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A hitch-hiker's guide to Aboriginal language retrieval and revival

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In those days spirits were brave, the stakes were high, men were real men, women were real women ...¹

'Arthur blinked at the screens and felt he was missing something important. Suddenly he realized what it was. 'Is there any tea on this spaceship?' he asked.

1. Preamble

During a conference trip to Canberra in 2013, I reserved some precious time to pay a visit to Luise Hercus in her Australian National University (ANU) office. As usual she was as sharp as a tack, and shared a story of her retrieval work with the Ngarrindjeri language. This time she told me of a very busy episode spent at her home in Victoria many years ago with James Brooksie Kartinyeri. He had come to stay for the weekend, and made constant requests for cups of tea and punctual meals, as she struggled to cope with the equal demands of her small son Iain, while her husband Graham was away. So Luise proceeded to share the agony and ecstasy of recording the Ngarrindjeri language from her demanding guest, knowing his language was in a state of serious decline, and no longer being learnt by children of Iain's age. But I got the distinct impression, as Luise shared this tale, that one of the lessons to be learnt was 'Don't panic!' I am sure this was because Luise knew that whatever little she did manage to retrieve and record during that busy time was going to be of some value in the future.

¹ All 'lesson' quotes are from Adams (2002).

2. Introduction

*I may not have gone where I intended to go,
but I think I have ended up where I intended to be.*

In this paper I share 14 lessons I have learnt (as a non-Indigenous teacher and linguist) over the years working in the field of language retrieval and language revival. These lessons will relay some of the agony and ecstasy of working on a number of languages in South Australia (SA) in particular. They also include some indulgent intermittent advice on how to go about language retrieval and revival, and in what order. This is supported with tangible evidence from actual programs with which I am familiar. What prompted me to write on this topic is the proposal of the Federal Ministry for the Arts to develop a ‘Framework to guide the planning, implementation and review of language projects’ (31st March 2015 Media Release, by the Attorney-General of Australia, Minister for the Arts, Senator the Hon. George Brandis QC). I trust that this *Hitchhiker’s Guide to Retrieval and Revival* will provide just a little insight to those responsible for writing the framework for the Minister and others working in this field.²

3. Lessons learnt - from a white teacher & linguist

Just as the Earth was ‘demolished’ by the galactic travelers (the Vogons) in Adams (2002), so too have many Aboriginal languages been demolished by the colonial travelers of yesteryear. Of the 350 Aboriginal languages once spoken across Indigenous Australia up until 1788, only 13 are currently being transmitted to children (Marmion et al. 2014). In Adams’ book, by good luck the Earth was saved from absolute annihilation by someone making a backup copy, which enabled Earth to be reinstated some time in the future. Similarly, the retrieval efforts of linguists such as Luise Hercus have ensured that there are ‘backup’ recordings (in various forms) of many languages of southern Australia which are now being used to save a considerable number of Indigenous languages of South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria from absolute annihilation (see also Giacon and Lowe, this volume). It is these recordings, made by Luise Hercus and others before her, that make the work possible that I, and many others, do with communities today.

But the actual process of using these recordings (in their various formats) to revive languages is not a straightforward one. In fact, the theory and practice of language revival is now a growing field of research among linguists (see, e.g. Hinton & Hale 2001). But the focus of this paper is on the practical lessons I myself have learnt in South Australia (SA), with the hope that they will provide a useful guide to other hitchhikers on the metaphoric journey of language retrieval and revival.

² See <http://www.firstlanguages.org.au/projects/junyirri-a-framework-for-language-projects.html> [accessed 2016-04-12].

3.1 Lesson number 1: Don't panic!

For a moment, nothing happened. Then, after a second or so, nothing continued to happen.

