Language documentation, description and revitalisation: experiences in South Australia

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Overview

- Theoretical preliminaries
  - Meta-documentation
- Case study
  - Diyari (Dieri) South Australia
- Conclusions and Q&A

Meta-documentation (Austin 2013)

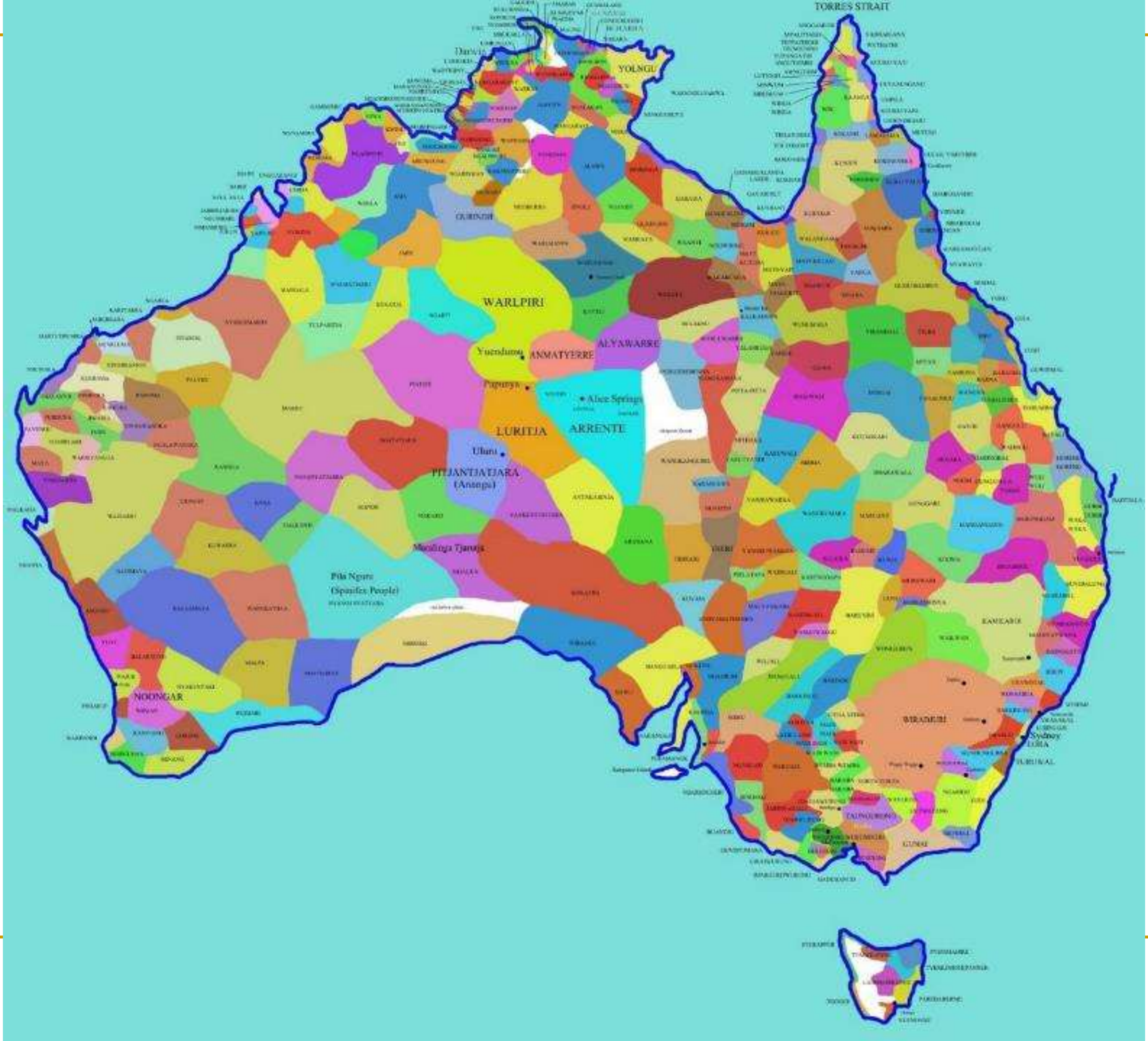
- Documentation of documentation: project goals, history, people, biographies, methods, tools, relationships, agreements, outcomes
- Very rarely made explicit by researchers (cf. grant applic.)
- cf. Woodbury (2011: 161) ‘corpus theorization’: ‘I will call the ideas according to which a corpus is said to **cohere** or “**add up**” its (corpus) theorization. Corpus theorizations, and even principles for corpus theorization, can both offer a space for invention and become a matter of contention and debate.’ (emphasis added)
- cf. Woodbury (2011: 161) ‘project design’: ‘the participants, their purposes, and the various stakeholders in the activity or program of activity or project’

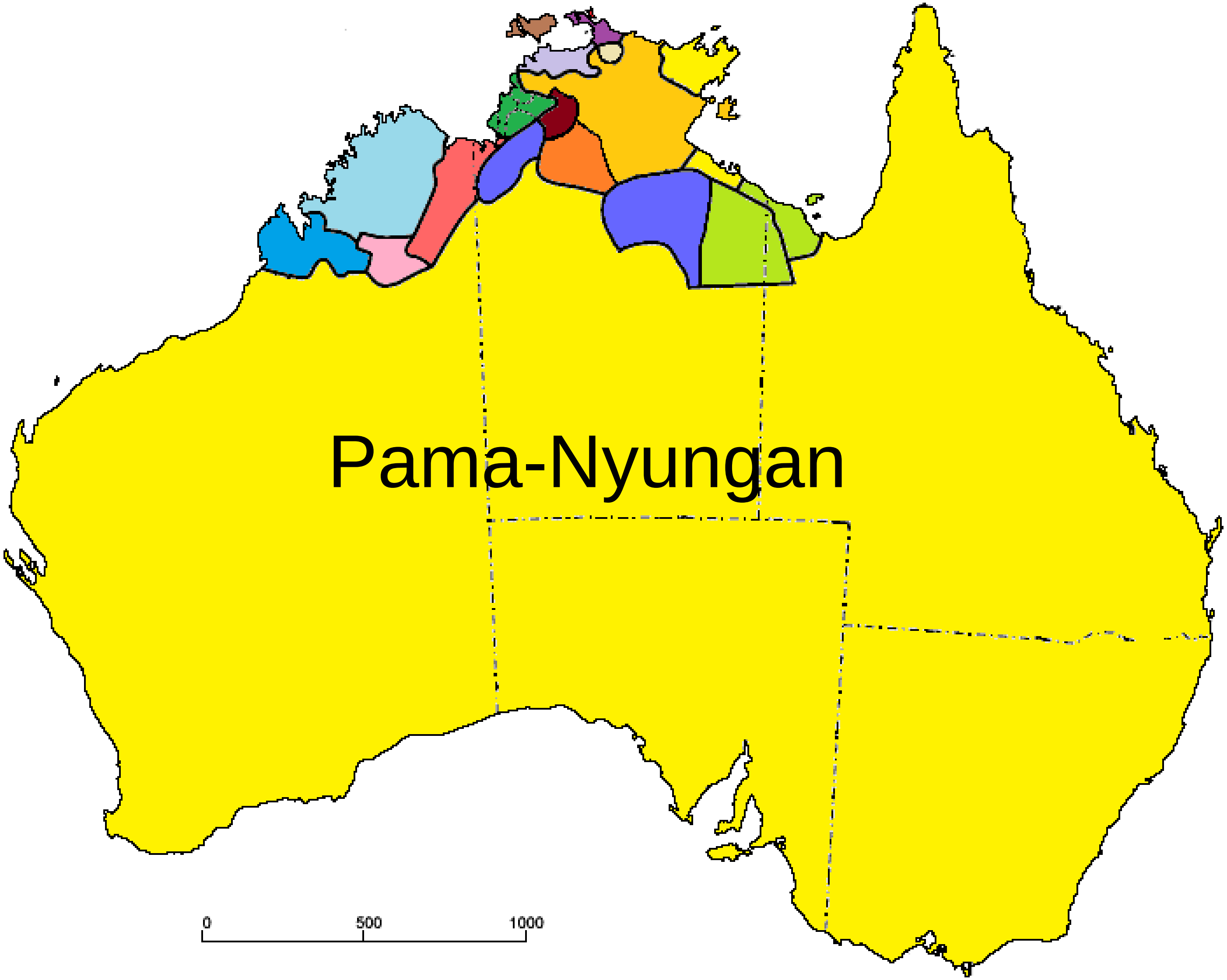
Meta-documentation

- Nathan (2010: 196): ‘[A]nother way to think of metadata is as meta-documentation, the documentation of your data itself, and the conditions (linguistic, social, physical, technical, historical, biographical) under which it was produced. Such meta-documentation should be as rich and appropriate as the documentary materials themselves.’
- Why? (i.e. isn’t it superfluous and overkill?)
  - to develop good ways of presenting and using language documentations
  - for future preservation of the outcomes of current projects, assisting sustainability by ensuring continuity of projects, people, and products
  - helping future researchers learn from successes and failed experiments
  - to document IP contributions and career trajectories

