Before and after ICAL, Rachel Hendery joined forces with ANU graduate Antoinette Schapper for a couple of lightning-fast fieldwork stints—the first with Wersing speaker Hans Retebana and local Alor linguist Benny Delpada; the second in Timor-Leste with Tokodede-speaking students at the Dili Institute of Technology.

The main social event of the mid-year for many CAP linguistics took place in Denpasar, Indonesia, where the Twelfth International Conference of Austronesian Linguistics (ICAL) was held, along with associated other conferences. From the ANU Wayan Arka, Mark Donohue, Owen Edwards, Katharine Gosling, Rachel Hendery, Gwen Hyslop, Ann Kumar, Sebastien Lacrampe, Andy Pawley, Malcolm Ross, Yusuf Sawaki and Karma Tshering attended. Following the conference Mark, Owen and Katharine joined Dan Kaufman of the Endangered Language Alliance and Chuck Grimes (an ANU alumnus, now working with local language research and literacy projects in Indonesia) to help run a two-week intensive language documentation workshop in Kupang, working on obtaining texts from, and training native speakers to continue the documentation of, several languages from the East Nusa Tenggara region: Amarasi, Baikeno, Dhao, Galolen, Hawu, Helong, Kusa-Manea, Lena, Loudo, Rikou, Southern Mambar, Tii, Uab Meto, and Vini. Special thanks are owed to Misriani Balle, who helped coordinate all of us into the Language & Culture Unit in Kupang.

Marvelous tidings as 3 large boxes of papers and books of the late Prof. Harry Shorto (SOAS) arrived at Paul Sidwell’s office after a circuitous and very expensive 2 year journey from the back of his old garden shed in suburban Norwich. On June 28th Paul, Keren Baker and Lisa Ginsburg were astonished at the discoveries they made as they unpacked and classified the contents, spreading across the floor of the forensics lab in a manner reminiscent of earlier images from Mark Donohue’s office. Included were extensive field notes on Palaung and War languages of Myanmar, many volumes of notes on Mon and Old Mon, and among great mix of files, notes and offprints was an otherwise nondescript folder marked simply “Khasi”. To our amazement it was found to contain a detailed phonetic and phonological account of standard Khasi, field data on Mnar and War (including texts) and a comparative lexicon and preliminary notes to a reconstruction. Very topical coming the day after Paul’s similar on Khasi reconstruction, there was even a letter dated December 1961 from Lilly Rabel to Harry Shorto discussing Khasi-Palaung parallels!

Paul says that there must be material for 6 PhDs on the lab floor as he writes. Interested?
SSWL (Syntactic Structure of the World’s Languages) is an open-ended database of syntax, morphology and semantics (website). Each language is characterised by a set of property-value pairs, and examples that illustrate these property value pairs. The database does not dictate categories, but aims to document language internal variability. A rich variety of search functions is available, as well as mapping tools and the creation of similarity trees. The database is open-ended in the sense that (a) new language experts may sign up to add new languages, and (b) new properties may be added. The database is meant to be a tool for the entire linguistics community. Properties are written so that they can be applied by language experts from a wide variety of backgrounds. The aspirational goal of the project is to represent every language on earth with 1000s of linguistic properties, so all contributors are welcome; it’s also a good way to organise your own thoughts about your own data. There are currently 170 languages on SSWL, with data contributed by 250 linguists.

Participation is easy: go to the site, click login, and then sign up. You will then be approved and sent materials to help you get started. Contact Hilda Koopman (UCLA, Senior Editor of SSWL) for troubleshooting.

Invitation to contribute to global linguistic endeavours

Publications and presentations


A book edited by Evan Kidd on the acquisition of relative clauses is out: http://benjamins.com/#catalog/books/tilar.8

Evan also gave a talk at TEDx Sydney last month on children’s play. It incorporates aspects of language acquisition, and may be of interest to the folks who are interested in acquisition or social cognition. Evan’s talk is available on YouTube.

Shun Ishihara presented a paper entitled “A Forensic Text Comparison in SMS Messages: A Likelihood Ratio Approach with Lexical Features” at the 7th International Annual Workshop on Digital Forensics & Incident Analysis in Greece.