Reviving a language is hard ... but don't panic ... and do not lose heart, especially when progress seems slow. And try not to judge yourselves, or compare yourselves with other language programs that appear to be making more progress. They also made mistakes on the way. And remember, it is as much about the journey as it is about the final destination. *Evidence*: often language projects feel pressured to produce tangible goods before their short-term external grants have to be acquitted. This was the case when we were funded to produce a wordlist for Ngarrindjeri, in southern SA. To alleviate such pressure, we first produced a trial wordlist (using Microsoft Word, and then Filemaker Pro), and printed 'DRAFT' across the front cover. This satisfied the funding body, yet gave us breathing space to think about the content, format, layout, purpose and audience for the wordlist. It also gave us an invaluable opportunity to consult more with the community to get their feedback on the first draft. I will always remember one Ngarrindjeri man who came up to me and said 'What use is this to me? I can't even read it!' This was an invaluable lesson for us; we had to modify our product. But it also told us that we had to provide supplementary resources, as well as training, to help people use the resources.



Figure 1: Iain Hercus and friends with James Brooksie Kartinyeri in Melbourne c. 1963. Photo: Luise Hercus.

3.2 Lesson number 2: Find any remaining speakers and record them now!

*'Now? inquired Deep Thought.
'Yes! Now ...'*

To commence a language revival program when there are still some living Elders who remember words and phrases is a true gift. So start recording these Elders straight away. Don't waste any time. Thank goodness Luise Hercus recorded those who still had some language knowledge in the 1960s. She understood that languages in southern Australia were perilously close to being lost forever, and sought out everyone she could record. In the case of the Ngarrindjeri man, James Brooksie Kartinyeri, it seems he sought out Luise in Melbourne, and spent a weekend with her in the mid 1960s (see Figure 1).

Luise knew it was essential to use a quality audio recorder to reduce any problems she had of not being able to write down everything he said. This contrasts with Ronald and Catherine Berndt's interviews with Mark Karloan at Murray Bridge in the early 1940s, where no audio recorder was available. They spelt the words in their notes to their best ability, but it is apparent their transcriptions have problems. In the modern era, there are no excuses for not audio recording Elders on quality devices. Worrying about how to spell the words can come later.

Evidence: we started recording the knowledgeable Ngarrindjeri Elders as soon as we began producing resources for the language in 2003. We used a good microphone and saved the recordings as WAV files using Audacity software on a laptop. Twelve years later those Elders have all passed away. If we hadn't acted then we would have lost the opportunity to hear these respected Elders pronouncing words and phrases as they remembered them being spoken when they grew up. Since then a number of Elders in the community have also accessed the sound recordings made by both Luise Hercus and Catherine Ellis in the mid-1960s to try and fill the gaps in their own understandings. We know there are also recordings made by Tindale on wax cylinders from the 1930s, which we are yet to utilise.

3.3 Lesson number 3: Decide on an orthography early

Earthman, it is sometimes hard to follow your mode of speech.

Early in a revival program is wise to finalise an orthography that is widely accepted. When we learn a language as an adult it really helps to have good written resources – especially when there are no fluent speakers to learn from. But in order to produce these language resources the community has to agree early on how to write and spell words; it is highly preferable that the orthography is acceptable to everyone. Once you have decided upon that orthography, it is wise to stick to it, otherwise it will be painful, and a lot of hard work, to change everything after you have produced lots of written resources.

Choosing this accepted orthography shouldn't be that hard, considering that most Aboriginal languages have similar sound systems. The main decisions are:

- whether to use voiceless symbols <p, t, k> or voiced symbols <b, d, g> for the stops (which have no voicing contrast)
- whether to use <rt, rn, rl> or <ṛ, ṛ̃, ṛ̣> for retroflex (apico-domal) consonants
- whether to use <r, rr> or <ṛ, r> for the post-alveolar continuant and flap/trill respectively
- whether to use <j> or <ty> or <tj> or <dj> for the lamino-palatal stop.