Components

- Stakeholder identities, roles and relationships
- Attitudes and Politics
- Research methodology and methods, including tools
- Project biography and history
- Agreements (formal and informal)


TORRES STRAIT
Darwin
YOLNGU
WARLPIRI
Yuendumu
ANMATYERRE
ALYAWARRE
Papunya
Alice Springs
LURITJA
ARRENTE
Uluru
PITJANTJATJARA
(Anangu)
Maralinga Tjarutja
Pila Nguru
(Spinifex People)
NOONGAR
KAMILAROI
WIRADJURI
Sydney
EORA
THARAWAL
GUNAI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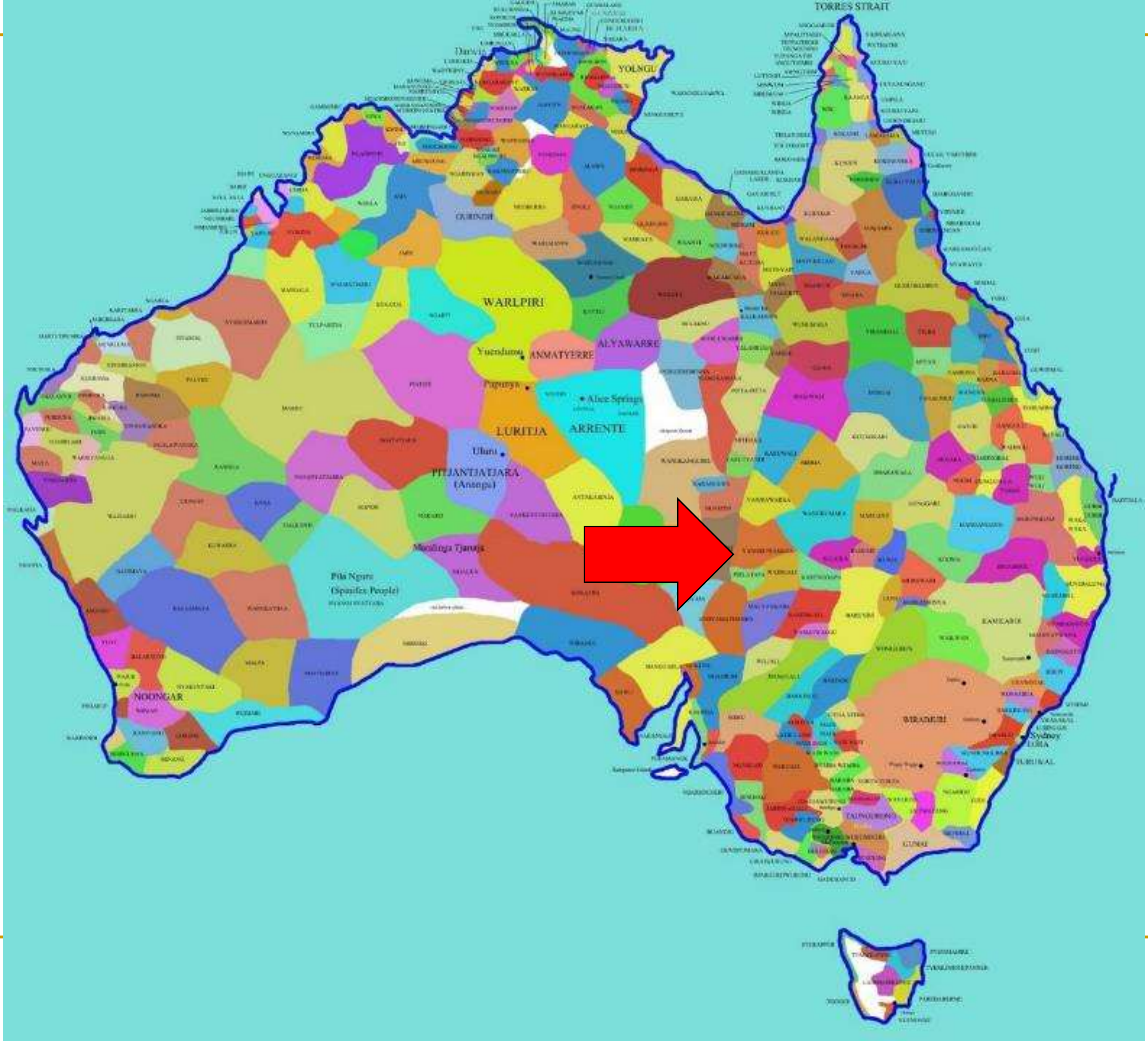
TORRES STRAIT
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Alice Springs
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(Anangu)
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(Spinifex People)
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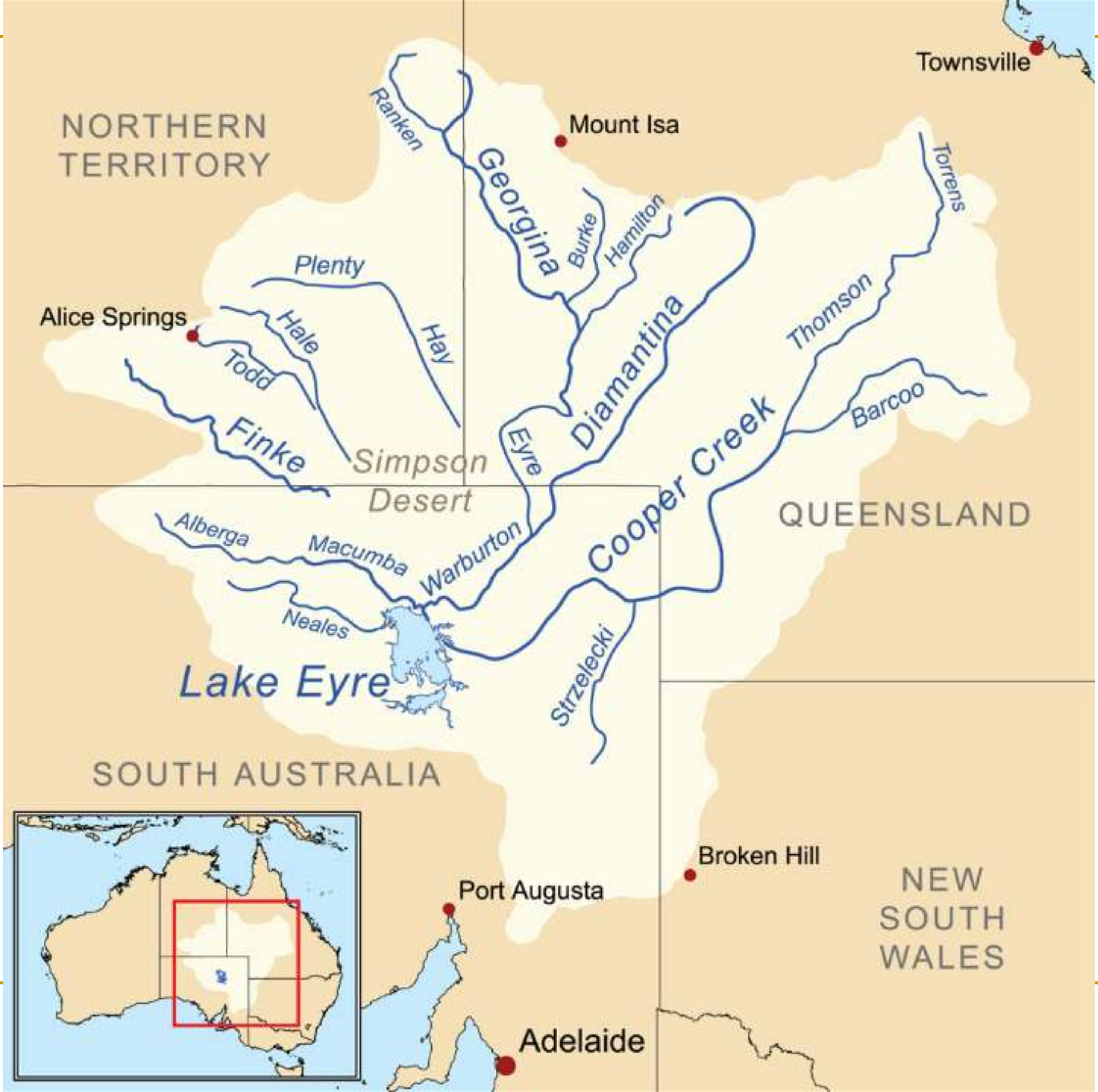
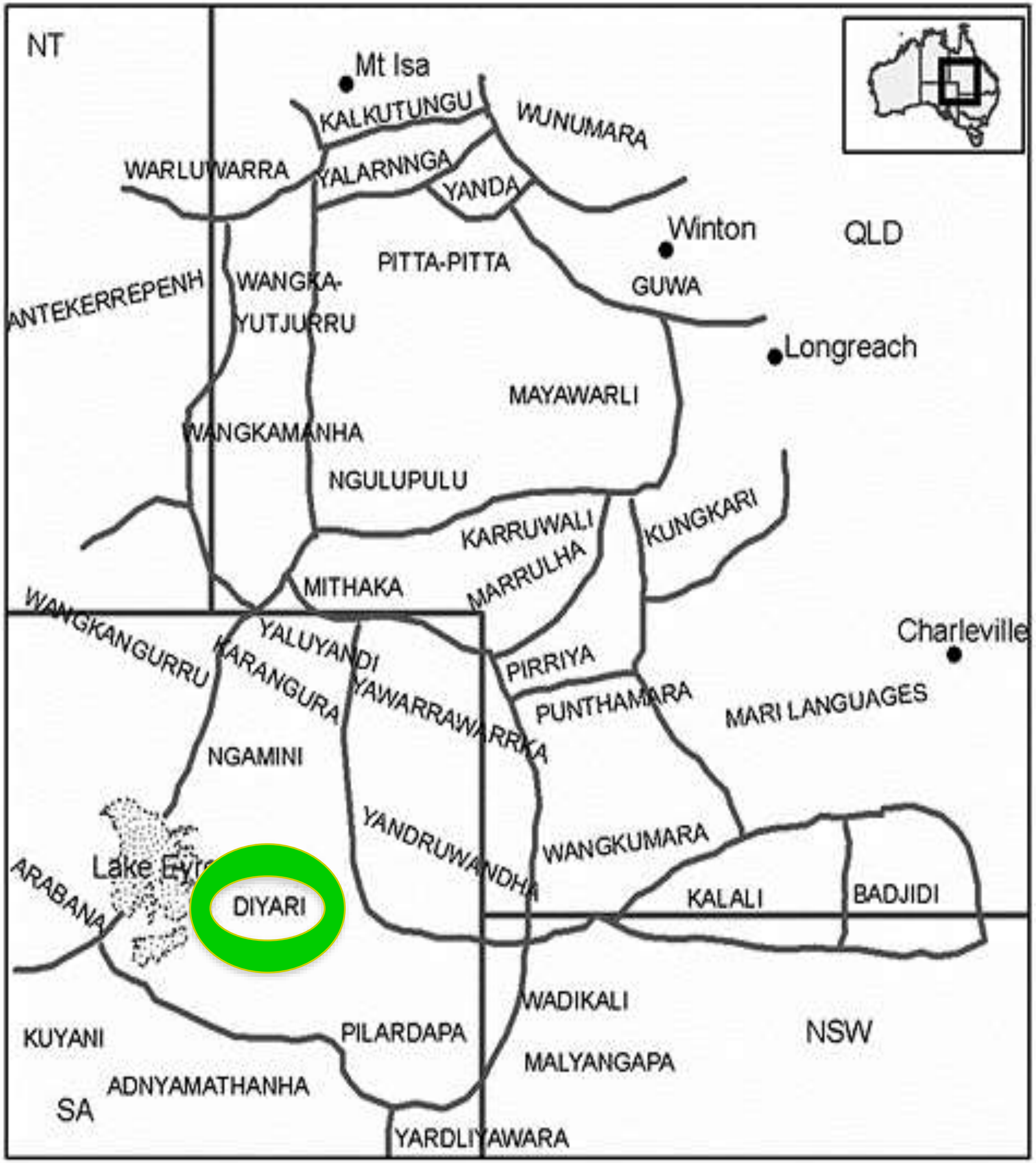
WIRADJURI
Sydney
EORA
THURUWAL
TAUNGURONG
GUNAI


