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Monitoring the use of Kaurna

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Abstract

Kaurna, the language of the Adelaide Plains in South Australia, was probably last spoken on an everyday basis in the 1860s. Fortunately, reasonable documentation has enabled its revival some 130 years later (see Amery 2000). The use of Kaurna in the public domain has now emerged as the dominant function of the language. Kaurna is used for a variety of naming purposes, the giving of speeches of Welcome to Country, acknowledgement of Kaurna land or for public performance. Requests for names, translations and information about the Kaurna language were initially dealt with on an ad hoc basis. The establishment of Kaurna Warra Pintyandi in 2002 allowed for these requests to be dealt with in a more orderly fashion. Currently six to ten requests are addressed in the regular monthly meetings. This article analyses how protocols and processes for dealing with the myriad of requests has evolved. A database has been established which is being mapped on Google Earth. This helps us to monitor and plan for the use of Kaurna in the public domain. There are lessons here for others starting out on the long journey of getting their language back.

Kaurna was probably last spoken on an everyday basis in the 1860s, though the 'last speaker', Ivaritji, died in 1929.[2] Fortunately the language was reasonably well documented by German missionaries, Clamor Schürmann and Christian Teichelmann, who arrived in Adelaide in October 1838. In total about 3000 to 3500 words were recorded together with hundreds of sentences and their English translations. A 24-page sketch grammar was written (Teichelmann & Schürmann 1840) but very few texts exist. As no sound recordings of the original language remain, pronunciation has

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2 Whilst it seems likely that Ivaritji was a first language speaker of Kaurna as a child in the 1840s, the only material recorded from her later in life by Daisy Bates (1919) and John McConnell Black (1920) are short wordlists of 26 and 66 words respectively.

been determined through detailed comparison of written records of the language with reference to closely related neighbouring languages, Nukunu and Adnyamathanha, for which sound recordings do exist. Efforts to revive Kaurna as a spoken language commenced in 1989. The language is now taught to relatively small numbers of students in programs offered at all levels of education from kindergarten to university. Less than 100 Kaurna people have participated in Kaurna courses or workshops over the last two decades, though some expressions have spread beyond this core group. The majority of students in most courses are non-Aboriginal. Aboriginal persons from other language groups are often also participants.

We are still at a relatively early stage in the revival of Kaurna, even though it has been taught now for nearly 20 years. The language is spoken to a minimal extent in Kaurna households and in the community, principally a handful of speech formulas and some salient vocabulary. However there has been an explosion of naming activity and its use in public ceremony, and it has been incorporated into a number of public artworks.

Kaurna in the public arena

Following efforts to reclaim and re-introduce the Kaurna language, its use in the public arena has now emerged as the dominant function of the language. One of the main reasons for Kaurna people learning the language is to be able to give speeches of Welcome to Kaurna Country. The first speech was delivered by Kauwanu (Uncle) Lewis O'Brien in 1991 and speech-giving has since increased exponentially. I documented 104 speeches given in 1997, the final year of my PhD research. There are now several Kaurna individuals who give more than 100 speeches each per year. However, use of Kaurna for public speech-giving is not new. Upon his arrival in the new colony of South Australia Governor Gawler gave a speech to the assembled Indigenous inhabitants and had it translated into Kaurna by then Protector of Aborigines, William Wyatt, and early colonist James Cronk. Gawler also appealed to colonists to inform the colonial administration of Indigenous names so that they might be recognised and placed on the map. A number of Kaurna placenames, such as Yankalilla and Onkaparinga, appear on the earliest maps and remain in use today. Kaurna hymns were sung in public by the Kaurna children who attended the school run by the German missionaries at Piltawodli, the 'Native Location'. Singing Kaurna songs in public is a practice that is continued by the Kaurna Plains School choir and Alberton Primary School choir today. A government schooner built at Port Adelaide in 1848 was named the *Yatala*. And there has been sporadic use of Kaurna words over the intervening years; for instance, the Adelaide Bushwalkers club named their newsletter *Tarndanya* with the first issue published in January 1948.

