

## **Multiple uses for old and new recordings: perspectives from the multilingual community of Warruwi**

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### **Abstract**

This paper reports on collaborative research by a team of linguists, musicologists, elders, educators and young people from the multilingual Indigenous community of Waruwi (South Goulburn Island, Northern Territory, Australia). A key aim of the various projects has been to make recordings available to the community and to equip and empower community members to be involved in the documentation and to control how old and new recordings are used.

In this paper, we report on the repatriation of archival recordings of language and song at Waruwi and discuss how the Waruwi community uses these recordings—and more recent recordings by the research team—for maintenance or revitalisation purposes. Different perspectives will be provided by various members of the community. We demonstrate



expand the dictionary and to empower young people to be involved in the documentation and maintenance of Kunbarlang.

Recordings made as part of the different research projects have been archived in various places including AIATSIS, ELAR and PARADISEC.<sup>49</sup> All these newer recordings, plus many archival recordings discovered during the projects, are currently on the Warruwi Language Centre computer.

In the following sections, we report on some of the ways that these are being used by members of the Warruwi community, their hopes for the ways they can be used in the future and a consideration of some ways to ensure community control of recordings and their uses.

### Multiple uses for recordings

In discussions over the years, and in recent interviews, community members at Warruwi have expressed their views about the multiple uses they would like from recordings. An overarching theme about using recordings is that they want them to be used to teach young people their languages, songs and cultural practices, so they can maintain them and keep them strong.

As D. Manmurulu pointed out in an interview with Mardbinda and Singer:

What's the main thing [I want from recordings]? ... Like for me it's talk about the song and recording and also teaching the young generation. That's my main thing (D. Manmurulu RS1-488 00:01:34.000 - 00:02:13.100).

Similarly, Naragoidj's focus is young people. Speaking in Kunbarlang and English to O'Keeffe about the way he wanted recorded materials to be turned into books, he said:

*Ngarrkkimarnbunj bibudbe* for the young people. *Ngudduburrbunj kanjaddangunjdje* read and write *kanjaddarnanj nayi djurra. La kirnda ngorro kayuwa kuyi kanjaddaburrbunj.*

We'll make it [a book] for the young people. You know, when they read and write they'll see that book. And it will be there and they'll know it [i.e., learn from that book] (Naragoidj, 20150413IOv01 00:09:56.488-00:10:11.903).

Old recordings are considered particularly valuable for teaching young people. As Mardbinda and Manmurulu discuss:

I think they [the old recordings] are good for me to listen to the old people, they were telling the story, and [I'm] transcribing them in Mawng and Kunwinjku as well. Sometimes in Kunbarlang. But especially in Mawng. They speak the old Mawng or something (Mardbinda, RS1-488 00:04:06.050 - 00:04:26.750).

Yeah, I think that the old one is very important for us and the new generation to teach them (D. Manmurulu, RS1-488 00:04:26.700 - 00:04:38.500).

For community languages such as Mawng and Bininj Gunwok that are still being learned by children, recordings are largely used to help with maintenance. However, J. Manmurulu argues that recordings may need to be used for revitalisation purposes in the future, new recordings need to be made and kept safe and languages need to be used in various contexts:

J. Manmurulu: In our school or out in the community we still talk to our kids strong in our language to keep our language strong ... We still need those languages to continue to keep it strong for the next generation and for our future. So if we do die well our children will speak, continue speaking and teaching. Well they have to record and put it away somewhere safe where maybe one day these people will say, "oh how bout we go back and look that language where our ancestors were talking, so we'll try and learn ...

[...]

D. Manmurulu: But here on Goulburn Island we keep our language very strong

J. Manmurulu: We keeping it strong. But yes, as you say, it might die sooner or later. That's why we teaching our kids not only teaching but the parents are strong to teach in Mawng ... Language it's really important ... This is what we arguing for: we want to teach our kids in language in the school, at home, under the tree, where you go camping, so keep our language strong (D. Manmurulu et al. 2014a).

### Waruwi Language Centre computer archive

The Waruwi Language Centre is situated on the Waruwi School grounds and came about through a partnership organised by Singer between the school and the University of Melbourne. The Centre houses all the old readers and teaching materials produced during the bilingual program. On the Language Centre iMac computer are hundreds of recordings of stories and

<sup>49</sup> AIATSIS Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies; ELAR Endangered Languages Archive; PARADISEC Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures.

songs, including archival recordings repatriated from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and more recent recordings (such as those by Barwick, Brown, Mardbinda, O’Keeffe and Singer in collaboration with community members).<sup>50</sup> Some of the songs and narratives are organised into playlists in iTunes. Community members can listen to recordings at the Language Centre and make copies of materials onto USB thumbdrives.<sup>51</sup>

Although there is no current funding for ongoing staff at the Language Centre, it continues to provide a base for ongoing research projects: Mardbinda does much of her research assistance work from the Centre, and J. Manmurulu uses it to source resources for the Indigenous Language and Culture program she teaches at Warruwi school.