NORTHERN TERRITORY
QUEENSLAND
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
NEW SOUTH WALES
Townsville
Mount Isa
Alice Springs
Broken Hill
Port Augusta
Adelaide
Ranken
Georgina
Burke
Hamilton
Torrens
Plenty
Hale
Todd
Hay
Diamantina
Thomson
Barcoo
Finke
Simpson Desert
Eyre
Cooper Creek
Alberga
Macumba
Warburton
Neales
Strzelecki
Lake Eyre


NT
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ANTEKERREPENH
WANGKA-
YUTJURRU
Longreach
MAYAWARLI
WANGKAMANHA
NGULUPULU
KUNGKARI
KARRUWALI
MARRULHA
MITHAKA
WANGKANGURRU
YALUYANDI
KARANGURA
PIRRIYA
Charleville
PUNTHAMARA
MARI LANGUAGES
YAWARRAWARRKA
NGAMINI
YANDRUWANDHA
WANGKUMARA
Lake Eyre
ARABANA
DIYARI
KALALI
BADJIDI
WADIKALI
NSW
KUYANI
PILARDAPA
MALYANGAPA
ADNYAMATHANHA
SA
YARDLIYAWARA

Diyari (Dieri) (1974-78)

- 4th year undergraduate honours, introduced to ‘moral research’ approach and methods by Luise Hercus: individual-centred respect, qualitative dialogic interaction, joint construction of outcomes, co-authorships
- PhD aimed at grammar production (Austin 1981)
- About 12 multilingual speakers who learned Diyari as children, in daily use in some families (for history see Austin 2014)
- Moved on to WA in 1978

Social shifts

- 1992 Mabo decision overturns *terra nullius*
- 1997 Diyari group lodges land claim
- 2001 formation of Dieri Aboriginal Corporation – 600 members in NSW & SA
- May 2012 determination of native title to ancestral lands
- 47,000 square kilometres (about 20 times ACT)
- second Consent Determination 26th February 2014 added to this land

Native title May 2012 (lodged 1997)

National Native Title Register Extract

Re-engagement – Dieri ILS project

- 2013 workshops: February Adelaide, March Port Augusta, April Adelaide, August Port Augusta
- Materials development with teacher-linguist Greg Wilson – songs, bilingual dictionary, Willsden Primary school language programme
- Blog dieriyawarra.wordpress.com
- 116 posts, 48,100 page views (as of 2024-02-22), gets 50-100 views per week
- (Added podcasts in 2023)
- Community inclusion and engagement process

SEAFOO

March 2013 workshop, 4 generations

Writing songs

ngapa-ngapa pirna ngariyi
ngarrimatha wakarayi
thalara pirna kurdayi
ngayanarni mithanhi
daku pirna thana
matya ngayana pankiyilha
ngapa pirna ngakayi
parru pirna pakarna

Lots of water is coming down
A flood is coming
Lots of rain is falling
In our country
There are big sandhills
So we are happy now
Lots of water is flowing
And big fish (are coming) too

Methods

- Based on tracing connections back to people on the Lutheran mission that closed 1916 (‘heritage’)
- Anchor for ways of speaking is one lady born in 1930 (granddaughter of my 1970s teacher) with all interested others contributing
- Linguistic goal is creation of songs (new, translated) that iconically celebrate people-land
- Process (workshops, meeting up, participation in events) is most important outcome, not exchange of denoting and predicating and producing ‘stuff’