Kaurna people themselves first turned to the archives in 1980 with the naming of Warriappendi Alternative School and have since named numerous organisations, programs and other entities, as well as themselves, their children and their pets. In recent years Kaurna naming activity, largely as a result of raised awareness of

Adelaide's Aboriginal past, has greatly increased. This naming activity has very often been initiated by Kaurna people, or other Aboriginal people, working within community organisations, schools, universities, government departments and so forth. But, increasingly, many non-Indigenous people want to acknowledge Kaurna land through naming activity. Sometimes these are individual, private requests such as naming a property or a boat. On other occasions it might be through a business for a business name, product name, or name for a boardroom and so on. But on most occasions it is effected through a public institution.

Since 1995 Kaurna language has been incorporated into a number of public artworks beginning with the *Yerrakartarta* installation by Daryl Milika Pfitzner and Muriel Van der Byll, outside the Hyatt Hotel on North Terrace in the heart of the city of Adelaide. In 2001–02, with the redevelopment of the Festival Theatre concourse, Kaurna text was also incorporated into the *Kaurna Yerta Kaurna Meyunna Tampendi* installation. Kaurna naming activity has increased so much, in fact, that it has been difficult to keep track of it.

Dealing with Kaurna requests

Through my involvement in Kaurna language programs and Kaurna language research since 1989, I have often been approached for information about Kaurna language, culture, history and placenames, as well as for advice regarding Kaurna naming, inclusion of text in works of art and for translations of various kinds. These requests have come from members of the Kaurna community; have been referred by the Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) Aboriginal Education Unit, Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute, the South Australian Museum, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies; or have come directly from schools, government departments, businesses, artists or members of the public. During the 1990s I would give technical advice but would make it clear to the person making the request that, as a non-Kaurna person, I was not able to authorise or endorse its use and referred them to Kaurna people for approval. Often I copied the request and my response to Kauwanu Lewis O'Brien who had an email account at the University of South Australia. Most other Kaurna people were more difficult to contact. At the same time Kauwanu Lewis was dealing with many similar requests that he was receiving directly.[3] Sometimes he sought my advice on spelling or points of grammar and assistance with translation. On other occasions he dealt with requests himself without reference to me.

While I did give advice to members of the public I always felt somewhat uncomfortable about this as a non-Aboriginal person, and wondered whether these many requestors did actually follow my advice and seek approval from a Kaurna person. I hoped to establish some kind of forum whereby these requests could be discussed and approved by Kaurna people. At that time there was one representative Kaurna body, the Kaurna

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3 The public also sought advice from other Kaurna people, though much of this activity was beyond my knowledge or awareness. Some has since come to my attention.

Aboriginal Community and Heritage Association Inc (KACHA). Kaurna language was included in KACHA's constitution but the organisation was always preoccupied with protection of heritage sites, internal politics and more pressing matters, so that Kaurna language matters were never discussed and I never received a reply to letters I wrote to the committee. However two matters were addressed by the Chair of KACHA, Fred Warrior, in 1996–97. These were the *Ruins of the Future* installation during the Festival of Adelaide in 1996 and the Adelaide City Council Kaurna naming initiative. A message in Kaurna language was recorded by Cherie Watkins and myself in the presence of Fred for the installation, whilst Kaurna park names were discussed and approved on a map spread out on Fred's kitchen table.

The formation of Kaurna Warra Pintyandi

The Kaurna Warra Pintyandi (KWP)[4] group formed without fanfare in 2002. At the conclusion of a series of workshops on Kaurna funeral protocols (see Amery and Rigney 2006) we decided to continue meeting on a monthly basis to work on projects and consider requests related to the Kaurna language. An agenda was set and comprehensive minutes recorded for each meeting. The need for a name for the group became apparent after some months of coming together to meet. The name, Kaurna Warra Pintyandi (creating/constructing Kaurna language) was adopted. It had been used previously for workshops associated with a project whereby new expressions were developed for use by mothers, fathers and other caregivers for use with babies and young children (see Amery & Gale 2000) was adopted. KWP meetings have been attended by a small number of regulars, notably Ngarpadla (Auntie) Alitya Wallara Rigney, Kauwanu Lewis Yerloburka O'Brien, Cherie Warrara Watkins and myself since its inception in 2002. Several early regulars no longer attend but have been replaced by others. Some Kaurna people attend occasionally when an issue arises that is of particular relevance to them. Meetings are also often attended by guests who include overseas visitors, researchers and individuals making a request to the committee. See Amery & Rigney (2007) for a more extensive discussion of the role of KWP, its history and relationship to the Kaurna community.

