Workshop on the Languages of Melanesia

The Workshop on the Languages of Melanesia (16-18 March) was a great success. More than 30 people gathered in Kioloa (ANU coastal camp) for a weekend well-balanced between talks, informal discussions and chilly swimming in the Pacific.

More participants than expected came along to Kioloa to attend the workshop. Over thirty people attended, from 9 countries including some who made the long shlep from the USA or Europe just for the workshop. Australia participants came from Newcastle, Armidale, Sydney and Melbourne as well as Canberra. It was also great to welcome colleagues who have recently joined cognate fields at the ANU, including Evan Kidd (psychology) and Ambra Calo (Archaeology).

After a first presentation on Friday morning at ANU by the keynote speaker, Sebastian Fedden (University of Surrey), the following two days were filled with presentations on various linguistic domains: among others, phonology (Sebastian Fedden, Ryan Pennington), reconstruction and language contact (Bill Foley, Beth Evans), language documentation (Deborah Hill), deixis (Christian Döhler) and verbal morphology (Åshild Næss, Ruth Wester, Tom Honeyman, Alex François, Nick Evans). The workshop was a good opportunity to gather linguists currently working in the area and for new students to be involved in discussions. Particularly striking was the freshness of the discussions and the forming of a new community of Melanesianists.

Saturday evening was a relaxed session to share field experiences. Alex François presented beautiful pictures of Vanuatu and its communities. Stephen Logan (University of Newcastle) retraced his surprising trip to the Solomon Islands where he met the last Ririo speakers. Julia Miller brought an exotic touch with her presentation of the Beaver community of British Columbia, Canada.

Thanks to the three organisers, especially Christian Döhler, Fanny Cottet and Nick Evans. Also to the sources of financial support, which came from the Humboldtstiftung (via Nick’s Anneliese-Mayer Prize) to get keynote speaker Sebastian Fedden over from Europe, and to CAP research funding with Linguistics Discretionary and ARC Discovery funding (Languages of Southern New Guinea project) also kicking in to get it all happening.

New meetings schedule for CAP Linguistics

In recent years the linguistics program has been coasting along with a very informal system for decision-making but with our expanded size this year it is time to give our governance a bit more structure. Two types of meetings that will be scheduled regularly, starting soon, are:

(a) departmental meetings, for which we encourage the participation of all in CAP linguistics
(b) a newly reestablished Linguistics and Applied Linguistics Board of Studies, to make decisions about Linguistics and Applied Linguistics right across campus.

It is important that all teaching and research academics in these fields should attend these meetings (planned frequency: 4 times a year) and we are also seeking three to four postgraduate student representatives from across the campus. If you are interested in nominative yourself or others please let Nick know ASAP.
Publications news

Recent publications from Nick Evans and Stef Spronck:

Spronck, Stef. (2012). “Minds divided: Speaker attitudes in quotatives”. In Quotatives: Cross-linguistic and cross-disciplinary perspectives, Buchstaller, Isabelle and Ingrid Van Alphen (eds.), 71-116


Tim Hassall has had three papers published since February 2012. These are: a study of acquisition of address terms in Indonesian (as a chapter in a book by Cambridge Scholars Publishing), a study of modification of requests by learners of Indonesian (as a chapter in a book by John Benjamins), and a contribution to a theoretical debate on acquiring sociopragmatics versus pragmalinguistics (as an article in the journal Language Sciences). He has also just published a 20,000 word collection of his Indonesian grammar lessons with exercises on the ANU website for access by language teachers and students outside ANU.

Meanwhile, Gwen Hyslop has co-edited Volume 4 of North East Indian Linguistics published by Cambridge University Press India.

CAP linguists present...

Rachel Hendery presented a paper at the annual Creolistics Workshop, in Aarhus, Denmark (10-13 April). The paper was entitled, “Creoles, L2 varieties and colonial Englishes: The status of Palmerston Island English”.

Nick Evans and Julia Miller presented a paper giving some initial results of work on the influence of parents’ speech background on detailed Nen phonetics, with the title ‘Sociophonetics and Multilingual Intermarriage in Southern New Guinea’ at a recent workshop (April 11) on the Social Side of Speech at the University of Western Sydney. A long-time associate of the department, Rob Mailhammer, also presented a paper there entitled ‘Phonetic Transfer and network theory: on the sociophonetics of language contact’. The workshop, also attended by Fanny Cottet, proved extremely stimulating for new lines of research in sociophonetics.