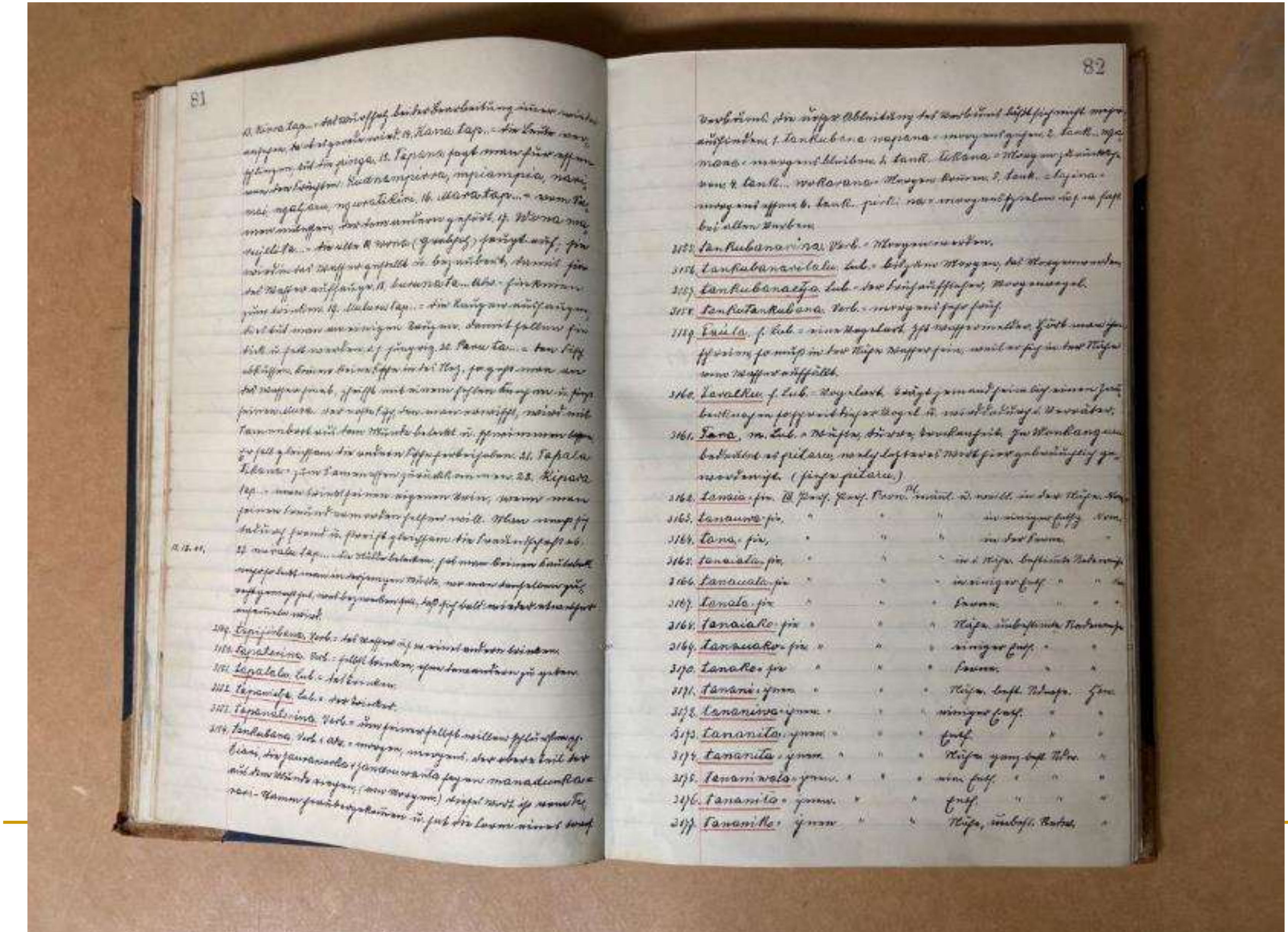
Trip to Dieri country (2022-12-07)

- DAC organized and funded trip to Killalpaninna
- Multi-party team: 4 generations of Dieri, linguist, anthropologist, archaeologist, plant specialist, community development specialist, videographer
- Goals and methods set by DAC participants – documenting plants and uses (culturally embedded), interviews as experientially-embedded conversations, youth engagement (research by?)
- E.g. collecting *yawa* and making *tyaputyapu*
- Video1 video2

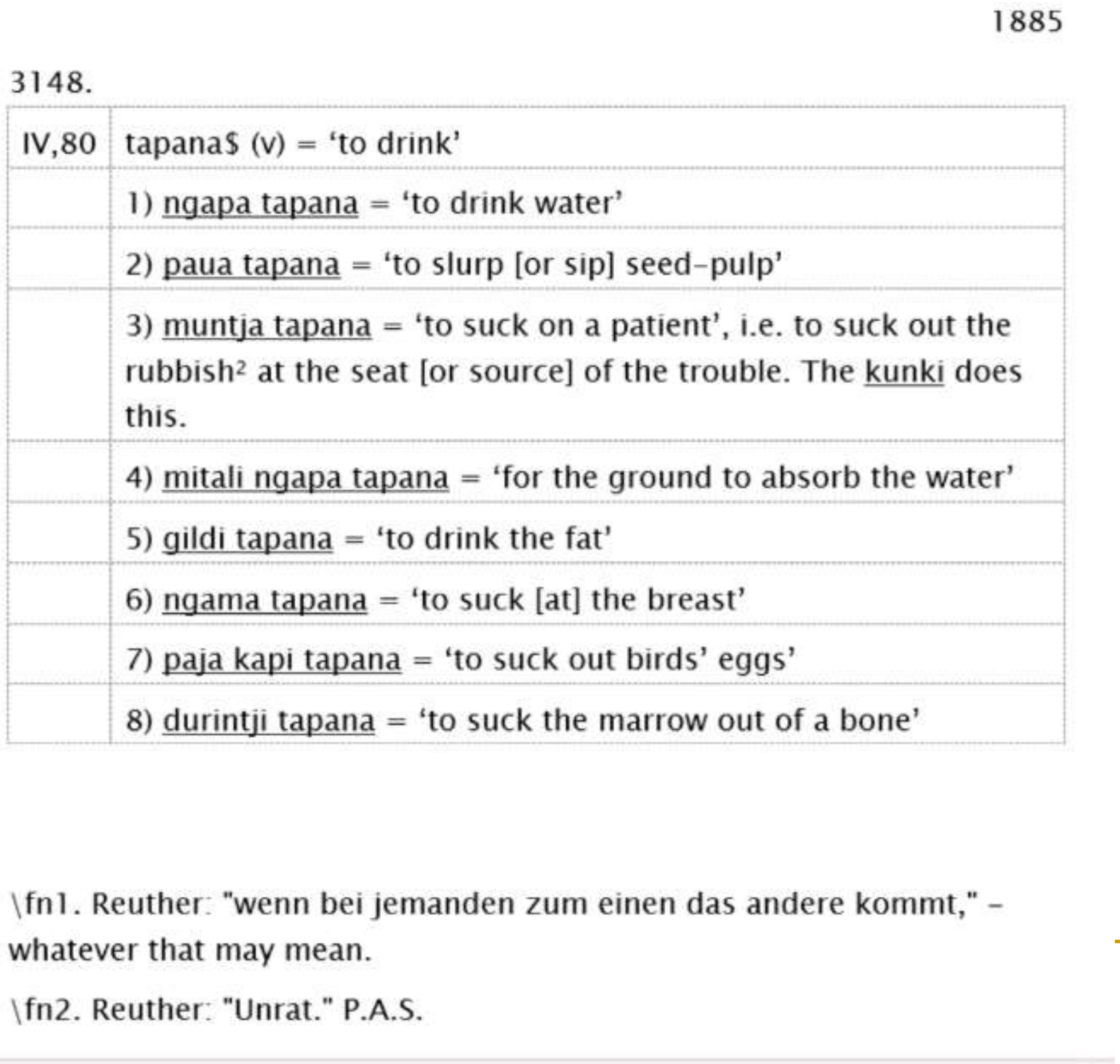
Leverhulme project 2021-2023

- **Adding value** to existing missionary materials and making them **usable** by community members and language learners (Austin 2023)
- Reuther-Scherer Diyari-English dictionary 2,180 page typescript in SA Museum and AIATSIS
- Digitised in 1990s to create Word document but weak OCR meant file was not really usable
- Austin, Garrett & Nathan – processed the digitised file to add XML tags which specify content, e.g. <gloss>…</gloss>, <note type=“ethnography”>…</note>