Monitoring the use of Kaurna in the public arena

Whilst we had some record of the many names that had been discussed by the KWP committee in the minutes and in my PhD thesis (Amery 1998), prior to that we did not have a detailed record. We had not kept all details of phone calls, phone messages, emails, letters and face-to-face conversations over the years, though some emails and phone messages were retrievable. I and some members of the Kaurna community had notes, sometimes cryptic, scattered in our diaries or on scraps of paper.

We were also often unsure of whether people actually used the name or whether they had followed the advice of the committee. We were also aware of Kaurna naming

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4 See www.adelaide.edu.au/kwp/.

activity occurring without reference to the KWP committee, both by Kaurna people and by others. Sometimes use of Kaurna names was approved by Kaurna people but there was no central record of this approval and on many occasions KWP members had no idea of what was happening.

Requests for names were often repetitive with many people seeking names meaning wellbeing, healing, partnership, together, meeting together, working together, unity and so on, and we were finding it hard to remember what names had already been used and by whom. We were a little concerned that we were doubling up on the same names for similar purposes. We wanted some mechanism whereby we could monitor the use of Kaurna language in public in a more systematic way.

Many requests being put to the committee were exceedingly vague and we often had little information on which to go. We were also often unclear about the nature of the request and had no indication about where and how the name or translation would be used and by whom. As a result we designed a questionnaire to collect more specific information. The increasing number of requests had also become a massive burden on our time, both on the KWP meeting itself and on my time before and after the meeting, so we suggested that people consider making a donation to the committee. In December 2006 we established a schedule of fees and began issuing invoices for our services. The questionnaire was redesigned in 2008 by University of Adelaide lawyers together with Amery and the KWP committee to include statements relating to indemnity and liability and the schedule of fees was added. The collated questionnaires now form a kind of register of requests.

In December 2005 we filed an application to register the KWP logo as a certified trademark, so that users could identify that correct protocols had been observed for names, translations and so forth which had been approved by the KWP committee. Unfortunately the proposed KWP trademark has still not been registered, as KWP is not an incorporated body and the University of Adelaide has not been prepared to own the trademark on behalf of the KWP group. The KWP group still asks that the KWP logo be used for these purposes, though this would be much stronger if the logo was officially registered as a certified trademark in the same way that the Australian Made or Woolmark logos are used.

The Kaurna Requests database

The Kaurna requests database was established in November 2005 when a visiting French student, Virginie Leonce, who had studied my Australian Indigenous Languages course at the University of Adelaide, volunteered to undertake some work for the Kaurna cause. I set about designing a database on FileMaker Pro so that she could go through my records and enter data into relevant fields. We compiled information about the nature of the Kaurna names and translations, linguistic issues and information about the approval process. We established ten numbered categories for the kind of entity (placename, personal name, business name/organisation, program/ forum/conference, building, room, publication/brochure, simple translation, art-

project, festival) and letter-coded categories (A-H) for the different kinds of people or organisation making the request (individual/private, organisation, education, government, business, reconciliation movement, environment group, other). These were further colour-coded according to whether the name was permanent or temporary or whether the requestor was Aboriginal or non-Indigenous (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Kaurna requests database.

In 2006 we sought funding from the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts to continue the project and publish the requests database on the web. With the establishment of the *Kaurna Placenames* website,[5] where information entered into a Microsoft Access database was displayed on Google Earth maps, the Kaurna requests database was transformed into a sister database in Access to sit alongside the placenames database. Four separate pages were established for each item in the database: name, linguistic information, request process and geographic information system data.

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5 See www.kaurnaplacenames.com.

The letter-coded categories used initially were replaced with more transparent names on drop-down menus, thus facilitating data entry and interpretation. A number of entities such as walking trail and reserve, and categories such as health were added. A new field, requestor identity (Kaurna, other Aboriginal, Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal collaboration, and non-Aboriginal), was also added to allow us to know who was driving the request agenda.

There are now over 700 entries in the database, though many of these are incomplete and still being researched. This probably represents 80–90% of the Kaurna names used in the public domain, though previously unknown usage is constantly coming to our attention.

