

LANGUAGE REVIVAL METHODS

DICTIONARIES AND WORDLISTS

WHAT A DICTIONARY IS FOR – AND WHAT IT IS NOT FOR

The point of a dictionary in language revival is to have all the words you have found in one place, so that learners and teachers can find them and use them.

A dictionary cannot possibly contain your language. It is only the words and an English translation. It does not hold all the wealth of meaning and knowledge of your language, nor does it show you how the words go together into fluent living language. You will need more resources than just a dictionary. But making all your words accessible is a key foundation for your language program, even if you don't pass it out to everyone.

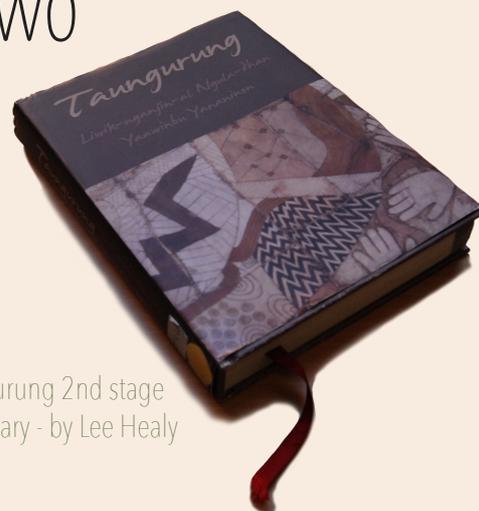
A dictionary makes it much easier to produce other resources – a body parts chart, a fieldbook of birds, an introduction to kin terms – as well as translations, songs, stories and so on. You might also want what is called an 'encyclopaedic dictionary', that includes a large amount of cultural notes along with the words.



Gumbaynggirr - kin terms teaching resource

YOUR DICTIONARY, EDITION ONE – AND TWO

Many communities produce a first dictionary as an important milestone in the language research – and then do a second one later. This is not a waste of effort. The first dictionary allows you to get your language out there to the community, and – just as importantly – will produce reactions, comments, and hopefully more participation, to feed into a second edition. This process allows your 2nd edition to have a higher level of community understanding and agreement. Commonly it will have an improved spelling system and translations, more words, and often additional sections such as everyday phrases or some grammar explanations. All this takes time – a 2nd edition may appear years later. Often, 1st editions are only informally published, leaving the bigger expense till the bugs are ironed out.



Taungurung 2nd stage dictionary - by Lee Healy

LINGUISTS AND DICTIONARIES

A dictionary involves perhaps a surprising level of linguistic issues to consider. These include:

- A spelling system that accurately reflects the sounds of the words, and that is acceptable and useable for both learners and speakers.
- Words that have several different meanings. For example, many Aboriginal languages have the same word for wing and arm. That same word may also mean a particular kin relationship, or a bend in the river. English doesn't make these connections. But all these meanings are correct for that word, for that language.
- Words that don't translate well into English. For example, many stages of development into adulthood are important in Aboriginal language cultures, and they are of course different from those of English. So historical sources may translate several words as just 'man' or 'young girl'. These words are not wrong! But some meaning was missed when they were recorded. All these words are important in reclaiming your culture and language.
- Words that sound the same but in fact are different. Think about English 'bark' (tree or dog?) Every language has some of these.
- Related words, with different endings on the same words. There may be dozens of these for a single word.

To make an advanced dictionary that will last you for the long term, you will need some linguistic training and/or assistance to make well-informed decisions on these and other issues. Of course, you will also need to keep key community members involved in the decision-making process – so they will need some training as well. A dedicated language worker can be an excellent liaison between the linguistics and community worlds.

LANGUAGE REVIVAL WORKSHOP

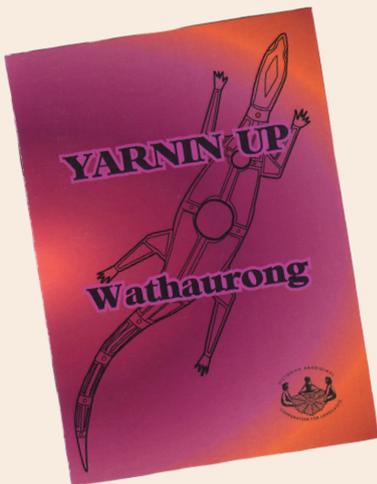
WORD BOOKS

When you have a first-stage dictionary, or at least a good-sized and well-organised collection of words ready for a dictionary, you can use that collection to produce resources for much broader use quite quickly and easily...

MAKING WORD BOOKS

This project has been popular in Victoria and some other areas. We have been making them small enough to fit in a back pocket. They can be produced very cheaply and quickly.

As well as the current dictionary or wordlist, the workshop facilitator should bring some samples of local artwork and/or photos, and/or ask participants to bring some with them.



Wathaurong word book

“There’s a lot more knowledge to go into that dictionary. And when we are done with that dictionary, it will be for the next fifty generations, because it will have that knowledge in it. That stuff that young people are asking me. It won’t be just a word. It’ll have those things that they need. Because there mightn’t be people around to give them that. Or you could have a dictionary that has other dictionaries attached to it, with that cultural knowledge.” - Doris Paton

“They can take the dictionary home, the first stage dictionary like everyone else has got, and really get involved on what this word means and what that word means.” - Lee Healy

1. In the workshop, decide on a small number of themes for the words you want. Examples: body parts, animals, family. Remember that books come in sets of four pages, so a multiple of four works well.
2. Using your dictionary or wordlist, select a first set of words on each of these themes. 10-20 words on each theme is ideal.
3. Write up each set of words on a separate page under their headings.
4. Choose some local artwork or a photo that represents your Country or community for the cover.
5. You may like to also choose a ‘watermark’ to go on the pages inside. This might be a small part of the cover art or photo.
6. Decide what else you need for a quick-reference book. The one illustrated has a spelling guide, acknowledgements, a statement of protocols for use, and a map of Victorian languages. (This step may take a little longer than the workshop time, but you can make the decisions in the workshop and work out who is going to write any extra sections.)
7. After the workshop, print it out, fold and staple and you’re done!

“To get a dictionary, we want it how we would pronounce it, that we can understand and we can read it.” - Uncle Ivan Couzens