### **Mawng Ngaralk website and Facebook page**

The Mawng Ngaralk (‘Mawng language’) website was designed by Singer with Marion Singer and built by Robyn Loughnane. It was initially funded by an Indigenous Languages Support grant in 2014 with the aim to support community languages spoken at Warruwi and to make research recordings accessible to the community (Singer *et al.* 2017).<sup>52</sup> Numerous videos are available in Mawng, along with an online and downloadable version of the Mawng dictionary (Singer *et al.* 2015). Videos also represent other community languages including Kunbarlang and Kunwinjku. Singer also created a Mawng Ngaralk Facebook page, which has regular links to different videos and other information on the website. Mardbinda has been involved in creating some of the videos and transcribing and translating videos to create subtitles.

The website and Facebook page have had a very positive reception. As D. Manmurulu expressed in an interview with Mardbinda:

I think it's very useful ... to put [recordings] on the website so people can see, so they will think, ‘ah, this is what the old people were doing and all that,’ you know, yeah. (RS1-488 00:04:49.550 - 00:05:16.950)

<sup>50</sup> Coleman remembers that there was a similar computer dedicated to Language work maintained by the principal and teacher-linguist between 1989 to 2001.

<sup>51</sup> The previous iMac Language Centre computer (provided by the ‘Western Arnhem Land Song Project’ funded by ELDP) had a CD/DVD burner; however, most people now prefer copies of materials on USB thumbdrives so it does not appear to matter that the new iMac does not have a CD/DVD burner. (This computer was donated by St Leonards Brighton, a school with an exchange program with Warruwi School).

<sup>52</sup> Ongoing maintenance of the website now relies on a small grant for research into how digital media can support Indigenous languages.

Mardbinda also thought it was good that people could watch ‘The Nowhere Girls’ drama series that she helped to create with filmmaker Liz Langslow:

It's *numalal* [‘good’] for them to see it [the ‘Nowhere Girls’ drama series] on the website (Mardbinda, RS1-488 00:25:28.950 - 00:25:33.250)

The website and Facebook Page have also helped Mawng speakers who do not live at Warruwi to maintain their language:

I love following this page [Mawng Ngaralk Facebook page]. I love how I come across it and it shows me the very little things we have in our language that sometimes I forget about. It’s hard living away from home and don’t get me wrong but I do sometimes forget some words, not because I’m losing my language but because I have nobody to talk to as much in maung [Mawng] at home than usual ... We are lucky to have Ruth Singer as our linguist, she spent a lot of time working with the elders and put in so much work and determination into getting the Mawng dictionary, putting it together, our language is important and we should keep it alive! (Geraldine Narul, comment on a Facebook post on the Mawng Ngaralk page, 28/8/17, quoted with permission).

### **The Mawng bird app**

J. Manmurulu and Singer, along with other researchers, have been involved in the project ‘Getting in touch: language and digital inclusion in Australian Indigenous communities’ (Carew *et al.* 2015). This has included the development of different mobile applications, including the Mawng bird app, *Karlurri pata kuwurlurrangken kawulurrangken* (‘Birds’), available on iTunes and Google Play. Singer and Mardbinda linked Mawng words with the English and scientific names and used Coleman’s comparative list of bird names in western Arnhem Land for initial checking of the names of the 50 birds (and calls) in the app. The app is one of a number of Indigenous bird apps built on the open-source Jila framework, created by Thoughtworks, and there is a template ready to use for the Kunbarlang bird app (Carew *et al.* 2015).

J. Manmurulu points out the importance of using new technology to engage the younger generation in learning and maintaining their languages:

Because in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, our kids will be digitalised kids, digital kids, we’re changing new things, trying out new things what really suits us and suits the kids (D. Manmurulu *et al.* 2014).

J. Manmurulu and Singer have trialled the app in one of the classes at Warruwi school, and J. Manmurulu plans

to use it with other classes next term as part of the Indigenous Language and Culture program she runs. O’Keeffe with Coleman, Mardbinda, Naragoidj and others plan to create a Kunbarlang version over the next 12 months.

### Performance practices

Recordings have been used by community members to help teach and revive old songs, as well as integrate them into new hybrid performances.

As D. Manmurulu pointed out in responding to Singer’s question about old recordings of songs:

Singer: Do you think people use the recordings of old files to learn them again?

D. Manmurulu: This what we trying to do, to bring young people in and teach them the old songs, who the old people were singing, so they can sing (00:30:28.300 - 00:31:28.800).

Barwick, Brown and O’Keeffe have all seen examples of musicians listening to archival or more recent recordings of songs before practicing them.