Neighbouring communities often choose their orthography by wanting to look different from that of their nearest neighbour. The Narungga, for example, chose the voiced stops <b, dh, d, rd, dj, g> so their language looks different from the Kurna voiceless stops <p, th, t, rt, ty, k>. They chose an 'identity of difference' through their spelling system.

For vowels, most Aboriginal languages use <a, i, u> for the short vowels, and <aa, ii, uu> for long vowels. Very occasionally, some communities adopt a spelling system with English-like sound representations such as <oo> for the high back vowel and <ee> for the high front vowel – but this inevitably leads to pronouncing the language more like English.

Evidence 1: The language revival movement for Adnyamathanha (originally Flinders Ranges, SA) has still not agreed on a common orthography, and has had three different systems; this seems to be impeding the production of essential resources and may explain why early efforts in Adnyamathanha have gone into producing animations (e.g. *Wadu Matyidi*), rather than written resources.

Evidence 2: The Kurna language (Adelaide Plains) began its revival movement entirely from written sources, most by German missionaries in the 1800s. The revival began in 1990 (see Amery 2000), and decided to avoid an inevitable difficult orthography debate, and pronunciation uncertainty, by adopting the spelling of the 19th century missionaries. Yet two decades later, the inadequacy of this spelling system became clear with its double letters <tt, nn>, etc., lack of representation of interdental and retroflex sounds, and confusion over the different r-sounds. This led to revision of the orthography; however this late change caused anything but peace. The dust is still settling. The extra work it generated to 'revise' written products that were under development or already in the public domain has been huge.

Evidence 3: Barnjarla (eastern Eyre Peninsula) has recently embarked on a revival program, led by Ghil'ad Zuckermann, who champions 'hybridity' in 'Revival Linguistics' (see Zuckermann & Monaghan 2012: 120). He has encouraged the Barnjarla to use <oo> for the high back vowel *u*. This seems confusing, as learners are tempted to say the sound as in English; it also makes the spelling system out-of-step with the neighbouring (linguistically related) Adnyamathanha, Narungga and Kurna, which use <u>. It is also different to most other revival programs in the state. Take, e.g. the 'newly created word' in Barnjarla for 'beanie, bobble hat' which is written *ganoo ganoo moona* (see Dean 2013). Zuckermann would argue that it does not matter that Barnjarla people pronounce it with the vowel of 'moon', as he aims for hybridity, not authenticity.

3.4 Lesson number 4: Get a draft dictionary out early

'We demand rigidly defined areas of doubt and uncertainty!'

Once an orthography has been finalised for a language being revived, a priority is production of a dictionary. People learning a language cannot do much if they do not have a reliable wordlist or dictionary. And looking up words is hard if the dictionary does not include a finder list (English-to-Aboriginal language index). Dictionary making is not an easy task, and the help of a linguist to interpret source materials is essential. Knowledge of the latest and best software available for dictionary making is another essential. Currently communities are using Miromaa, Toolbox or FLEx.

Evidence 1: Most languages in SA being revived have put early efforts into dictionary making. Kurna still do not have a published dictionary with a finder list from English-to-Kurna, although there is a draft dictionary with a finder list currently in limited circulation. One Kurna Elder discouraged the production of a finder list for many years because she did not want non-Aboriginal people looking up Kurna words for names of buildings and parks etc. without first asking permission. There has been a Kurna resource book *Warra Kurna* available since very early on with a Kurna-English wordlist, organised by topic, along with a reprint of Teichelmann & Schürmann (1840) grammar and vocabulary (Amery 2003).

Evidence 2: For Ngarrindjeri, a comprehensive dictionary with a finder list was compiled very early in the revival process. It took much work to combine the twenty-odd written sources, as well as the 500 words collected from living Elders. The digital format had many different stages, beginning with Microsoft Word, then transferring to Filemaker Pro, then to Toolbox, and now to FLEx. I produced this dictionary together with the community, under the management and leadership of Syd Sparrow, a Ngarrindjeri academic based at the University of South Australia (see Gale & Sparrow, 2010). We recently transferred the dictionary data to Lexique Pro as an easy-to-read and search interface.

