

RE-AWAKENING LANGUAGES

**Theory and practice in the
revitalisation of Australia's
Indigenous languages**

**Edited by
John Hobson, Kevin Lowe,
Susan Poetsch and Michael Walsh**



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Cover image: 'Wiradjuri Water Symbols 1', drawing by Lynette Riley.
Water symbols represent a foundation requirement for all to be sustainable in their environment. For Indigenous people traditional languages are a foundation for cultural survival, hence the importance of traditional language revival, resource development and teaching programs for all Indigenous Australians.
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Dedication

During the course of this volume's preparation two very significant events occurred.

One of the authors, George Fisher, a Wiradjuri man and language revitalisation warrior of long standing, passed from this life. His loss from the fight for revitalisation's front line will be deeply felt by many for a long time to come.

Shyla Maple Madden was born to Nezmia Hay. Nezmia provided invaluable administrative support to the team in the early stages of the editorial process. Shyla's conception and delivery spanned a much shorter time than this volume's and was far more a labour of love for Nezmia and her partner.

We dedicate this volume to George in celebration of a life lived well for his language, and to Shyla in the hope that the world she grows up in will be made richer in opportunities for her to learn and speak hers with its publication.

And so the cycle continues.

Acknowledgements

The editors wish to thank a number of individuals and agencies that assisted in the production of this volume.

To all the authors who entrusted their issue to us and endured our repeated interference with it, we owe great thanks. Without their contribution the volume would not achieve the standard that it does.

To the Office of the Board of Studies NSW we are indebted for supporting community writers – many of whom had never had the opportunity to publish before – for facilitating the concept and much of the process, and affording Kevin Lowe and Susan Poetsch the opportunity to pursue the project in the first place.

To both the Koori Centre and the Department of Linguistics at the University of Sydney for providing John Hobson and Michael Walsh the freedom to undertake this endeavour, we also extend our thanks.

To the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, and particularly the always supportive Anthony Seiver, we wish to express our great appreciation for the generous provision of funds towards publication costs.

To Jeanie Bell thanks are also due for graciously providing the foreword. It is a privilege to carry the endorsement of an Aboriginal academic and community member who has worked so long and tirelessly for Australian languages.

To Lynette Riley we are particularly appreciative for the opportunity to use the cover of the volume to display her most impressive artistry that draws on her Wiradjuri tradition.

And finally, to Nezmia Hay, for nursing the editorial team along through the early stages of her and our confinement we are especially grateful. She showed great patience and tolerance with us no matter how annoying and persistent we became, and is clearly destined to make a wonderful mother.

Conventions

Unless otherwise specified the terms *Aboriginal* and *Indigenous* should be taken to refer specifically to Aboriginal Australians and Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people throughout this volume. When used without capitals the terms *aboriginal* and *indigenous* should be taken to refer generally to the native populations of any country. Thus the aboriginal or indigenous populations of Australia are referred to as Aboriginal, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, or Indigenous Australians.

The term *Dreaming* is capitalised throughout where it refers to Indigenous Australian religious tradition. A number of authors have also chosen to follow a stylistic variation currently common in Australia of referring to senior Indigenous Australians as *Elders*.

In Australian contexts, *language* is frequently used to refer implicitly to Indigenous languages and a number of authors herein follow this practice.

As arrangements for the publication of this volume included that all chapters be individually downloadable via the internet,¹ no universal table of abbreviations or acronyms is provided. Instead these are introduced in each chapter as they arise.

¹ ses.library.usyd.edu.au/handle/2123/6647.

Foreword

The revival of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in Australia has been in progress for several decades, and in this time a lot of methods and strategies for reviving, renewing and maintaining our languages have been tried and tested. There are many success stories that can be told, and many others of attempts to revive language in a community or region which may only last the length of time that government funding sustains them.

When this happens the people involved in the program often lose hope. Interest and motivation drops when there isn't a paid worker keeping the language program alive and relevant to the different age groups and situations where language may be used in a contemporary setting.

What has been successful or unsuccessful in different ways is a matter of debate and also depends largely on what the language community decides is useful and relevant to them. The traditional custodians or speakers of these languages may find it important to reclaim only certain parts of a language in order to achieve short-term goals for their families and their communities, while others may be aiming for more long-term goals of increasing the number of fluent speakers.

What each language or family group does is critical to the bigger picture of what we all are trying to achieve: cultural maintenance and survival as the first people of the land. Each contribution, big or small, is part of an ongoing struggle facing all indigenous people around the world. In the midst of globalisation we strive to maintain and strengthen our identity and connection to country through our language, cultural practices and values for present and future generations.

The contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia to linguistic and cultural diversity worldwide is essential and is happening through the important work in which we are all involved. The achievements and success of this work are reflected in the papers and case studies presented in this very important book.

This work is sustained in different ways in different places with leadership from the Elders and the knowledge holders in our communities. They provide us with guidance from the Elders who walked before them, and who still watch over us today to give us the strength to endure the challenges we face now and in the future.

This collection of papers reflects the story of different groups and their experiences. They are the voice of the land and the voice of the people breathing life back into the languages that existed on country for thousands of years prior to their more recent decline. Such stories will provide invaluable inspiration to those community people just beginning the journey of reclaiming their language, as well as to those of us who are continually reviewing what we have done so far and continue to do in our efforts to renew, revive and maintain our unique language and culture in this country – our homeland.

Galangoor nguu, dimingali moghwidhaan, djinaang djaan

Good spirit, sacred stories, feet on the ground

Jeanie Bell

Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education