Rob Mailhammer gave a talk at the Australian Languages Workshop on Stradbroke Island (9-11 March), entitled “Reconstructing the Pre-Amurdak verb system: implications for subgrouping Iwaidjan”. Rob also co-authored a paper with Carrie Gillon (Arizona State) on the endangered and severely under-described Native American language Quechan at the Conference on Endangered Languages and Cultures of Native America, University of Utah (23-24 March), investigating the “Morphology And Semantics of Plural Marking In The Quechan Verb”.

Warta field methods course wrap-up

The Field Methods course on Warta, with Sembara (Sam) Dibara, wrapped up on March 2nd with a celebratory party. During three intense weeks working with Sam the class made serious headway into this language, previously totally undescribed. In addition to recording and transcribing a moving story from Sam about how the spirit of his (still living) mum comes down to help him with unremembered vocabulary items during the night, Christian Döhler and Sam were able to get a partial transcription of an earlier recording made in the late 1970s. We also got Sam to record a Warta-language voiceover for an old video about wildlife in the Bensbach region. Students in the course are still working on their analyses, and in the meantime one of them, Kyla Quinn, has got interested in Warta to the point where she will be undertaking a couple of months of fieldwork in the Bensbach district later this year for her Honours project.
More fieldwork news from the sub-continent

Flowing on from last issue’s cover story, more great fieldwork stories come our way from India, Nepal and Bangladesh:

Keren Baker, MA student supervised by Paul Sidwell, Mark Donohue and Gwen Hyslop, has been prowling about the Meghalaya plateau and networking with everyone from the Khasi ethnic group that she can find. She’s successfully caught up with the elusive Lyngngam people of the western end of the plateau, which was her goal, but along the way has uncovered five additional, and previously unsuspected, speech varieties, named by their speakers as Maram, Langrin, Remem, Molang and Nongtrai. Keren writes: “Non-Standard Khasi varieties seem to be growing in number”. Our picture of the Austro-Asiatic languages of India is changing fast. Keren and her friend Kyntiew have been dashing about the plateau collecting data and assembling a picture of the true level of diversity among the Austro-Asiatic speakers in north-east India.

Ginny Dawson, an honours student supervised by Mark Donohue and Gwen Hyslop, is getting on famously with the Tiwa-speaking community of Umswai, in north-east Meghalaya. She’s had fun talking to monolingual grandmothers in their language, and while having made inroads into vowel harmony and tone spreading, is still trying to work out those verbs…

Peter Appleby, who’s planning to write about tone and other prosody in Hmar, a Kuki language of eastern India, has travelled down to Silchar, on the plains north-east of Bangladesh, where the concentration of Hmars is so great that they teach Hmar at the local university. He’s now collected data from two lects called ‘Hmar’, which agree in terms of the vocabulary used … but one is tonal and the other is not. Much to learn!

Mark Donohue’s Kusunda team in Nepal (Madhav Pokharel, recently retired Professor of Linguistics at Tribhuvan University, and Bhoj Raj Gautam, recently finished MA student) are processing about 30 minutes of oral texts each week, working with Gyani Maiya, the best speaker of the (almost vanished) language. These recordings show the level of complexity that can be crammed into three vowels: there is contrastive pharyngealisation, contrastive breathiness, and contrastive nasalisation, all of which can combine on the same vowel. Eek, but Hooray! From the materials we’ve exchanged so far (from Nepal to Australia) it’s clear that there is a lot of work still waiting to be done. As always, real running speech reveals many, many things that elicitation can’t even dream of.

Students on the move

Siva Kalyan will be joining the PhD programme at Northumbria University, in Newcastle-upon-Tyne (a.k.a. “the old Newcastle”) this October, under the supervision of Ewa Dąbrowska. He intends to work on developing ways of formulating grammatical analyses in a psychologically testable manner.

Charlotte van Tongeren, who has been visiting from the Netherlands, and who attended the Field Methods course as preparation for her first fieldwork, went off almost immediately after the end of the course to begin work on Suki, a TNG language just a few days to the north of Warta, and again almost completely undescribed. Missionary Graham Martin introduced her before leaving her to her own devices – according to our latest news she has been warmly welcomed into the community.

Charlotte begins her fieldwork on the Suki language
International conference and seminar news

Siva Kalyan has been accepted to give a poster entitled “What a word means in a given context” at the 11th Conceptual Structure, Discourse, and Language Conference, in Vancouver in mid-May, and at the 5th conference of the German Cognitive Linguistics Association in October. He has also been accepted for a presentation at the 4th UK Cognitive Linguistics Conference, to be held in London in July, entitled “Exploring the Content Requirement”.

Rob Mailhammer will travel to Bloomington, Indiana, to present a paper, “From quantity to syllable cut: evidence from North Germanic, West Germanic, and Semitic” at the 18th Germanic Linguistics Annual Conference together with William Kruger and Alexander Makiyama, two students from Arizona State University.