In October, a large contingent from ANU, including Keren Baker, Virginia Dawson, Lisa Ginsburg, Mark Donohue, Gwen Hyslop and Paul Sidwell will be talking at the 45th International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics, in Singapore. This includes 2 one-day workshops on Austroasiatic and Hmong-Mien languages the day before the conference (the former organised by Paul Sidwell, the latter will be attended by Lisa Ginsburg). Details are available here.

Farewell to Alex François

After three and a half years in our department as a Visiting Fellow, Alex François will have to leave us at the end of July, to return to his C.N.R.S. position in France. The ties created during these last years will continue for a long time, and hopefully more occasions will arise for him to visit Australia and the ANU again in coming years. Or we can fly and visit him in Paris, in his department the LACITO (Langues et Civilisations à Tradition Orale) – in Paris. It’s not far!

Meanwhile, in mid May, Alex was invited to join a team of geologists for a 10-day sea trip to Vanikoro, an isolated island of the eastern Solomons. It was the occasion for him to catch up with the people he had first met in 2005, and hand them copies of his book of traditional stories in the main language Teanu (Buma). The two other languages of the island, Lovoro and Tanema, have now come down to one speaker each – the father and the son! – and were thus given priority during this short trip. In parallel, Alex seized this opportunity to take notes on a number of other languages spoken in the Temotu province (Tikopia, Asubuo, Tanibili, Áiwo, Natugu…). This province of Temotu is puzzling in its linguistic diversity, and certainly hosts some key elements in the history of Oceanic languages.
PhD student news

Sébastien Lacrampe just came back from ICAL in Bali where he delivered a paper entitled "Piecing the puzzle together: O argument marking in Lelepa, Central Vanuatu". Fieldwork is only a couple weeks away as he will depart to Vanuatu at the end of July and work there until September. He has been working hard in identifying gaps and problems in his data, and will go to the field with a hefty fieldwork questionnaire. Another goal for this fieldtrip is to edit a draft of a Lelepa-English-French story book he prepared and sent last month to the community to be read and checked by a team of speakers. The book contains texts collected in the field, and is to come out before the end of the year as part of a publication series funded by the Australian Government for the Roi Mata's Domain, a community-run project which manages the important Lelepa traditional sites listed as World Heritage by UNESCO in 2008 (see http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1280/). Earlier in the year Sébastien submitted a paper to be published in the ALS 2011 volume of proceedings. The paper was accepted and is now in the last stages of the reviewing process. Sébastien also heard last month that he won an ELDP documentation grant from SOAS at the University of London. This will extend his PhD scholarship for a year, and provide him with fieldwork and equipment money.

As well as getting into some serious PhD writing, Greg Dickson is also involved in some exciting projects. He has been volunteering his administrative services to the Ngukurr Language Centre – a community language centre in his fieldsite. The organisation has been making steady progress since being founded in early 2011 and was recently awarded $120,000 in funding for 2012/2013 under the Australian Government’s Indigenous Languages Support program. This will allow the Language Centre to employ staff and develop language programs in the community.

Another project Greg was involved in came to fruition with the launch of a double CD “Ngamba Wiji li-Wunungu” by Shellie Morris and songwomen of Borroloola. The CD contains new music and traditional songs in four languages. Greg worked with Marra elders to translate and transcribe 17 short Marra songs for the project which are presented beautifully in the CD booklet (see above).

The conference ended with a lovely social outing to St. Marguerite island and Cannes filled with beaches, an old fort, a guided walk around the island and a picnic.

At the business meeting Paul - who sits on the executive as Publications Officer - proposed a motion for SEALS to adopt a constitution and incorporate as a non-profit, which was passed without objection. Next year SEALS will be held at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok - we expect a significant ANU delegation to contribute.

Paul Sidwell and Lisa Ginsburg traveled to France to attend the 22nd Annual Conference of Southeast Asian Linguistics Society in Saint-Raphaël (website). Thanks to the organisers of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society (SEALS) 22 conference especially Alice Vittrant and Deth Thach, we were all treated to a very nice conference in a beautiful setting. Agay is situated between mountains and the French Riviera and our hotel had gorgeous views of the sea. The hotel itself is the usual retreat of the retired French military personnel and was built in 1906.

