyikina language near Derby, WA, by Jeannie Wabi and Colleen Hattersley, a terrific video animation by Greg McKellar of Burke, NSW, consultative strategies for language education development by Eileen Hawkes, a representative of the Curriculum Council of WA, employment strategies by Sara Jane Slattery of the Bloodwood Tree Association Employment Directions Network (Pilbara), news from North Queensland by



Uncle Herb Patten & Bruce Thomas from Wangka-Maya Language Centre

F A T S I L P O R T H E D L A N D



Victorian Delegates at FATSIL Conference

Christine George and Bridget Priman of the North Queensland Regional Aboriginal Corporation Languages Centre, and a comprehensive explanation of the National Indigenous TV Initiative by Neil Turner. A big mob from Victoria also made the journey and contributed a colourful presentation about the work that the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages is doing. It wasn’t all work though. Aunty Diane Robinson led a very informative bus tour of important local sites, and Uncle Herb Patten turned it on with a rousing performance of the gum leaf at the conference dinner.

VACL DVD

VACL produced a 15 minute DVD that was initially designed to complement the Language Education Kit to be sent out to schools. The DVD gives a brief history of the loss of Indigenous languages in Victoria and then highlights the work of VACL over the past decade. Community Language Programs are featured showcasing the fantastic work done in communities and local schools towards the revival of local languages. Importantly, the DVD portrays the importance of language revival, what it means to Indigenous people and how it can make a stronger connection with their culture through stories and knowledge. Copies of the DVD can be obtained from VACL.

Language Map

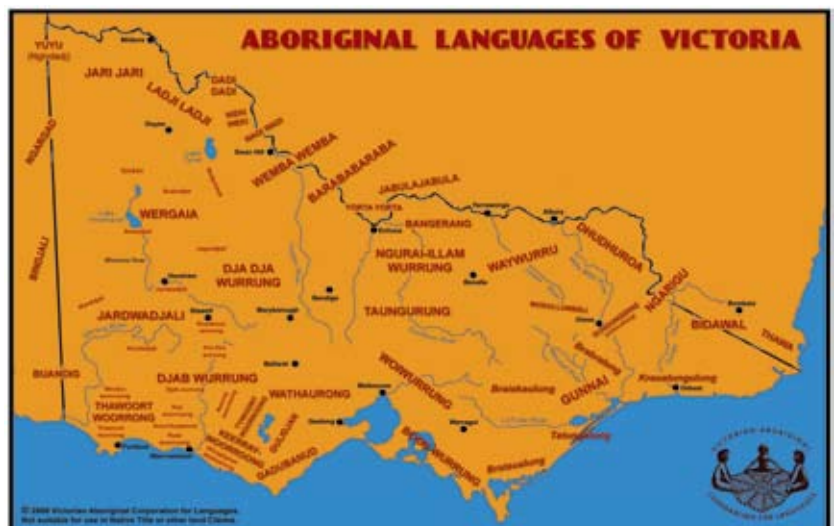
Ten years since the release of the “Language Areas of Victoria - a Reconstruction” by Ian Clark, the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages was presented with a revised map of the language areas of Victoria. Much has changed in regards to Traditional Owners and Native Title since the 1996 map and the release of such a map within the current climate of Cultural Heritage, VACL decided to ask the community about the release of such a map that defines boundaries. Feedback from the Community and VACL Members raised some important issues that required serious consideration. **Some of the points raised were as follows;**

- *The only meaningful way to establish traditional owner boundaries is based on archaeological evidence ie., cultural material, sources / distribution and by walking and living within the landscapes. Looking for the signs such as river valleys / mountain ridges / water catchments (flows) / access routes / flora & fauna localities / known camp sites / scarred trees – markers / stone arrangements / burials / etc.*

- *The use of languages as a means of defining country/boundaries is poor and inclusive. It is only one form which is inconclusive and still creates issues.*

- *Language is only one source, not recognising the natural & cultural features in landscapes and reading the signs and stories told to us by our elders.*

VACL resolved to release a map that only highlights the languages in Victoria without defining boundaries as these can be taken too literally. Copies of the map can be ordered from VACL by calling 03 9600 3811.



ABORIGINAL CHOIR PERFORMS AT FEDERATION SQUARE



Christmas Carols in Woiwurrung language drifted through Federation Square in Melbourne on a sunny day last December. The Aboriginal Children's Choir, comprising Indigenous and non-Indigenous kids between the ages of 8 and 14 entertained an appreciative crowd with carols in the Woiwurrung language, including songs composed by senior Wurundjeri Elder, Aunty Joy Wandin Murphy. Lou Bennet also played with the Choir, complementing the kids beautifully with her generous spirit and strong songs. The Choir has been busy - playing 6 gigs in as many months, and looks forward to new songs and a full schedule in 2007.

