

Australian Linguistics

Past, present and future of Australian Aboriginal languages and their relevance for linguistics

stef.spronck@helsinki.fi

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Intended Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course you should be able to

- discuss the main distinguishing features of Australian Aboriginal languages and their relevance for linguistic typology;
- explain the main topics that have shaped Australianist linguistics, particularly with respect to language spread and contact (historical linguistics), the relation between language and culture (anthropological linguistics) and the importance of syntax (theoretical linguistics and morphosyntactic description);
- independently collect data on relevant linguistic topics using a descriptive grammar and interpret glossed data in unfamiliar languages (in accordance with the Leipzig Glossing Rules);
- critically reflect on the relation between speakers of Indigenous languages and academic linguists.

Online course description.

Session descriptions

All classes will be held on Zoom on Fridays between 2:15-3:45 pm.

- 22/1 Session theme: Introduction
 - Before the meeting:
 - * Assignment: Watch the short video on Moodle (short news item from ABC Australia about the endangered language Mirriwoong).
 - During the meeting:
 - * Topic 1: The history of Aboriginal Australia and the (classification of) Australian languages.

- * Topic 2: A brief history of research on Australian languages, changes in the relation between researchers and Aborigines and ethical challenges in research on Australian Aboriginal languages.
- * Activities: Short quiz, discussion about the video, Q & A.
- 29/1 Session theme: Phonetics, phonology and topics in lexical semantics
 - Before the meeting: Check your group and assigned language on Moodle.
 - * Group A reads Evans (1995).
 - * Group B reads Gaby and Singer (2014).
 - * Assignment: Add the phonemes of your adopted language to the database on Moodle.
 - During the meeting:
 - * Topic 1: Phonetics and phonology in Aboriginal Australia.
 - * Topic 2: Lexical domains and Aboriginal semantics.
 - * Activities: Peer-instruction and discussion about your assigned readings, Q & A.
- 5/2 Session theme: Topics in the morphology of Australian languages
 - Before the meeting:
 - * Group A reads Singer (2010).
 - * Group B reads Simpson (forthcoming).
 - * Assignment: Add the bound pronouns of your adopted language to the database on Moodle.
 - During the meeting:
 - * Topic 1: Morphological structure and polysynthesis in Australian languages.
 - * Activities: Peer-instruction and discussion about your assigned readings, Q & A.
- 12/2 Session theme: Kinship and speech styles
 - Before the meeting:
 - * Group A reads Laughren (2001).
 - * Group B reads Garde (2008).
 - * Assignment: Check if your adopted language has an avoidance style. If so: Summarise its main properties in the Moodle database. If not: provide a brief description of the kinship system of your adopted language (can be on the basis of supplementary sources).
 - During the meeting:
 - * Topic 1: Kinship and social organisation.
 - * Topic 2: Speech styles and narrative traditions in Aboriginal Australia.

- * Activities: Peer-instruction and discussion, watching a video of a dreamtime story, Q & A.
- 19/2 Session theme: Topics in the syntax of Australian languages
 - Before the meeting:
 - * Group A reads Silverstein (1976) (please ignore the cross-out parts)
 - * Group B reads Hale (1976)
 - * Assignment: Please indicate whether your language is syntactically ergative and find one example of a mismatch between morphology and syntax in your grammar. Please copy the full example to the database.
 - During the meeting:
 - * Topic 1: Overview of syntactic structures in Australian Aboriginal languages: phrase structure, clause structure and valency change.
 - * Topic 2: Non-configurationality and complex clauses.
 - * Activities: Peer-instruction and discussion, Q & A.
- 26/2 Session theme: Aboriginal English, mixed languages, endangerment and revitalisation
 - Before the meeting:
 - * Everyone reads O’Shannessy (2013) (so no separate groups this week).
 - * Assignment: Submit your ‘reply letter to the community’ by noon 25 February (see 3 below).
 - During the meeting:
 - * Topic 1: English-based and mixed ‘new’ Aboriginal languages.
 - * Topic 2: Revitalised languages and the future of fieldwork in Australia.
 - * Activities: Discussion about the ‘letters to the community’ and Q & A about any remaining issues and next week’s exam.
- 5/3 Final exam
 - See (1) below. Submission of the exam will be open from the beginning of regular class hours until an hour after class (i.e. 3 hours in total).

All lectures held during the meetings (but not the activities) will be screen-recorded and made available as videos on Moodle, together with the session slides and complementary readings.

Assessment

Your final grade will consist of the following components:

- (1) Final exam: Seven essay questions; one for each class topic + one general question [50% of final grade pre-rounding].

- (2) Weekly database assignment: Everyone adopts a descriptive grammar of an Australian language (please see Moodle) and adds data specified for each week in the Syllabus in the *Australian languages database* on Moodle [30 % of final grade pre-rounding].
- (3) Essay: An aboriginal community sends a letter to your linguistics department asking to destroy all references to their language from the university library. Your essay is a letter of about 600 words to the community explaining why you will/will not do so [20 % of final grade pre-rounding]. (A fuller description of this assignment is available on Moodle.)
- (4) Attendance and ‘classroom participation’ [pass (final grade rounded up)/fail (final grade rounded down)].

References

- Evans, N. (1995). Current issues in the phonology of Australian languages. In J. A. Goldsmith (Ed.), *The Handbook of Phonological Theory*, pp. 723–761. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
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- Garde, M. (2008). Person reference, proper names and circumspection in Bininj Kunwok conversation. In I. Mushin and B. J. Baker (Eds.), *Discourse and Grammar in Australian Languages*, pp. 203–232. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Hale, K. (1976). The adjoined relative clause in Australia. In R. M. W. Dixon (Ed.), *Grammatical categories in Australian languages*, pp. 78–105. Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.
- Laughren, M. (2001). What warlpiri ‘avoidance’ registers do with grammar. In J. Simpson, D. Nash, M. Laughren, P. Austin, and B. Alpher (Eds.), *Forty years on: Ken Hale and Australian languages*, pp. 199–225. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics.
- O’Shannessy, C. (2013). The role of multiple sources in the formation of an innovative auxiliary category in Light Warlpiri, a new Australian mixed language. *Language* 89(2), 328–353.
- Silverstein, M. (1976). Hierarchy of features and ergativity. In R. M. Dixon (Ed.), *Grammatical Categories in Australian Languages*, pp. 112–171. Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.
- Simpson, J. (forthcoming). Semantic case in Australian languages. In *Oxford Handbook of Australian Languages*. Oxford etc.: Oxford University Press.
- Singer, R. (2010). Creativity in the use of gender agreement in Mawng: How the discourse functions of a gender system can approach those of a classifier system. *Studies in Language* 34(2), 382–416.