Mapping Kaurna names on Google Earth
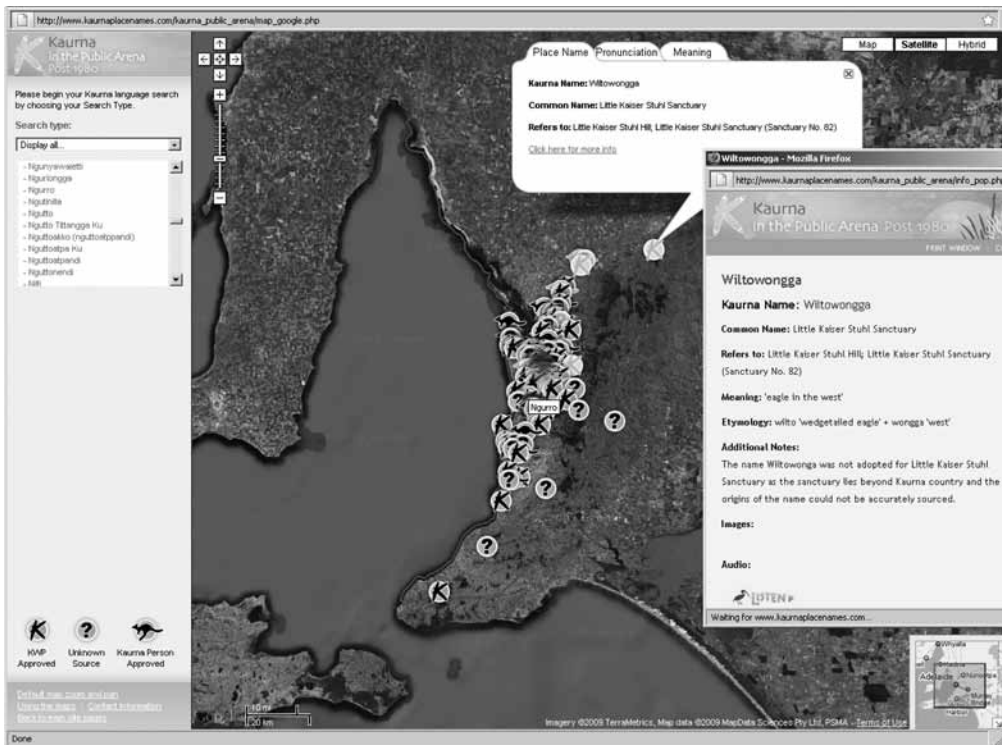
Figure 2. All Kaurna entries displayed on satellite view, with pop-up
boxes showing for Wiltowonga.

In 2008–09 KWP contracted Beanstalk Creative and Production, who had developed the website for the Kaurna placenames project, to develop a set of pages to display Kaurna language used in the public domain. Clicking on an item brings up additional

information in a window, including a picture and sound file for pronunciation purposes (Figure 2). The location is pinpointed with a precise latitude and longitude reading unless we need to disguise the precise location, as in the case of a women's refuge or sacred site. In this case the name appears in a list to the side of the maps. Clicking on the names brings up information as before.

The 'Kaurna in the Public Arena Post 1980' web pages were designed so that names assigned to a particular category such as business names, trails or buildings and so forth could be displayed at the same time. Alternatively we can see all the names being used by businesses, health providers, Indigenous organisations or non-Indigenous individuals and so on. In this way we can tell at a glance which names are being used where for a particular set of purposes. Whilst we could easily search the database for a particular name or category and generate a report, the visual display on Google Earth provides a far more user-friendly way of keeping track of this activity.
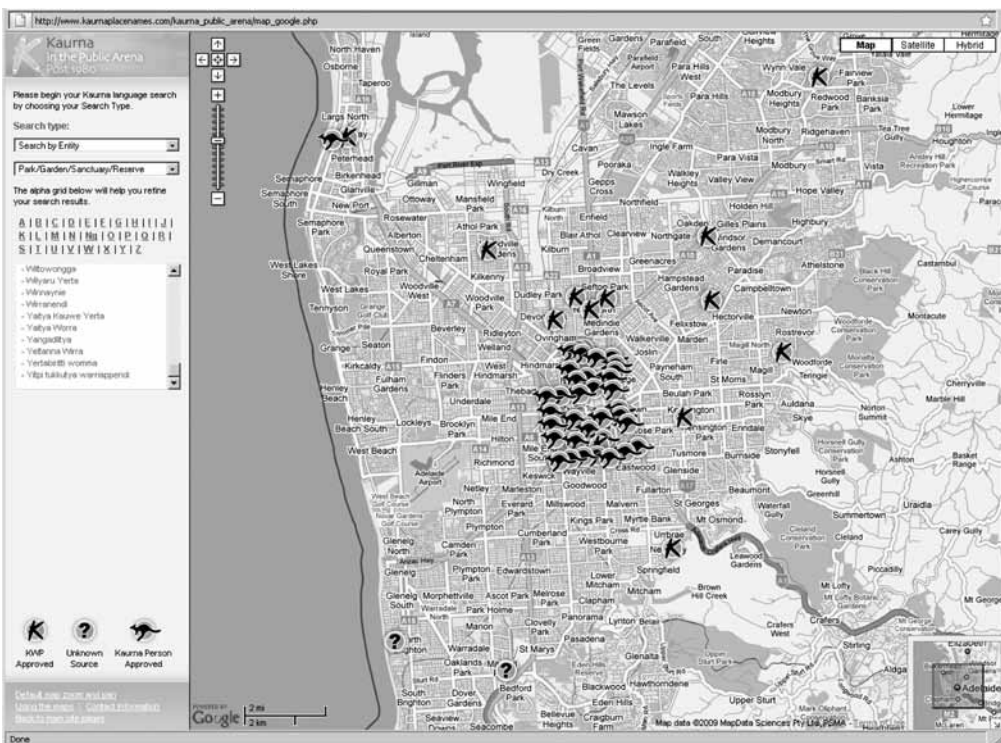