3.5 Lesson number 5: Language revival is very difficult without a learners' guide

'Did I do anything wrong today,' he said, 'or has the world always been like this and I've been too wrapped up in myself to notice?'

Another very desirable product after a dictionary is a Learners' Guide which is easy to read and understand by community members. The ideal Learners' Guide outlines the grammar of the language simply, and contains many example sentences for learners to draw from. Unfortunately, for many languages of southern Australia, there are no adequate archival materials or language records from which to produce a Learners' Guide. The Ngadjuri people of SA have asked linguists for help with a Learners' Guide, but it is impossible to produce one due to the paucity of sources. By contrast, some languages have comprehensive published grammars, often written as PhD theses for an academic audience, but these unfortunately are virtually unintelligible to Aboriginal people reviving their languages.

Evidence 1: Writing and publishing a Learners' Guide for Ngarrindjeri was accomplished early in the revival project, but the final product (which I wrote with a Ngarrindjeri colleague) is still difficult to read and understand without training. This contrasts with the highly commended Kaurna Learners' Guide (Amery & Simpson, 2013; reviewed by Ostler 2013) which is written simply, and is accessible for the lay person, with many sentence examples. However, because of the book's size and bulk (260 pages), uptake by the community has not been as vigorous as expected. The cheaper 45 page Kaurna Alphabet Book (also with useful phrases) sells more readily.

Evidence 2: Dieri is a South Australian language fortunate to be richly supplied with archival language material (including a New Testament translation), and a quality academic grammar (Austin 1981). Unfortunately, even the keenest Dieri 'language warrior' finds the grammar hard to access and understand. These days, people want small (but detailed) pocket books, or apps on their mobile phones, with recorded words and phrases as sound files. Such phone apps have been produced for other Aboriginal languages, but none are yet completed for SA languages.

3.6 Lesson number 6: Language revival must primarily involve community

*'If there's anything more important than my ego around,
I want it caught and shot now.'*

It makes obvious sense that language revival programs should involve the actual language community in the production of materials, right from the start. Unfortunately, some university researchers do not understand this. Funding bodies measure program successes primarily by the tangible product outcomes, project reports, and the prompt acquittal of funds. Whilst these measures are important, even more important is capacity building of the community who will use these products, which is harder to measure. I argue that making tangible language products should provide valuable learning experiences for the community involved, as well as give them a real sense of ownership of the revival process.

Evidence 1: I have been directly involved with the production of large dictionaries, picture dictionaries, alphabet books and/or illustrated wordlists for Ngarrindjeri, Kaurna and Ngadjuri. For Ngarrindjeri, I worked with Dorothy French, a respected Ngarrindjeri woman, who took responsibility for choosing the words and collecting the photos. This took well over a year, and her grandchildren became very good at taking photos. Dorothy also became very proficient at using the project laptop, and got to learn how to do book layouts in *Publisher*, how to record using *Audacity*, how to spell the many words she recorded from Elders, and how to put them all into a *PowerPoint* presentation, for a CD to accompany the booklets. We resisted pressure to engage a professional graphic designer. Similarly, Pat Waria-Reed and I worked together on a Ngadjuri picture dictionary over a long period of time. Again we did it together using *Publisher* (much to the annoyance of the printer, who wanted us to upgrade to *InDesign*). Pat learnt much about the spelling and logic of Ngadjuri words, and her family got involved in taking the photos. For the Kaurna Alphabet Book we engaged a graphic designer (resulting in a more polished final product),

but the Kaurna community were intimately involved in gathering the content for both editions of the Alphabet Book, and really owned the project.