Cathryn Donohue recently returned to the Basque Country where she met with some friends and colleagues and gave two talks – one at the Universidad del País Vasco on the typology of case marking and the other at Universidad de Deusto on the importance of case in linguistics. It was unseasonably warm which, coupled with the recent switch to daylight savings here made it possible to enjoy great discussions over pintxos late into the evenings!

And still more conferences and presentations

Gwendolyn Hyslop was a co-author for the following talks (presented by Marc Brunelle):

Gwen has also had an abstract, entitled “Epistemic perspective in Kurtóp” accepted in the workshop “The origins, motivations and definitions of intersubjective perspectives in grammar”, as part of the 45th annual meeting of the Societas Linguistica Europaea, to be held at Stockholm University, 19 August–1 September.

Carol Priestley gave a presentation on ‘Social Categories based on shared experiences, with Koromu (PNG) examples’ at the ‘Social Cognition and Social Interaction’ themed Semantics Workshop at ANU (April 13-14). She really appreciated seeing and hearing from all the other linguists she met there. Thanks to CAP colleagues for great input.

Welcome Lisa and other news

After some visa delays, Elisabeth Ginsburg has finally arrived from Wisconsin, United States. Her doctoral research will concern spatial relations in White Hmong. She is ready to jump right into! Feel free to drop by to say hi to her in Coombs, Room 5220.

Paul Sidwell has submitted an application to the Australia-Japan Foundation for his project “Advancing Co-operation in Voice Biometrics”, on behalf of the recently created Speech Biometrics Group. The application seeks support for travel and networking activities. In other news concerning the Forensic Linguistics and Biometric Lab, a couple more students have joined the growing army of volunteers helping out with our flagship projects and general lab odds and sods: Daniel Frost and Charlotte Chambers join Yoko Otaki and David Blank, bringing the crew up to four. Great things are happening in the lab, so stay tuned.

The video recordings of Nick Evans’ recent Nijmegen Lectures have just gone up on line and can be viewed at: http://www.mpi.nl/events/nijmegen-lectures-2011/video-recordings

Shun Ishihara was awarded a 2012 Endeavour Research Fellowship, which allows him to visit the National Research Institute of Police Science, Japan and work on a forensic voice comparison project with them in the second half of 2012.

Michael Carne will join the Ishihara Lab to conduct forensic voice comparison research. He is interested in mobile transmission effects on acoustico-phonetic based vocalic parameters.

“Thanks to CAP colleagues for great input.”

Elisabeth Ginsburg: the latest PhD student to join us here at ANU
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.

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Coming up...

A range of visitors and local scholars are presenting in upcoming seminars, held in the Arndt Room (Seminar Room B), Coombs building, unless specified otherwise. Latest details and abstracts are available here: http://chl.anu.edu.au/linguistics/events.php

April 27 (11:00am-12:30pm): Linguistic vitality and language ideology: what motivates speakers to maintain a small language in a highly multilingual community? - Ruth Singer (Melbourne University).

April 27 (3:30-5:00pm): Clause structure in Dumut languages - Ruth Wester (VU University Amsterdam).

May 4 (11:00am-12:30pm): TBA - Daniel Angus (University of Queensland)

May 11 (11:00am-12:30pm): The mysterious Black Mountain language of Bhutan: a field report - Gwendolyn Hyslop (ANU)

May 16 (4:00-6:00pm): Big Ideas on Language seminar series - Nick Enfield (MPI Nijmegen). LAW Sparke Helmore Theatre 2

May 17 (3pm): Book launch: 'Dynamics of Human Diversity. The case of mainland Southeast Asia', ed. Nick Enfield. (Location/details to be announced later)

May 18 (11:00am-12:30pm): TBA - Ken McElhanon

May 18 (3:30-5:00pm): TBA - Matthew Dyer

June 15 (3:30-5:00pm): TBA - Shinichi Ishihara (ANU)

June 22 (3:30-5:00pm): Lexicalization, narrative structure, and Ahtna directionals: Observations using GIS - Andrea L Berez (Seminar Room B, Coombs bldg.).

June 28-July 6: International conferences: LF2012 and 12-ICAL Udayana University, Bali, Indonesia. Conference co-organised by Linguistics (ANU), Udayana University (Bali-Indonesia), and the MPI (Germany)

July 18 (11:00am-12:30pm): Thesis Proposal Review seminar - Matthew Carroll

July 18 (2:00-4:00pm): Proto Sogeram kinship (CRLC Series) - Don Daniels

July 20 (3:30-5:00pm): Papuan Clause Coalescence: How to Change but Stay the Same - Don Daniels

August 31 (3:30-5:00pm): TBA - Deborah Hill (University of Canberra)