Leverhulme project 2021-2023



Scherer typescript 1974



1885

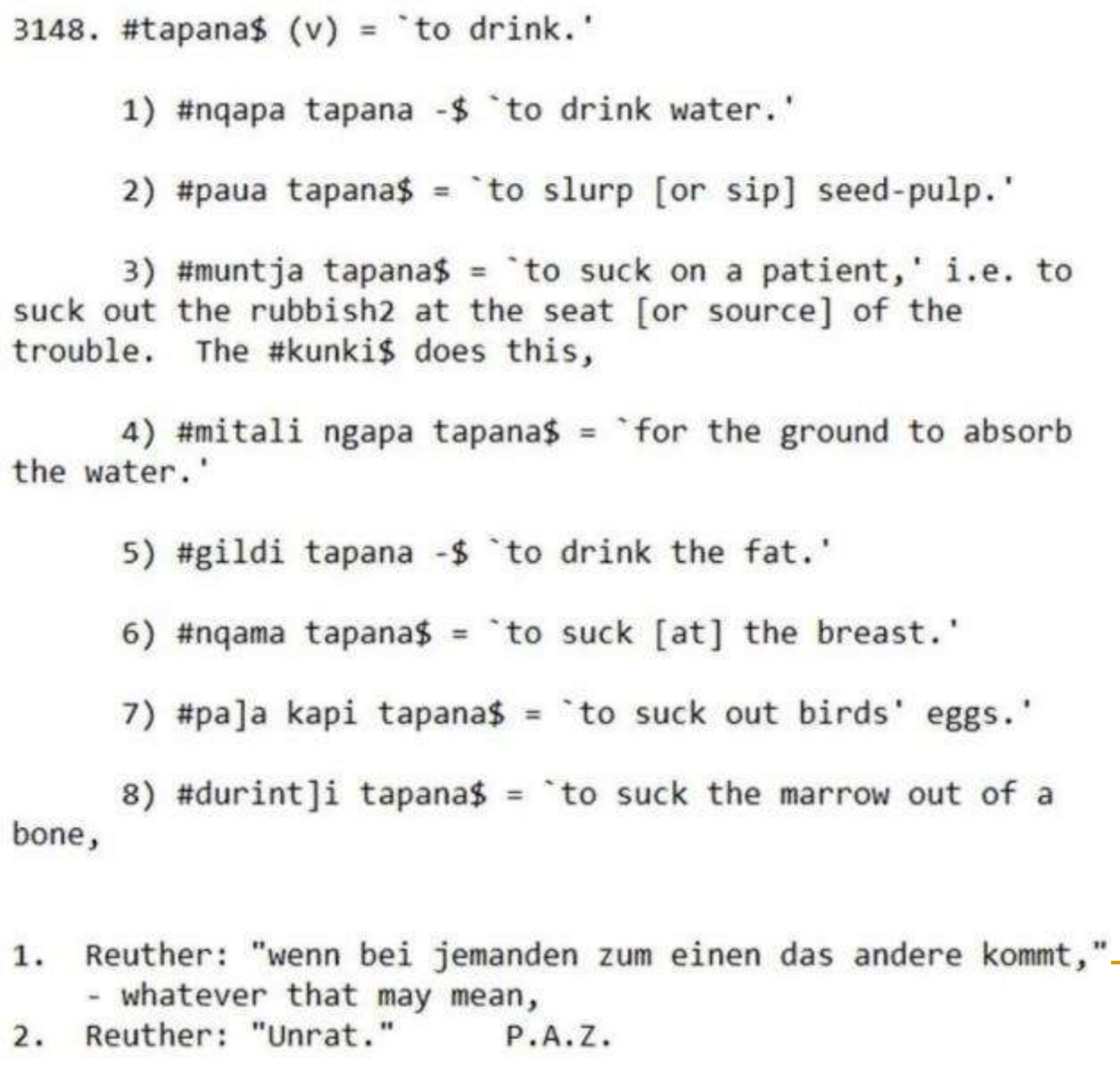
3148.

IV,80	tapana$ (v) = 'to drink'
	1) ngapa tapana = 'to drink water'
	2) paua tapana = 'to slurp [or sip] seed-pulp'
	3) muntja tapana = 'to suck on a patient', i.e. to suck out the rubbish[2] at the seat [or source] of the trouble. The kunki does this.
	4) mitali ngapa tapana = 'for the ground to absorb the water'
	5) gildi tapana = 'to drink the fat'
	6) ngama tapana = 'to suck [at] the breast'
	7) paja kapi tapana = 'to suck out birds' eggs'
	8) durintji tapana = 'to suck the marrow out of a bone'

\fn1. Reuther: "wenn bei jemanden zum einen das andere kommt," – whatever that may mean.

\fn2. Reuther: "Unrat." P.A.S.

Scanned page of Scherer



3148. #tapana$ (v) = `to drink.'

1) #nqapa tapana -$ `to drink water.'

2) #paua tapana$ = `to slurp [or sip] seed-pulp.'

3) #muntja tapana$ = `to suck on a patient,' i.e. to suck out the rubbish[2] at the seat [or source] of the trouble. The #kunki$ does this,

4) #mitali ngapa tapana$ = `for the ground to absorb the water.'

5) #gildi tapana -$ `to drink the fat.'

6) #nqama tapana$ = `to suck [at] the breast.'

7) #pa]a kapi tapana$ = `to suck out birds' eggs.'

8) #durint]i tapana$ = `to suck the marrow out of a bone,

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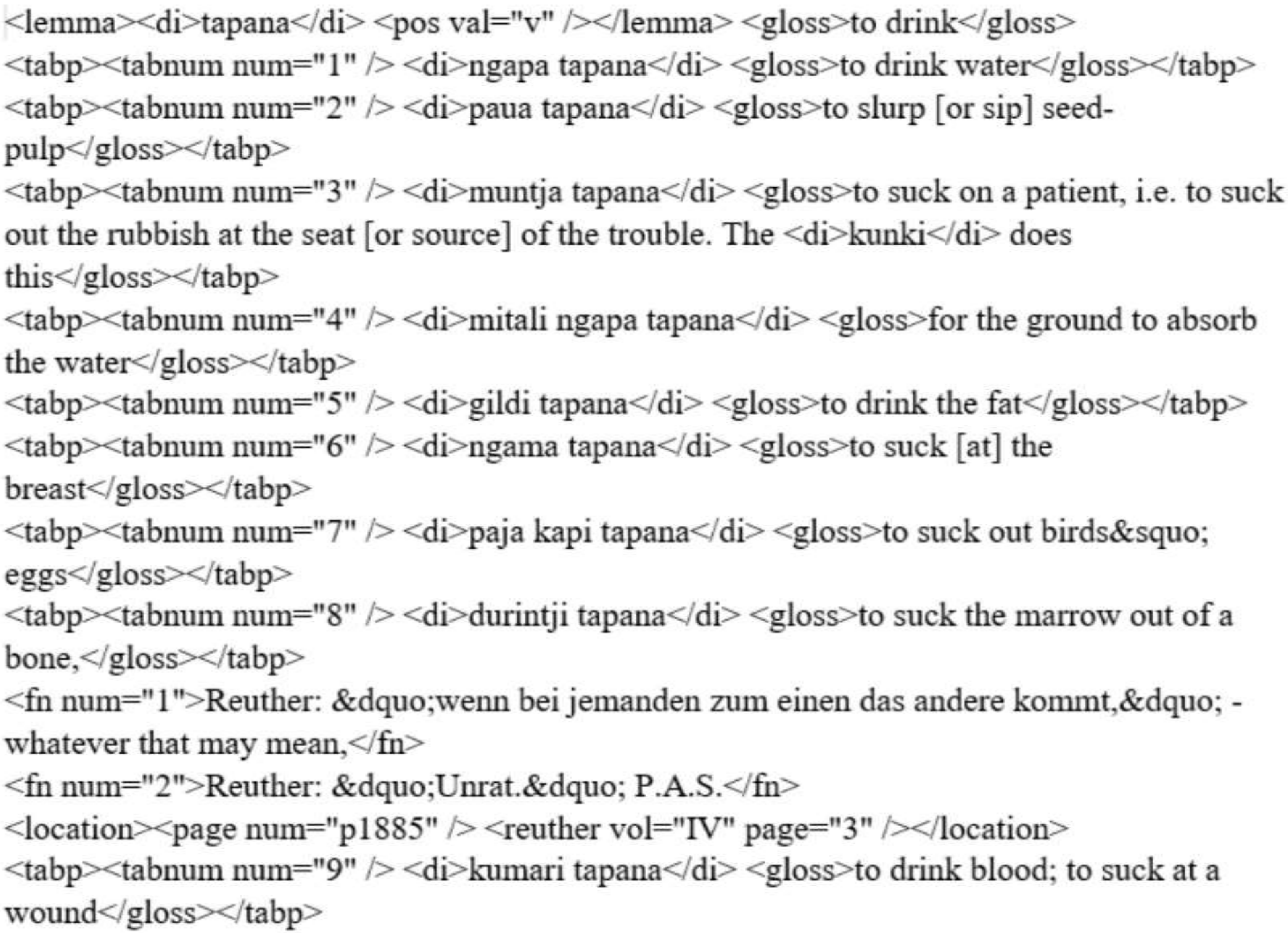
1. Reuther: "wenn bei jemanden zum einen das andere kommt," - whatever that may mean,
2. Reuther: "Unrat." P.A.Z.