Evidence 2: An alternative method used by some university-managed revival projects is to employ bright, young research assistants to compile wordlists and picture dictionaries. If these assistants take these tasks on as undergraduate honours degree projects, they sometimes do the work for free. Over the years I have offered support to young, frustrated University of Adelaide research assistants who have found it hard to motivate themselves. I remember the despair of one such assistant engaged to compile a wordlist of the west coast Mirning language from a field notebook generously given to the university by the respected linguist Geoff O'Grady. She said to me one day: 'If I could only meet just one Mirning person'. Ironically, a Mirning man came to the university recently asking for help in reviving his language. I asked him if he had a copy of that Mirning wordlist made earlier, but he said he was completely unaware of its existence.

3.7 Lesson number 7: Small is beautiful

A common mistake that people make when trying to design something completely foolproof is to underestimate the ingenuity of complete fools.

Recent language funding allocations in Australia demonstrate that government funding bodies favour giving their money to larger, established organisations, who can theoretically offer support to lots of language groups. It seems governments like the one-stop-shop when it comes to acquittals and reporting. It saves them consulting and working with lots of smaller organisations. This arrangement, however, in times of limited money, is inevitably at the expense of smaller independent, community organisations who just want to work on their own language and cultural projects. Small can be beautiful, especially for community language groups working at the grass-roots level on projects that meet a very real need in their community.

Evidence: The Ngarrindjeri language revival movement that began in the mid-1980s has been productive and demonstrated 'value for money'; however, Ngarrindjeri language funding in the past has been primarily via universities (not by choice). In South Australia, to open up language funding opportunities at the community level, a number of smaller Aboriginal incorporated bodies have been recently established (with the encouragement of government bureaucrats), such as MIPAAC (*Miwi-inyeri Pelepi-ambi Aboriginal Corporation*), formed to promote language and cultural activities among Ngarrindjeri living in the Fleurieu region of their country. Unfortunately, such new organisations became ineligible to apply for language funds which were frozen in 2013 by the incoming Liberal government. Only established language organisations are now eligible to apply through a 'direct offer' system. Furthermore, under the new guidelines Federal funding will not be offered to competing groups wanting to work on the same language. After decades of working in the field of Aboriginal education and languages, I am yet to meet a united Aboriginal language group who want to be represented and controlled by one single organisation.

3.8 Lesson number 8: Aboriginal workers want to work on their own languages

“You know,” said Arthur, “it’s at times like this,.... I really wish I’d listened to what my mother told me when I was young.”

“Why, what did she tell you?”

“I don’t know, I didn’t listen.”

Most Aboriginal people I know who have an interest in their own language and feel the strong link it has with their identity do not want to work on other Aboriginal languages, especially if their own is in need of much work. And why should they? So building on lesson number 7 above (Small is Beautiful), it makes sense not to demand that Aboriginal people, employed by organisations or institutions, work on other Aboriginal languages. This is a factor that should cause funding bodies to rethink how they distribute their money, and whether they are being fair and equitable in refusing financial support to smaller community organisations.

Evidence: The Aboriginal people I work with only want to learn and produce resources in their own languages; they have no interest in working on other people’s languages. They really enjoy, however, visiting other language programs, and sharing their experiences of revival at language forums and conferences, especially the biennial *Puliima Conference*, run by the Miromaa Language Centre. However, there are exceptions, and this is usually with Aboriginal people who are living long term on the country of other language groups. Emma Hay is a Narungga woman who grew up and continues to live on Boandik/Bunganditj country in Mount Gambier. She has been a pillar of strength as the founding manager of the Boandik language revival movement, which began in 2011 (Gale 2014). There are other Aboriginal people too, who are employed in schools, and have chosen to learn and teach the local language of the region where they live and work, particularly the Kurna language. And of course there are the Aboriginal linguists, such as Jeanie Bell, a respected Butchulla woman, who has been a true champion of many issues relating to Aboriginal languages, especially in the Northern Territory (see Bell 1993).

