

# PRINCIPLES OF LANGUAGE REVIVAL USING LINGUISTICS

Linguistics is the study of languages and how they work. Sometimes learning about linguistics can seem daunting but it can provide some really useful tools for people to use as part of reclaiming their language. Sometimes communities choose to ask a linguist to do some of this work for them.

## DEVELOPING LINGUISTICS KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Anyone who works in language revival is likely to hear about quite a lot of linguistics as time goes by. At one time or another, many language workers and language activists decide that they want to develop their linguistics skills and knowledge so that they can do as much as possible with their language. There are a range of ways to learn about linguistics – contacting a regional language centre can be a good place to start. When you have the linguistics tools in your own hands, you have more power to make strong and lasting decisions for your language.

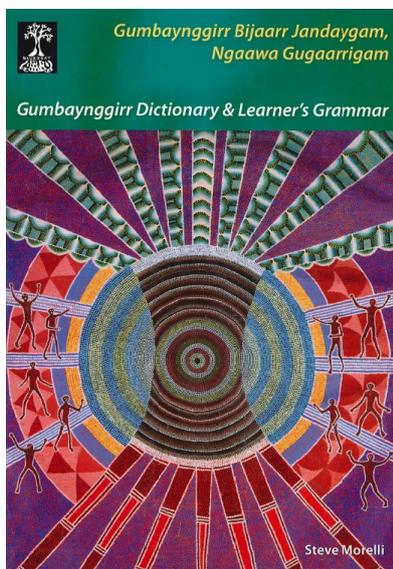
## GETTING THE RELATIONSHIPS RIGHT

It is important to find a good balance between linguistics perspectives and community ways of knowing. When there are strong, healthy relationships in place and a good balance in perspectives, linguists can make really positive contributions. When relationships between communities and linguists are less strong, community members might not trust materials produced by linguists, and linguists can get worried about things like historical accuracy of community-produced materials.

## PUTTING LINGUISTICS TOOLS TO WORK

One of the key strengths of some linguistics knowledge is the confidence it gives people to get more active in how they do language revival. It allows them to have a go – try things out, reflect on what works and then try out some more new things. Linguistics knowledge is also important for understanding historical sources. Many tools that are useful in language revival, such as dictionary development software, also assume some knowledge of linguistics. These tools are a great way to simplify and organise work in some of the big tasks associated with language revival.

As partners or mentors, linguists can support the development of comprehensive and well-analysed dictionaries, descriptions of grammar, and carefully designed and graded learning materials. You might want to 'outsource' some of this work to a linguist, with regular consultations built in, or you may want to work alongside to share knowledge and perspectives as you go.



**juubarr / juuburr** *noun* (R)  
'witchetty grub, edible grub (The four stages for *juubarr* are: [1] 'When he's eating his way in the wood (just hatched from eggs); [2] he turns into *mulugurr*, when he turns fat and yellow and from the *mulugurr* he sort of lose his skin and turns into a *jiiginy* [3]. From a *jiiginy* he turns into a *baany* [4] beetle and he flies away.' (LN) Same stages for →*juundany*.)  
**juuda** *question noun* (locative case)  
'where at?' →**jugi**  
**juuda julu** which one? whichever one (lit. 'where part') • *Mgana ngiinda yarrang, juuda julund' wala ngiinda ngaraynggi*. Take the one, whichever one you might want.

**dawa**; compare to →**jaluganda**.)  
**juum** *noun*  
1. smoke (thin)  
2. cigarette  
**jumbulbang** *noun* big smoke  
**juum waruuguma** (Sm) send a smoke signal (lit. 'make smoke rise')  
**nyaaga juumbu** (smoke) get into (someone's) eyes • *Jaa! Ngaanya nyaawang miil juumbu*. Yuk! Smoke got into my eyes. (lit. 'smoke saw my eyes')  
**juuman** *noun* (Sm)  
long tom (fish)  
**juumburral** *noun* (GL)  
jacky dragon, jacky lizard (*Amphibolurus muricatus*)

Gumbaynggirr dictionary and learner's grammar 2nd Edition

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*“But I feel confident in myself. And I feel more confident now than I ever did. And that’s made me a lot stronger to teach it, because I know a lot more. By doing the phonological reconstruction myself. To do every word. It has really opened up my eyes. And I can see where a linguist is coming from, and I can see where the sources are coming from, to help us with our language.” - Lee Healy*

*“You gotta go down, you gotta keep talking to people all the time about it. If there’s issues that are out in the community, go out there and start tackling them. And say, ‘Well, hang on – come on board. This is an opportunity. Come on board. Don’t knock us down’, you know. In order for it to succeed. And the thing is, when we give it back to the community, they may not want to write it down. They may want to speak a few things. But then, it’s giving it back to the kids, too. How do you do that? I know that people say, ‘Well, hang on – no, I’m too old to do that. Teach the young ones. Teach the grandchildren’, blah blah. But the grandchildren are going to come back to the grandparents and say, ‘How do you say that word? Can you remember that, Grandma or Grandpa?’ They don’t remember it. What’s the sense of just teaching it to the grandchildren? You know, it has to be everybody on board talking it.” - Jenni Beer*

*“And I noticed when I went to university and did linguistics, I was taught that Aboriginal languages mostly had a VSO word order, and that was pretty general. When you’re out there, you realize there’s actually quite bit of flexibility in word order in our languages. There isn’t just a fixed thing, just one way, is there? It can be quite flexible in a lot of languages that I’ve come across. And I think that people tend to go with the English word order. They tend to want to put the adjectives before the nouns. They tend to want to say something in the way they’re used to saying it. But it doesn’t make or break the language if they do that, does it?*

*I think the role of linguistics is like a window and a door or a key. It gives people a key to open up some of the mystery of Language. I get really overwhelmed by people’s responses when something suddenly clicks for them, you know. They sort of go, ‘Wow! I didn’t even notice that before. And now, look, I understand it.’” - Jeanie Bell*

*“Well, when I ask a question, I just want to know how it works, linguistically. Or maybe they could make it a whole workshop thing, like how to make sentences, you know, the proper way. Also, show me grammatical way, give us those skills – but give us a choice. I might choose the other way. Whereas some linguists go, ‘Oh no, that’s not grammatically correct. You can’t print that book.’ And my philosophy is, so what if someone comes better than you – well, actually, I taught em. So, you know, that’s a plus for me too. People who are happy to pass on knowledge, and to grow other people, don’t care about passing it on.” - Lynette Solomon-Dent*

*“Cos I just thought – oh, there’s only select people that could create Language, and linguists went for degrees and Masters and PhDs, because they specialised in it. But to give opportunity for community members to go to the next stage. That was the opportunity that I took with open hands. It was about me taking control and taking ownership.” - Carolyn Briggs*