Algorithmically added XML tags



```
<lemma><di>tapana</di> <pos val="v" /></lemma> <gloss>to drink</gloss>
<tabp><tabnum num="1" /> <di>ngapa tapana</di> <gloss>to drink water</gloss></tabp>
<tabp><tabnum num="2" /> <di>paua tapana</di> <gloss>to slurp [or sip] seed-
pulp</gloss></tabp>
<tabp><tabnum num="3" /> <di>muntja tapana</di> <gloss>to suck on a patient, i.e. to suck
out the rubbish at the seat [or source] of the trouble. The <di>kunki</di> does
this</gloss></tabp>
<tabp><tabnum num="4" /> <di>mitali ngapa tapana</di> <gloss>for the ground to absorb
the water</gloss></tabp>
<tabp><tabnum num="5" /> <di>gildi tapana</di> <gloss>to drink the fat</gloss></tabp>
<tabp><tabnum num="6" /> <di>ngama tapana</di> <gloss>to suck [at] the
breast</gloss></tabp>
<tabp><tabnum num="7" /> <di>paja kapi tapana</di> <gloss>to suck out birds&squo;
eggs</gloss></tabp>
<tabp><tabnum num="8" /> <di>durintji tapana</di> <gloss>to suck the marrow out of a
bone,</gloss></tabp>
<fn num="1">Reuther: &dquo;wenn bei jemanden zum einen das andere kommt,&dquo; -
whatever that may mean,</fn>
<fn num="2">Reuther: &dquo;Unrat.&dquo; P.A.S.</fn>
<location><page num="p1885" /> <reuther vol="IV" page="3" /></location>
<tabp><tabnum num="9" /> <di>kumari tapana</di> <gloss>to drink blood; to suck at a
wound</gloss></tabp>
```

Some statistics – main Reuther Dictionary

entries	4,262
Diyari modern spellings	2,584
sub-entries	15,957
Notes	13,226
Examples	3,880
Translator footnotes	1,766
Editor notes	3,174
Diyari words	27,483
German expressions	1,274
Comparative sets	136
XML tags	**241,730**
ID (entries, sub-entries)	20,219

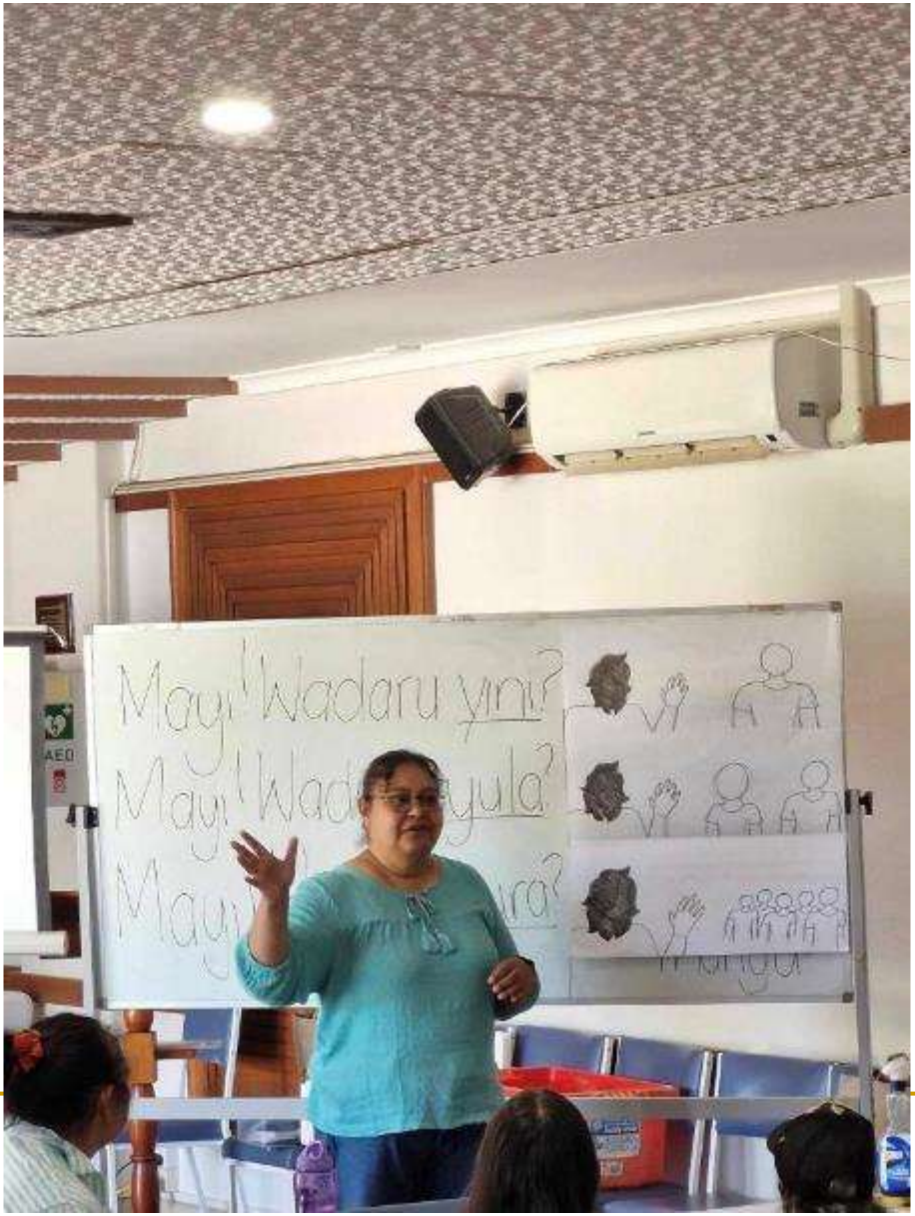
Outputs (www.diyari.org)

- ‘specialist’ edition which closely represents Scherer’s translation and is intended for researchers and specialists. link
- ‘user-friendly’ edition intended for non-specialists and language learners that omits some details and presents a powerful Search capability to find words in English and Diyari, and examples of use link
- **Indexes**: Diyari forms in dictionary; Diyari modern spellings, English glosses
- **Supplements**: missing entries, placenames, ancestral beings, comparisons with neighbours