3.9 Lesson number 9: Offer training early

Protect me from knowing what I don’t need to know. Protect me from even knowing that there are things to know that I don’t know. Protect me from knowing that I decided not to know about the things that I decided not to know about. Amen.

Offering formal language training for adults wanting to learn an Aboriginal language is a good way to ensure learners put effort into their language learning. It also ensures language outcomes for funding bodies. But more importantly, it is a convenient way to bring like-minded people together on a regular basis to learn, speak, read, sing, compose, engineer, read about, discuss, promote, debate, teach, share and revive their language together. If regular training sessions involve the key people who are involved in a language revival movement, they can become

the hub of language development. Sustained quality training also helps increase the number of people actively involved in the revival journey, and therefore gives it strength over the long term. The biggest challenge in offering such training is to find the right course, as well as teachers and funding.

Evidence: In SA, we embarked on training for adults, wanting to revive their language, from the beginning. Kurna lessons for adults began in 1994. The formal TAFE qualifications we have offered in more recent years are through the Aboriginal Access Centre (AAC). These adult courses were taught within the context of Aboriginal languages being taught to students in the state school sector since the late 1980s. These school programs triggered a need for adults to train as teachers in the schools, especially for Kurna where the majority of schools are located. We are still struggling to meet the demand for Aboriginal language teachers in SA. For the Ngarrindjeri we first offered informal training for language teachers from 2004 at Murray Bridge school. We then offered a formal IVEC Certificate I (Ngarrindjeri) from 2006, and had 16 graduates. Then people demanded more training, so I took time out to develop two nationally accredited TAFE courses: Certificate III in *Learning an Endangered Aboriginal Language* and a Certificate IV in *Teaching an Endangered Aboriginal Language*. This was all done with Federal government funding.

Since 2011, we have run these courses for a diverse range of languages. For the Certificate III we have 11 graduates for Ngarrindjeri, nine for Kurna, five for Wirangu, one for Adnyamathanha, and one for Narungga. An additional surprise, 12 Pitjantjatjara students (who are fluent in their first language) who requested and completed their Certificate III in 2013-2014. We now also have graduates for the Certificate IV from Ngarrindjeri, Kurna, Adnyamathanha, Narungga and Pitjantjatjara. Note that the bulk of funding to run these training courses has had to come from outside the TAFE sector, either from Canberra or the state education department, because we could not meet the conditions of the AAC (that is: only Aboriginal students in class, paid teachers have to have a Certificate IV TAE, we must use TAFE premises and vehicles, and they will not fund catering, accommodation or travel). I have been overwhelmed by the positive outcomes from these training courses and have witnessed the emotional, educational, linguistic, social, cultural and personal growth and benefits to our graduates.

3.10 Lesson number 10: Don't be frightened to teach grammar

Resistance is useless.

It is not fashionable in language teaching circles to admit to teaching grammar in school classrooms, yet many language teachers do, and grammar lessons are a given in the tertiary sector. In Gale (2012) I advise teachers that they should not be frightened to teach formal grammar lessons in a language revival context. I was quite amazed by the feedback from other teachers and linguists working in the field, saying how gratified they were to read about the teaching of grammar. There is no doubt that learning a language also demands natural language learning methods such as those espoused by the 'Master-Apprentice'

approach. But when a language is being brought back from written archival sources, an understanding of grammar is essential.

Evidence: We have always taught grammar in formal classes for adults learning Ngarrindjeri and Kurna in SA. That does not mean there are no critics (see, e.g. Zuckermann's 2013 views on 'excessive use of highfalutin (often Latin-based) grammatical terminology'). Of course there is a limit to how much terminology one should teach, but one of the units in the Certificate IV *Teaching an Endangered Aboriginal Language* is 'Understand the terminology and metalanguage to talk about the target Aboriginal language'. This unit remains in the next version of the Certificate IV, despite criticism from the AAC in TAFE who want a course that can be taught entirely by non-linguists. My experience is that Aboriginal people feel empowered by the knowledge and use of some linguistic terminology, such as 'ergative' and 'interlinear gloss'.