Recordings of D. Manmurulu’s songs have also been used for a young boys’ dance competition performance that began with traditional Inyjalarrku music and dancing then changed to hip hop music and dancing.<sup>53</sup>

Yeah, she [the dance teacher] asked me if I could come and sing for those boys, but I told her there's a recording somewhere. So, they got it and I was here with them and first was Inyjalarrku first singing on the recording, singing stopped, then that [hip hop] music, same time. And they came out and they danced standing and painting themselves and then they started dancing. And this is how when they went to Darwin, they won! (D. Manmurulu, RS1-488 00:15:08.950 - 00:16:18.850)

D. Manmurulu as the songman custodian of the Inyjalarrku songs was appropriately consulted and was closely involved in the use of the recording for this dance competition, including teaching the boys the correct Inyjalarrku dancing.<sup>54</sup> However, he is concerned about the interest in using his recordings by people outside the community, because *manyardi* are supposed to be performed by the appropriate songman custodian and his male relatives.

This [American ballet] mob now ... what I've heard is they wanted Inyjalarrku to record and make that song for those other [ballet] mob to sing and dance on *balanda* [‘white people’]

<sup>53</sup> A video of the performance is on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/0QK3wE3xyNc>

<sup>54</sup> A video of D. Manmurulu teaching the boys is on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/WaCUCJQeELo>

side, that's why we going to Melbourne [for the Indigenous Music Symposium] to talk about that too. But this is important for us, it's a spiritual song. Otherwise I'm not too sure, maybe they'll [the ballet company] get sick if they play around with this Inyjalarrku, they get sick, or I get sick. It's a spiritual song ... we say *nyunyuk* [‘sacred’]. That's why I just told them ‘no, you can't do that’. You can record and hear it, but not for making up [dances] yourself or get kids to dance, no that's not it. Like in *balanda* [white people’s] song that's ok, you can, anyone can dance to put that music and dance, but not *manyardi*, Inyjalarrku no, that's main one. They can't mucking around with it! (RS1-488 00:19:47.250 - 00:22:02.350)

We are therefore considering together the best ways to make *manyardi* recordings accessible, but to provide warnings to safeguard them from being used in the wrong ways.

### Future uses for recordings

People have also expressed their interest in creating books and films from existing and new recordings. As D. Manmurulu and Mardbinda said in responding to an interview question by Singer about future uses of recordings:

Put it [the recordings] in a... mainly on book or video [DVD]... So sometimes like if you forget, then put it on video [DVD], see it. If no, if video [DVD] break, then book, yeah. Both ways, so book can last bit longer (D. Manmurulu, RS1-488 00:53:53.000 - 00:54:31.900).

I think it's *nungmalal* [‘good’], like put it on a book or something ... And make a CD, like on the back or something, maybe with a book and CD (Mardbinda, RS1-488 00:54:36.200 - 00:54:57.300)

Similarly, Naragoidj has spoken in Kunbarlang about wanting to make *nayi narlengbinbin djurra* [‘a big/fully grown book’] and said *ngamabulunj kurleng* stories [‘I want lots of stories [for it]’] (20150413IOv01). He is also keen to see the completion and publication of the Kunbarlang dictionary.

The research teams plan to continue working consultatively with community members so that new materials can be created from the existing and new recordings.

### Community control of recordings

Along with making recordings available to community members, another key aim of the various projects has been to equip and empower community members to be involved in the documentation and to control how old

and new recordings are used. For example, Singer and O’Keeffe have been providing training and mentoring for Mardbinda and other community members to learn to use various recording devices and transcription software. Mardbinda has also assisted with consultation with speakers, family members and others in the community about which recordings can be put on the Mawng Ngaralk website. D. Manmurulu, J. Manmurulu and Naragoidj, along with other community members, have been closely involved in advising researchers on community protocols around recording, archiving and accessibility of recordings.<sup>55</sup> These protocols include the need to restrict some materials to people of a particular gender, or restricting materials after the death of the speaker or singer.

The Mawng Ngaralk website includes a section ‘Women and girls only’ holding narratives that are not supposed to be heard by men or boys. In Singer’s consultation, the speaker and other women were confident that the label ‘Women and girls only’ would be respected by men and boys. In contrast, some women at Maningrida who had been happy to record a women’s only story in Kunbarlang with Aung Si (a male researcher) told Coleman and O’Keeffe that they did not want this story on the website at all, but were happy for it to be archived with restrictions on access.