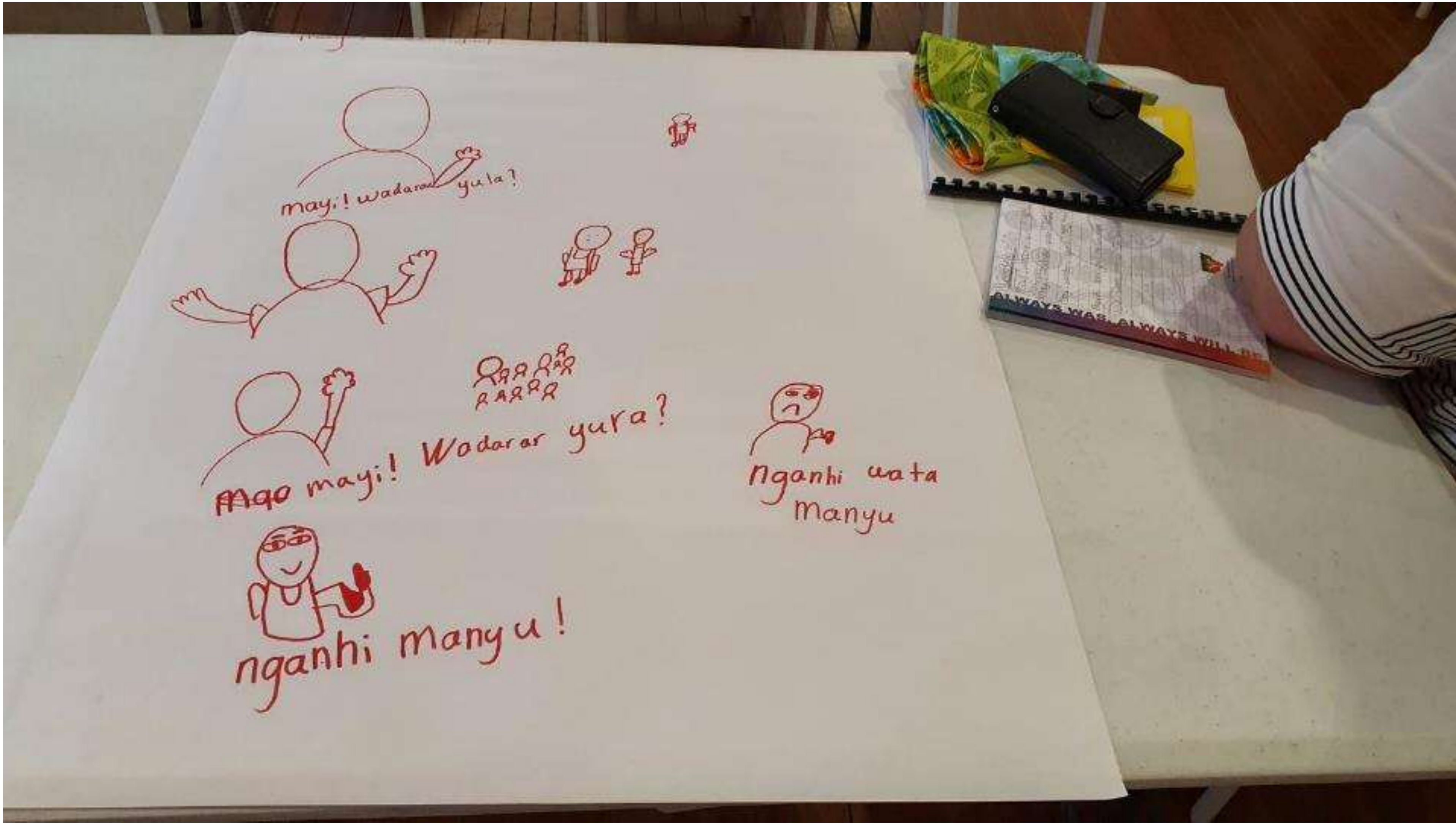
Trip to Broken Hill country (2023-11-10/13)

- Issues with DAC funding of trip to Broken Hill (NSW) sub-community so families and I paid expenses
- Multi-party team: 4 generations of Diyari, local knowledge holders, artists, musicians, archaeologist, and me. Facilitation by Michelle Warren (60 participants over 2 days)
- Goals and methods set by participants – greetings, body parts, lingo bingo; all learning was interactive and engaged all participants, building on existing knowledge and exploring new contexts

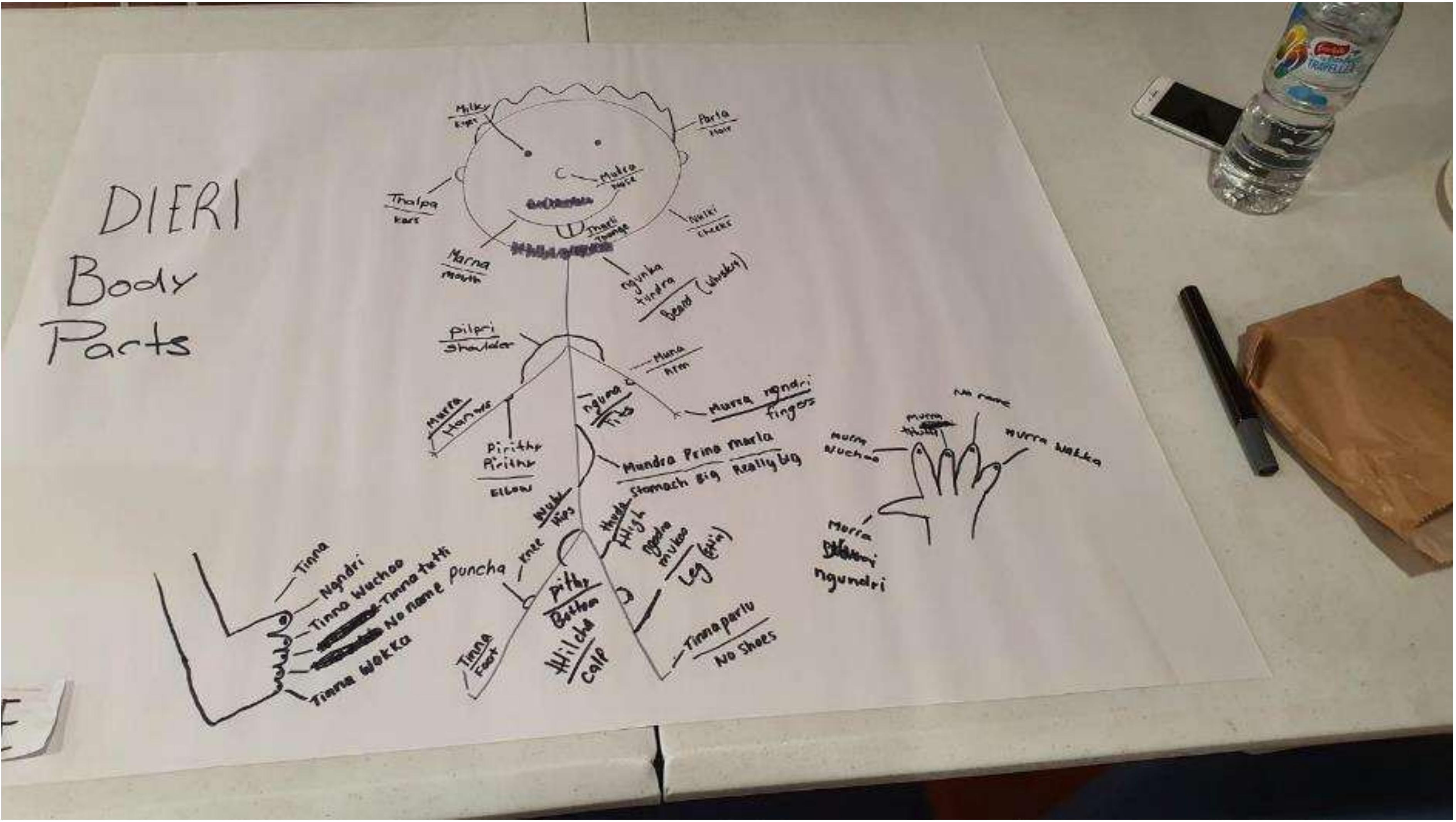
Michelle Warren on greetings


Mayi Wadaru yini?
Mayi Wad yula?
May ra?
AED

Class practice


mayi! wadara yula?
~~Mao~~ mayi! Wodarar yura?
nganhi wata manyu
nganhi manyu!
ALWAYS WAS, ALWAYS WILL BE

Body part terms (non-standard spelling)


DIERI
Body
Parts
Milky
Eyes
Parta
Hair
Mukra
Nose
Thalpa
Ears
[redacted]
Nalki
Cheeks
Thardi
Tongue
Marna
mouth
[redacted]
ngunka
tindra
Beard (whiskers)
pilpri
Shoulder
Muna
Arm
Murra
Hands
ngama
Tits
Murra ngndri
fingers
Pirithr
Pirithr
Elbow
Mundra Prina marla
Stomach Big Really big
Wuki
Hips
thuda
thigh
ngadra
mukoo
Leg (shin)
knee
puncha
pithy
Bottom
Hilcha
Calf
Tinna
Foot
Tinnaparlu
No Shoes
Tinna
Ngndri
Tinna Wuchoo
Tinna tutti
No name
Tinna Wokka
[redacted]
[redacted]
No name
murra
[redacted]
thutti
murra
wuchoo
murra wokka
Morra
[redacted]
ngundri
E