'Still taking our language'

Language research and intellectual property

Whenever communities are considering working with a linguist, there are concerns about how the linguist will respond to issues of language custodianship – how to make sure the information, the control of the project and the intellectual property remain with the community.

Because of this, there has been a strong focus recently on developing community protocols. A number of publications have also appeared discussing the big picture. Our culture, our future by Terri Janke is one fairly well-known one (<http://www.frankellawyers.com.au/media/report/culture.pdf>). There are also several around by a growing number of linguists who are also concerned about these issues, and want to develop better foundations for collaboration with communities.

As a linguist myself, I am concerned about the way linguists write about language work. Communities are well aware that they carry out many different roles in language work. For example, FATSIL's Guide to community protocols (<http://www.fatsil.org/papers/FATSILProtocolsguide.pdf>) lists some suggestions: 'collecting language data, documenting language, using equipment/technologies, analysing language data, making decisions about publication format, design and layout'...and more. In general, if you talk to linguists who work with communities, they seem to be aware of this. But if you read their publications about language work, much of this work seems to go unrecognised. Most of the names of people referred to are other linguists; phrases like 'my data' or 'his grammar' seem to imply that the linguists own the work; and the range of activities mentioned for community participants is very small.

If linguists and communities are to build a foundation of trust for working together, it is essential for the linguist to acknowledge the collaboration in real terms, throughout any discussion of the work they produce. It seems to me that many linguists would agree with this – so why doesn't it happen?! Perhaps there are a number of reasons.

Firstly, processes of funding, publication and university staff evaluation require academics to demonstrate what we do, in ways that really don't account for collaborative community work. If linguists don't produce what is required, we could gradually lose our ability to keep working as linguists. Second, we are just used to writing in particular ways, so anything that isn't written in those ways doesn't seem 'academic' enough to us. A third reason may well be that linguists are afraid to let go our belief that we are the 'experts', and leave that place for community participants to take up. Regardless of the reasons, clearly the situation has to change, or communities may just give up on working with linguists altogether.

So what is to be done? I think it is important to raise awareness in the linguistics community about issues of recognition in their writing – to help linguists listen better to what communities think, and dissolve some of the barriers in the way of change.

In September, a National Indigenous Languages Conference will be held (advert in this newsletter). The conference is for community representatives, Language teachers and linguists, so it could be an ideal place to start discussing these issues together. I would like to bring some material from this research project – interviews with Aboriginal people and analyses of writing by linguists – and set up a round-table discussion. Perhaps a workshop like this could begin to extend the protocols that are already around, by developing a draft agreement between the linguists and the community representatives present.

If you would like to be involved in this, or if you have other ideas you would like to talk over, I'd love to hear from you!

Dr Christina Eira, VACL Community Linguist

This article is based on a research project funded by AIATSIS. The title of this project, 'Still taking our language', is a quote from Tania Wanganeen, Language Worker, Narungga Aboriginal Progress Association. Special thanks to Dennis O'Brien for conducting interviews and collecting materials.

Policy Development Workshop

On 23rd & 24th March, VACL held an Indigenous Language Policy Development Workshop at Rydges in Preston. The aim of the workshop was to hold a forum for the development of draft guidelines to the establishment of a Victorian State Policy on Indigenous Languages and to facilitate an ongoing collaborative partnership between VACL, FATSIL and relevant government stakeholders for the promotion and preservation of Indigenous languages in Victoria. The benefit of having such a document ensures the necessary financial support is received to revive Indigenous languages within the community.

Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Hon. Gavin Jennings opened the forum by stating that “Aboriginal Cultural Heritage is about language, stories and traditions as well as land and objects.” The Bracks Government provided \$10,000 to help VACL run the two-day workshop, bringing together experts in this area whilst FATSIL secured \$34,000 through the Dept Communication, Information, Technology & the Arts (DCITA) to support the Policy Development process.

Delegates saw several presentations on the first day by speakers from NSW, South Australia and New Zealand who already have experience with policy development in their own states and country whilst the second day consisted of three concurrent workshops focussing on Language in Culture, Language in the Community and Language in Education. These workshops returned key recommendations to be considered for inclusion in a Victorian State Indigenous Language Policy.

The next step is to collate these recommendations and undertake further community consultation before approaching the State Government for further negotiations. To keep up to date with the progress of the policy development, check the VACL website at; www.vaclang.org.au.

LANGUAGE AWARENESS EDUCATION KIT

VACL receives an ever-increasing number of queries from the general public but also from primary and secondary teachers wanting to find out about Victoria’s Indigenous languages for education in their classes. As such VACL has responded to this need with the development of the VACL Language Awareness Education Kit.