Highlights included plenary talks by Nick Enfield (ANU alumnus now with MPI Nijmegen) and Girard Diffloth (EFEO Cambodia). Many of the talks centered around languages of Mainland Southeast Asia with a few exceptions. Common topics included phonetics, historical linguistics, syntax and corpus linguistics. Paul talked about numeral systems, a topic that both Mark and Nick have published about. Paul addressed the question of their reconstruction in Proto-Austroasiatic, and whether there was sufficient evidence to reconstruct a decimal system, and if so was there more than one set of lower numerals. Lisa’s favorite presentations covered the fields of space, deixis, classifiers, and Hmongic languages. As official SEALS Archivist, Lisa was also busy collecting handouts and texts from presenters for the online archive, see: http://jseals.org.

Paul Sidwell and David Gill (MPI, Jakarta field station)
Grants, scholarships and awards

Aung Si was successful in securing the following research grants:
- ELDP Small Grant to carry out a preliminary documentation of Danau in Myanmar (~GBP 8,400)
- Eastern Himalaya Fellowship from the Firebird foundation to carry out a preliminary documentation of Lhokpu in Bhutan (~US$ 9,000)
- CHL Small Grant to carry out further fieldwork for a Soilega-English bilingual dictionary (~AUS 2,600)

PhD candidate, Supawan Pingjai, who is currently on a field trip in Thailand, won a scholarship of 80,000 THB from the Institute of Thai Studies, Chulalongkorn University.

Paul Sidwell was awarded a CHL small grant of $1495 (plus $500 departmental matching funds) for his project "An Improved Text Independent Speaker Discrimination Engine". The funds will be used to employ David Blank to develop the user interface and automation of data processing.

Piers Kelly and Christian Döhler participated in the ANU Research Fest. Piers won the 3rd place in the category "Research Note" and Christian also came in 3rd in the category "Research Photo" (see left). All credits should go to Christian’s partner Tina who took the picture when she visited him in the field in Rouku village (PNG) in July 2011.

Bhutan and India fieldwork news

Gwen Hyslop and Mark Donohue started work with speakers of Chöcangacakha who are studying at the ANU in early May. Chöcangacakha is a language spoken by approximately 20,000 people living along the middle Kuri Chhu valley in eastern Bhutan, south from the dzong in Lhuntse. Initial observations indicate that while the bound morphology appears to be recognisably related to surrounding (East Bodish) languages, the lexicon shows signs of being an archaic version of Dzongkha, a South Tibetan languages of western Bhutan. Mysteries await… the project website provides details on Chöcangacakha and its region.

The Bhutan Oral Literature and Language Documentation Projects continue in Bhutan. In May, another 88 recordings were added to the Olekha database and the research assistants had plans to travel to Riti (a village 4 days walk from the nearest road) for more data collection. Next on the agenda is to train the assistants in transcription and translation.

Peter Appleby, Keren Baker and Ginny Dawson, who had been doing fieldwork in North East India, have now returned and are starting to organise their time for thesis analysis and writing.

Nicholas Evans visited the Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, Germany in early June to give two talks and to meet with Volker Gast, who is a member of the DoBeS project (Nen and Kmntso: two languages of South New Guinea). In Jena, Nick and Volker were joined by Christian Döhler and Anneliese Kuhle. Christian is currently in Germany working through his analysis of Kmntso and preparing for his upcoming field trip in July. Everyone will remember Anneliese when she visited ANU in 2010 gathering material on reciprocal constructions for her PhD. Anneliese took the opportunity to hand over a printed copy of her dissertation. Volker, Nick, Anneliese and Christian went on a 30km hike following the river Saale, North of Jena - a part of Germany renowned for its wonderful nature as well as being a place soaked in European history.

Malcolm Ross is en route to the Max Planck Institute in Leipzig, where he will spend August and September. He left Canberra on June 20 to attend a meeting of advisors to the Institute of Linguistics at Academia Sinica in Taipei, followed by the Austronesian Formal Linguistics Association conference (also in Taipei) and ICAL organised by our own Wayan Arka in Bali (Andy Pawley was a keynote speaker). He will finally reach Leipzig after visiting friends and relatives in Wales and England.
Phonotactics database has gone live!