3.11 Lesson number 11: Embrace song as a tool of revival

I want to go somewhere I've never been, and I'd like to go with you.

Many language revival programs have chosen to embrace song and 'singing in language' as a tool. Writing, singing, translating, and performing songs, ditties, hymns, or traditional chants can really enhance the language learning process. Even if singing in a choir or band is 'somewhere you have never been before', and you don't believe you can sing, there is much to be learnt and gained from it. Singing is well recognised as a mnemonic device, and it is also a lot of fun, and therefore good for one's soul and sense of well-being. But there is also much language that can be learnt during the processes of writing new songs, or translating popular hymns and songs for public performance.

Evidence: The language revival movement really accelerated for Kurna when Auntie Josie Agius, a Kurna Elder, demanded at a 1990 song-writing workshop for Ngarrindjeri and Narungga that the consultant linguist (Rob Amery) help her write songs in the Kurna language. From then on Kurna has been used to construct whole texts, rather than just for naming things around Adelaide. Further song writing has also followed, led by Nelson Varcoe, culminating in a *Kurna Songbook* (Schultz et al. 1999). Similarly, Ngarrindjeri has been used consistently for translating hymns and composing new songs, entirely 'in language', since 2003. A significant milestone was the performance of a very old and favourite hymn *The Old Rugged Cross* (by a choir formed from a TAFE language class) at the re-opening of the famous Raukkan Church (which features on the Australian \$50 note). The choir spoke of feeling goose-bumps and having tears of pride as we performed that day (see ABC TV Stateline, 2009; ABC TV 7.30 Report Adelaide, August 2013). Other language choirs have also formed in the state, and performed at major events, such as the Adnyamathanha Women's Choir who regularly perform with Dame Kiri Te Kanawa at *Opera in the Outback*. Singing in language over the years at this event has been a great source of pride for these women, but also a means for re-learning the language from those such as Kaelene McMillan and Lilly Neville, who still speak their language fluently.

3.12 Lesson number 12: Develop dialogues to learn off-by-heart

‘Exactly!’ said Deep Thought. ‘So once you do know what the question actually is, you’ll know what the answer means.’

One tried and tested method is to learn useful phrases and dialogues off-by-heart, developing meaningful and useful Question-Answer dialogues, which can be spoken and used for frequent daily activities (e.g. ‘Hey, brother. How are you going? Where have you come from? How did you get here? You staying for long?’). These dialogues can be constructed as a learning exercise in itself. Amery (2013) calls this the *Formulaic Method*. Again, developing these dialogues is something most efficiently done as part of formal training, then shared more broadly out in the community.

Evidence: One of the key Pitjantjatjara language tasks that students have to undertake at a summer school, offered annually by the University of South Australia, is to learn a long dialogue off-by-heart, but in three parts. By the end of the first week, the students doing the course for credit have to perform the dialogue in front of their peers, without any prompts or cheat sheets. It works. We duplicated this same task in our Certificate III Ngarrindjeri classes at Victor Harbor. And again it worked:

Ei katjeri!, Nginti wethun lingling?, Ngolai? Pintjathawi? Yekau. Anu Nginti
Hey good looking, do you want a cup of tea? Milk? Sugar? Yes. Thankyou.

3.13 Lesson number 13: Every language community wants their own linguist

To give real service you must add something which cannot be bought or measured with money, and that is sincerity and integrity.

Language revival requires considerable interpretation of written language resources and archival material. The poor quality of these sources often demands the skills and linguistic understandings of a trained linguist. Furthermore, with the rapid changes in technology, and the need to embrace this technology for the digital documentation and production of language resources (see Thieberger, this volume), there is a need for workers who know how to use it. Linguists generally try to keep up with these advances through their networks. They therefore have much to offer revival programs, even though there are some Aboriginal revival programs who reject linguists, and want to go it alone. Of course this is their prerogative.