Figure 3. Parks, gardens, sanctuaries and reserves displayed within the inner Adelaide metropolitan area (map view).

Symbols are used to quickly identify information that relates to the approval process. A KWP logo indicates names and words that have been approved by the KWP

committee. A *tarnda* (male red kangaroo) marks names that are being used by Kaurna people or where it is known that a Kaurna person has approved of its use. A question mark is used where we have no information about the approval process or where we know that no Kaurna person was consulted (Figures 2 and 3).

Whilst the *Kaurna Placenames* website is available to the public, for now the 'Kaurna in the Public Arena Post 1980' pages will be password-protected, accessible only to KWP members and others to whom they choose to grant access. This restricted access is intended to be temporary and will eventually be lifted.

Figure 4. List of product or brand names selected from the
database underpinning the maps.

Discussion

We now have a mechanism established to compile information on the use of Kaurna in the public domain and keep track of its usage. We will soon have a website that displays the information in various ways that the user can choose. We are also able to enter data directly into the database online where it is taken up immediately on the Google Earth maps (Figure 4). But we have a backlog of names and requests to research and data to enter.

Of course it would have been preferable to establish processes for monitoring the use of Kaurna language 20 years ago. We did not foresee the importance of monitoring use of the language at that stage. We did not anticipate the extent to which the language would be taken up. Nor did we have time to maintain a detailed record.

Now that the database has been established it will be much easier to keep a comprehensive record of naming activity as it takes place. This will give Kaurna people much greater control. Knowledge is power. The database and web pages are powerful tools whereby we can plan for the development and use of the language. See Amery (2001) for a detailed discussion of language planning in relation to Kaurna.

We use both the *Kaurna Placenames* website and the 'Kaurna in the Public Arena Post 1980' web pages to establish norms of spelling and pronunciation by posting downloadable sound files on them. We also use these pages to establish authoritative meanings and derivations of the names and texts, thereby assisting in the planning of the Kaurna language corpus. And the pages significantly enhance the status of the language through the posting of accurate information and display of Kaurna language activity in user-friendly ways.

Conclusion

The Kaurna requests database, *Kaurna Placenames* website and the 'Kaurna in the Public Arena Post 1980' web pages with Google Earth images provide a useful model for other groups to monitor use of their own languages. However it is strongly advisable to set up a mechanism for recording names, translations and their use sooner rather than later in the revitalisation process in order to capture as much of a language as possible. Beginning earlier also minimises the effort in attempting to include offline work already collected.

The database needs to be fashioned in a way that records information about the words themselves, their reference and location, together with information about who is using them and for what purpose. The database can be tailored to the needs of both the language group and other users. The precise structure will depend in large part upon the purposes for which the language is used. In the Kaurna situation it has been important to document the approval process as well as the usage itself.

The process of documenting names and translation in the public domain also serves to celebrate language revitalisation efforts thereby further motivating and spurring on the language movement.

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