...well, almost: ANU webstyle approval is still pending...

This project, aiming to catalogue the phonotactic diversity of the world’s languages in a searchable format, has been chugging along for the last year or two (following a conversation Mark Donohue had with Larry Hyman), and has now been announced and publicised. Assembled by Mark, Rebecca Hetherington and James McElvenny, with much assistance from Ginny Dawson, Owen Edwards and Fiona Honeyman, and the ever-patient inter-library loans people at the ANU library, the current on-line version displays data relevant to syllable structure from about 1500 languages in a searchable format. Have a look at http://phonotactics.anu.edu.au. Feedback is always welcome: phonotactics@anu.edu.au.

Also up and running is the Student Phonetics Initiative. This group meets to improve phonetics skills, mainly acoustic. Yoko Otaki has organised the group, and anyone with an interest in phonetics and its applications is welcome to join. If you want to attend, contact Yoko for details about times, though the place is of course the Forensic Linguistic and Biometric Laboratory, in Baldessin building.

A visitor, a robbery and sketch phonologies

Soichiro Harada will be doing research as a postgraduate visitor at CHL until November. He is currently doing PhD at Osaka University, Japan, writing a grammar of Kuroshima Dialect of Southern Ryukyuan. Ryukyuan is an indigenous language group of Southern part of Japan, especially in Okinawa.

This month the NSW police approached the Forensic Linguistic and Biometric Laboratory to help with a case going to court soon. A robbery and assault by two men on an elderly woman was captured as a ‘Vital Call’ recording and the police requested an analysis and report comparing the voices with interviews and telephone calls already on file. The team of Paul Sidwell, Yoko Otaki and Daniel Frost spent several days working on this fascinating case - with its various technical challenges - and will deliver their report to the authorities at the end of the month. They hope to give a seminar on this latter in the year after legal matters are tied up.

All linguists with primary language data should consider writing up a phonetic and phonological summary of the language(s) they’re working on for publication as an illustration of the IPA. This is a short publication that gives insights into the kind of documentation and data that is required to argue for an analysis, and alerts the wider world to the exciting things that we’re uncovering in our work at the ANU. For details, download the style guide from http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayJournal?jid=IPA.

Documentation of Kusunda hits the headlines

Documentation and analysis of the Nepalese isolate Kusunda proceeds, with now about 20 hours of recordings transcribed and entered into ELAN. Much glossing remains to be resolved (about half of the morphemes, really), but we’re working out many interesting things about the syntax of the language - this is the first time anyone’s collected texts, as opposed to individual words or elicited sentences. Earlier materials (Watters et al. 2006: 51) had shown that “situated in a sea of ergative marking languages, Kusunda, with its nominative-accusative case marking system, stands out as a typological island”. We can now continue the catalogue of local morphosyntactic quirksiness with the observation that ‘in a sea of SOV languages, Kusunda does not display a preference for the ordering of subjects, objects and verbs’. (On the other hand, having identified at least parts of the evidentiality system, we’re tied it down to the area in at least one way.) Follow the progress on the web page: http://kusunda.linguistics.anu.edu.au. For a recent media report, see http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-17537845 (following from a local report in Gorkhapatra, a leading Nepali newspaper. The media frenzy extended to reports in Somali and Indonesian: see here for examples.

More media attention was give to links between Indonesian universities and the ANU which was discussed in the Indonesian press, in the context of linguistic diversity. Under the headline “Indonesia is richest in languages in the world”, the variety of languages and the work of researchers at the ANU and the Max Planck Institute in Germany is mentioned. Read the article (in Indonesian) here.
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For past newsletters, go to:

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.

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

June 28-July 6: International conferences: LFG2012 and 12-ICAL
Udayana University, Bali, Indonesia.
Conference co-organised by Linguistics (ANU), Udayana University (Bali-Indonesia), and the MPI (Germany)

July 15-18: (9:00am-4:30pm each day)
SNG Project meeting (Seminar Room C). Program available here.

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 22 (11:00am-12:00pm): TBA
Stephen Morey

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

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