VACL understands the protocols associated with language and its use, and respects the right of communities to manage their own reclamation of language. This kit aims to raise awareness of this understanding, not to teach language itself. The kit is aimed at primary and early secondary students both non-Indigenous and Indigenous alike. VACL believes that raising awareness about language and the associated issues will help to create understanding about the diversity and complexity of Indigenous communities in Victoria and is a window into understanding culture.

The kit has been developed in-house with consultation from various Indigenous community representatives, Language Workers and Aboriginal organisations, including VAEAI where the project has been submitted as per protocol with Indigenous content in Victorian schools. A Teachers’ focus group was also held in November last year. This was very useful in gaining feedback and suggestions as to how a mainstream classroom might incorporate such a resource and the needs of teachers and students who may have very little knowledge about Indigenous communities, language and the protocols that need to be followed.

The kit comprises a Teachers’ Resource covering the basics of protocols, facts about Australian languages in general and the history of language in Victoria and the reclamation process up to today. This is accompanied by a number of activities for students. Each activity has suggested alternatives for different ages and approaches, so as to fit into VELS, the latest Victorian Schools curriculum.

Currently the kit rests with VAEAI to be reviewed by it Schools Committee. It is hoped that the kit will eventually be available to download free from the VACL website and for purchase in full-colour hard copy. If you have any queries with regard to this project, please contact Alex at VACL on 9600 3811.



The Arwarbukarl Cultural Resource Association in Newcastle have developed a computer program called the Miromaa Language Program. Miromaa is a computer program to assist in preserving and reclaiming our Indigenous languages. The program acts as an electronic database of language resources. It has many functions for both the language worker and language learner including a word database and translation program, and also has interactive video and multimedia functions. The program is capable of being programmed with different levels of detail using filters and levels of security and access

restrictions. Miromaa aims to give control over the language back to the communities. VACL has been supporting the development of Miromaa through testing and feedback and has held several Workshops for our Language Workers to become familiar with the program. Miromaa has received positive response from those who have used it saying that it is an easy-to-use database that ensures the survival of our languages into the future. VACL has four copies of Miromaa available to communities wanting to undertake language work.



Workbooks to complement Nambur Ganai CD Rom

The Gunnai Language Program has produced the first in a three-series Workbook to complement the Nambur Ganai CD Rom developed in 2001.

The first workbook is aimed at the beginner level with an "Intermediate" and "Advanced" level to follow.

The Workbooks follows the CD and is the written version of the CD Rom. The workbook will guide the learner to various parts of the CD Rom. The workbook will also enable the teacher to choose which part of the CD Rom the learner should practice and it enables the teacher to follow and also to create tasks for the learner to use. Level one is made up of New words, Sentences and the Jiddelek story. As you navigate thru the CD Rom you can follow the instructions in the workbook. For more information on these workbooks, contact Lynne Solomon-Dent at the Gunnai Language Program.

Congratulations to the Wathaurong Community Language Program & Multilocus who recently received the "Best Aboriginal Resource at the ATOM (Australian teachers of Multimedia) Awards. The Wathaurong Program was part of a project that involved 8 Indigenous Communities across Australia to develop and interactive CD-Rom that taught children languages through computer games and activities.



WIN AN IPOD SHUFFLE !!



We're looking for a new name for our VACL Newsletter in a Victorian Indigenous Language. Entries should include the appropriate translation and necessary permissions for its use.

Competition closes 5pm Friday the 29th June 2007.

Send your entries to;

VACL
295 King St
Melbourne Vic 3000
or by email to;

vacl@vaclang.org.au

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Hi!

I'm Christina Eira, the new Community Linguist at VACL. I started here just a few weeks ago and met some of you at the Victorian Indigenous Languages Policy and Development Workshop that VACL ran in March. I've been working for the last 6-7 years with communities in South Australia – mostly Narungga. The Narungga people have been reclaiming their language from the knowledge of Elders and historical sources, and I have been involved in collecting Language knowledge, analysing its sounds, words and grammar, assisting the community in their decisions about missing parts of the language, spelling etc., and training Narungga people to teach the language and continue developing it. We've just published 11 books that reflect a great deal of work by many people, including two dictionaries (one for adults and a picture dictionary for kids), a grammar book, and several readers for children, with illustrations by children.



As well as this long-term project, I've been involved in some of the work that Waywurru and Dhudhuroa people have been doing, especially in finalising their spelling system and dictionary, and have also been helping to set up dictionary software for Ngarrindjeri (another SA language). I've been in Linguistics since 1992 when I started an Honours degree with a double major in Linguistics at Melbourne University, and loved it so much I went on to do a PhD as well. That took a while, but it gave me time to get some experience in working with various communities and developing dictionaries.

I'm looking forward to meeting more of you and supporting all the Language work that is happening in Victoria. We're planning a trip to visit some communities soon, but in the meantime please contact us if you have anything you think you might like me to help out with.

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