Evidence: All of the languages in SA that are under revival and making progress have a linguist who is supporting them, although at different levels of intensity and despite unpredictable funding. My experience is that each language program wants their own linguist, and they want them for the long haul. Over the years, Barry Blake has been there for the Boandik, Rob Amery for the Kaurna, Mary-Anne Gale for the Ngarrindjeri, Paul Monaghan for the

Wirangu, Peter Austin for Dieri, Greg Wilson for Arabana (and Dieri), Guy Tunstill for the Adnyamathanha, Christina Eira for Narungga (until she moved to Victoria) and more recently Ghil'ad Zuckermann for Barnjarla. Other language groups are looking on and asking 'Why can't we have our own linguist?' To the funding bodies, I say: 'Why not?'

3.14 Lesson number 14: A hide of a rhinoceros helps language revival survival

'Funny,' he intoned funereally, 'how just when you think life can't possibly get any worse it suddenly does.'

Language reclamation and revival is hard work: it is not only mentally taxing, but is also theoretically challenging and emotionally draining. In addition, it is politically and socially fraught with sensitive issues, and not just from a white linguist perspective. Aboriginal people often feel really strongly about their language, and quite rightly get upset when they see things they don't like. Issues such as who can teach it, and how and where it should be taught and learnt are important to them. So working through these issues can be difficult and taxing. But this passion can be harnessed in a positive way, and become the driving force that helps people persist with the huge difficulties and challenges of reviving their languages.

Evidence: One of the units offered as part of the Certificate IV in *Teaching an Endangered Aboriginal Language* is: 'Protocols and ethics of teaching endangered Aboriginal languages'. I have taught this unit with Ngarrindjeri, Kurna, Narungga, and Adnyamathanha, as well as with Pitjantjatjara students. I am always amazed at how much interest and discussion this unit sparks. Aboriginal people feel extremely strongly about their language and language issues, and this can be a sustaining source of strength, as well as an occasional cause of conflict. I have witnessed many fights over the years sparked by language issues; it is good that people feel such passion, but I have also found my recently acquired training as a counsellor has helped.

4. Conclusion

'The Answer to the Great Question ... Of Life, the Universe and Everything ... Is ... Forty-two,' said Deep Thought, with infinite majesty and calm.'

Has this paper given a definitive answer to the Great Question of 'How do you retrieve and revive an Aboriginal language'? I do not think so, but I do think I can safely say the answer is not 'Forty-two'. What this paper has set out to do is provide 14 useful lessons that I have learnt as a language teacher and linguist who has now been working in the field for quite some time. I trust these lessons will be a useful guide for those embarking on the tough journey through the galaxy

of language revival. I also hope they will be of use to the funding bodies, as they contemplate how and where to distribute their limited money. Maybe they will also be of use to those composing 'Frameworks' for Aboriginal language work.

Time has proven that any agonies endured by documentary linguists in the past, such as by Luise Hercus and others, have well and truly brought their rewards in the present, particularly for the Aboriginal people now using those documents. It was heart-warming to hear three Ngarrindjeri language workers thank Luise in Canberra in 2009 (see Figure 2), and three Wirangu workers in 2012 (see Mobile Language Team Website, News Item). I also took great pleasure in relaying a 'Thankyou' to Luise, from the Nukunu man Jared Thomas on a recent trip to Canberra. Jared, who is a published author and PhD graduate, considers his dog-eared copy of the Nukunu dictionary (Hercus 1992) one of his most treasured possessions.

Even though the conclusion to this paper may be that Aboriginal language work and language revival is a journey full of agony and ecstasy, I think I can safely declare that it is well worth hitching a ride on that galactic journey.



Figure 2: Phyllis Williams, Mary-Anne Gale, Luise Hercus, Eileen McHughes and Verna Koolmatrie in Canberra, 2009. Photo supplied by Mary-Anne Gale.

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