Across Australian Indigenous societies, there are some common protocols about restricting recordings or images of a deceased person for a period of time determined by the relatives of the deceased. The periods of time determined by relatives can vary considerably, from around six months to up to four years, and there appear to be some cultural shifts to less restrictions in some Indigenous communities (see for example the discussion about this in the Warumungu community of Central Australia by Christen 2012:333).<sup>56</sup> At Waruwi, some individuals have been saying that they are happy for their families to not restrict their images and voices, but others want recordings to be restricted for a much

<sup>55</sup> This builds on previous community engagement with language work and ensuring community control at Waruwi. For example, Coleman notes that Northern Territory Department of Education linguists and teacher-linguists in bilingual programs (such as Waruwi) insisted that statements of NT Government copyright to Indigenous language work, should include explicit reference to the intellectual property rights of traditional owners and speakers of Indigenous languages.

<sup>56</sup> Georgia Curran also notes that this has been the case with her work at Yuendumu: ‘Warlpiri women’s desire to have their songs remembered seems to override these previously observed restrictions so that often songs are played with voices of deceased people quite soon after their death. This is also the case with images – sometimes at funerals now there is even a large portrait photo of the deceased person projected on to a big screen in front of everyone’ (pers. comm. 26/09/17).

longer period of time after a person’s passing. Given the varying views of different individuals and families within the Waruwi community (and communities across western Arnhem Land). D. Manmurulu explained that it is important to take images and voices off websites when someone is newly deceased because of the conflict that can occur if people are shocked or upset by seeing or hearing these.

Mardbinda: Can you explain why it is important to take photos/videos/recordings off the website when a speaker/singer passes away?

D. Manmurulu: ... yeah, you can do that because, you know, lately when like still new [newly deceased], when the person die and then somebody might put it [recordings] on to website and some families don’t know, long as they see through website and they get shock there and they get bit upset and they start talking, you know, they say ‘who put this on website?’ Sometimes we just big argument now, big fight, yeah. Something like that (RS1-488 00:37:33.750 - 00:39:15.000).

D. Manmurulu also discussed the fact that he is happy for his images and voice to be unrestricted after his passing, and is telling his family this, but the decision will ultimately be for his family to make:

Like to me it’s, that’s ok ... if I die and they can put it through whatever bluetooth or through website, like for myself dancing doing the giant dance or something like that, so if I pass away but still my photo gonna be there, yeah... that’s up to my family if they want to do that [restrict images and recordings]. But when I die, before I die, I always tell them, I’ll tell them that ‘you leave my photo anything hanging on the wall, doesn’t matter if I die but, they’ll be our remembrance and things. But you can put it away if you want for maybe, not a year, but maybe for 6 months, then put it back on again, yeah’. But I will tell them before I die! (D. Manmurulu, RS1-488 00:41:51.450 - 00:43:30.600).

Naragoidj has also indicated that he is happy for all the recordings of him to remain public, even after he has passed away.

Researchers also need to be sensitive when repatriating archival recordings, because hearing the voices of deceased in older recordings can also provoke feelings of sadness, even if these feelings are mixed with more positive feelings about hearing the voices of their relatives and remembering back as Mardbinda and D. Manmurulu discussed with Singer:

Mardbinda: At first when I heard the recording of my *wawu* it felt like (like he passed away a

few years ago) and when he made the recording I felt like, that's *numalal*, but I didn't want to do it, like transcribe it just yet. But then I would do it again [later].

Singer: How do you feel when you hear those old recordings from family who've passed away?

D. Manmurulu: Well I feel a bit sad, but I really wanted to hear more, yeah. I'm happy yeah. Sometimes when I hear it reminds me back when I was young boy and I was with him, singing, that's where I was learning that I was singing with my father (RS1-488 00:08:19.650 - 00:09:27.200).

Community members have advised Singer and O'Keeffe when materials need to be taken down from the website or restricted for a period of time in the archives and the different archive collections have metadata providing information about who to contact in the event of a speaker or singer's death. However, further discussions are needed about the best way to be able to manage this and allow community control into the future. Coleman notes that debates in the 1990s in some communities centred around the need for communities to have control by keeping materials only in their community. However, various events such as natural disasters destroying materials at Language Centres and new staff at schools discarding materials from the old bilingual program convinced most people of the need for safekeeping in archives, provided there are appropriate access conditions.<sup>57</sup>

### Conclusions

In this paper, we have shown that there are multiple uses for the old and new recordings at Waruwi. Given the range of different perspectives from members of the Waruwi community (and beyond) about the use of materials and ways they may or may not need to be restricted, we argue that researchers need to have ongoing discussions with community members to inform collaborative research and access protocols for recordings. This will be particularly important as we navigate changes in technology and new protocols for materials online. We argue that researchers need to ensure that communities are equipped and empowered to have control over recorded materials and determine priorities for ongoing documentation, maintenance and revitalisation projects.

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<sup>57</sup> In a recent fieldtrip in western Arnhem Land, Coleman and O'Keeffe heard a story about a new school principal who had taken all the language materials created for the bilingual program to the local tip. Thankfully, some of the school janitors were able to rescue large amounts of material and hide it until there were new staff at the school who were more supportive of language work.

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