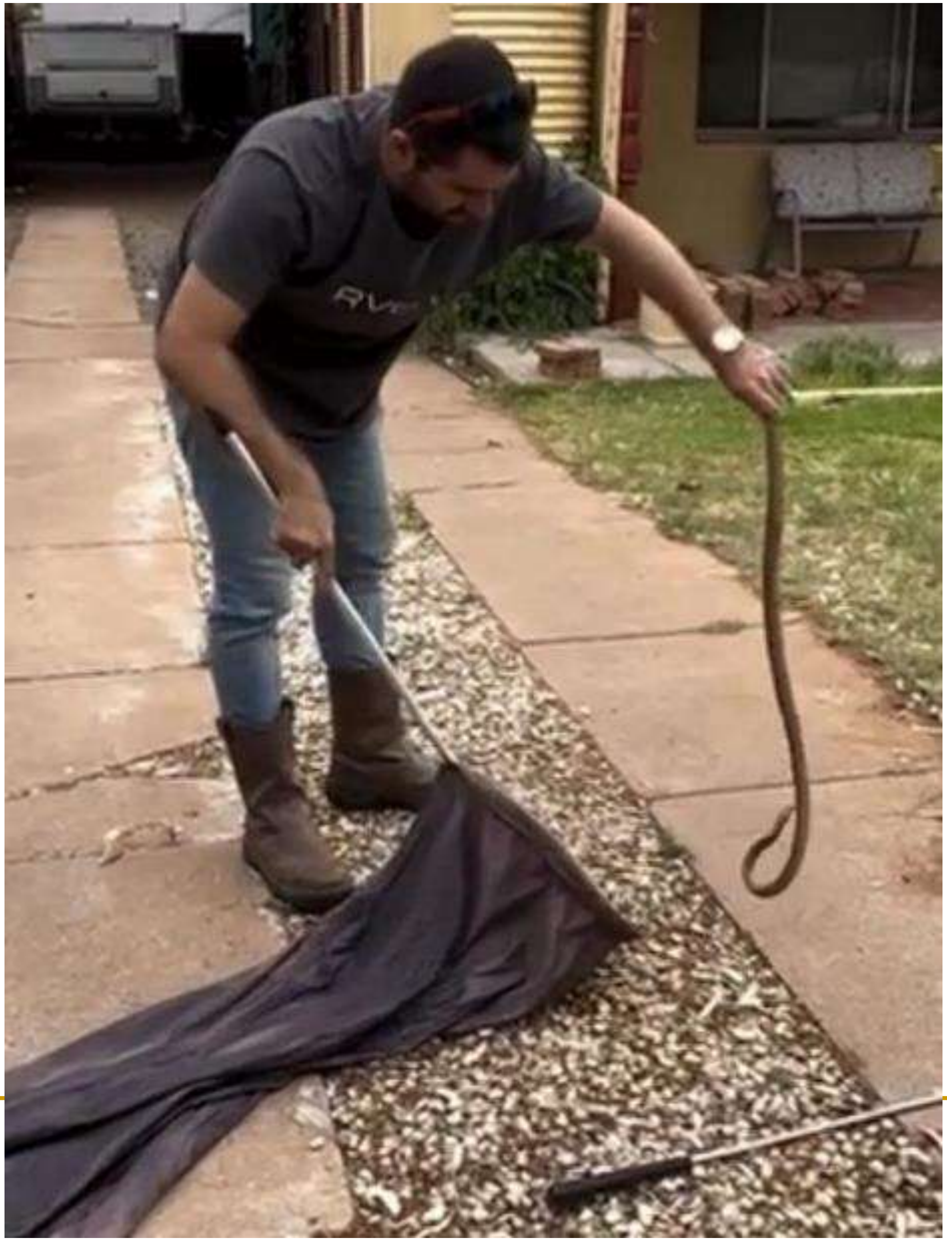
WEDGE
Eagles

Lingo bingo

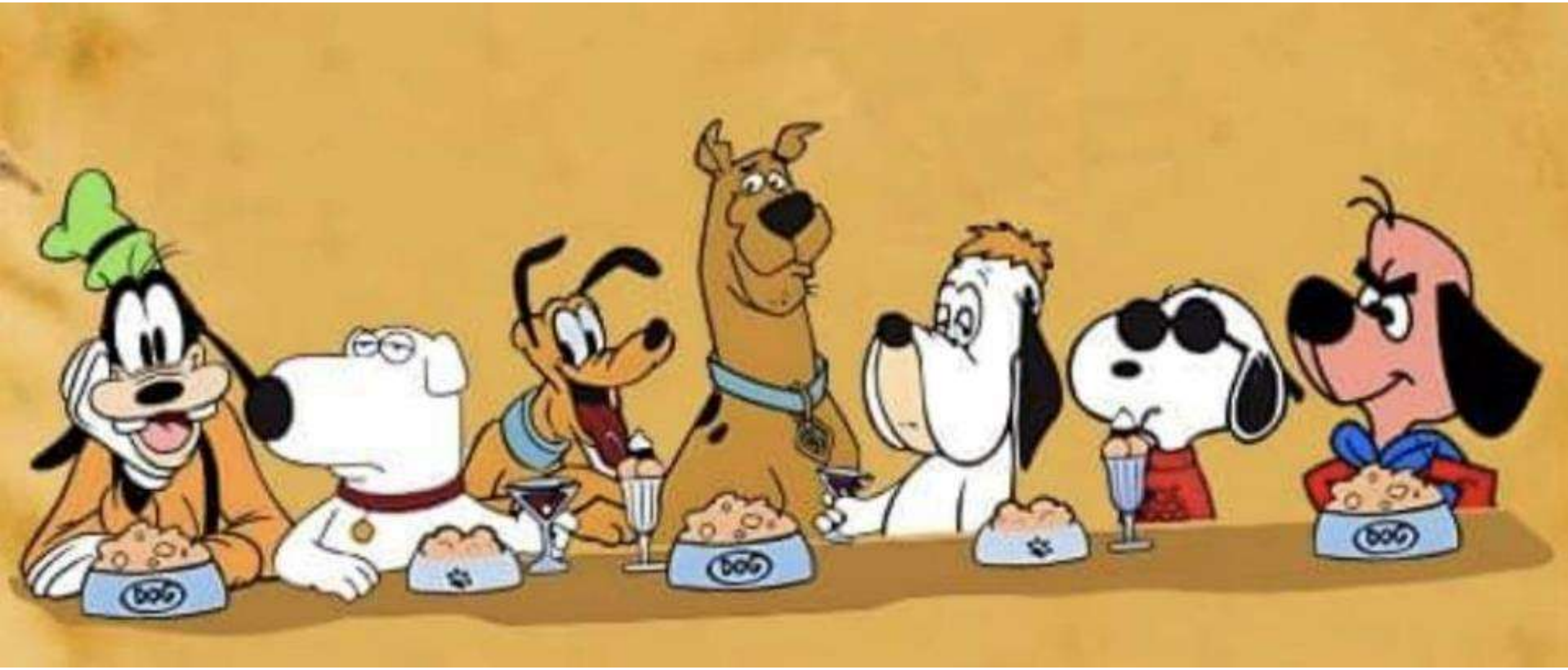
Follow up

- Creation of professionally printed Lingo Bing packs (cards, instructions)
- Facebook posts – local events or humorous illustrations with short descriptions in Diyari posted every day or two in November-December 2023
- Diyari Language Blog – regular daily traffic
- No books – focus on listening and speaking

karnali wanku pardakayi yakuthanhi wirripalha



kinthalawara karlkatharriyi thayilha


DOG
DOG
DOG
DOG

What have I learnt in 50 years?

- Moving from ‘research on’ to ‘research for’ and ‘research with’ and ‘research by’ can be extremely rewarding and generate insights into language structure and use, both within the community and in the wider academic world
- Revitalisation generally relies on a solid documentary and descriptive basis – the size of the corpus does not have to be a determining factor but can impact on possible outcomes. We can add value to legacy materials//
- Revitalisation work involves substantial challenges, including personal, academic, social, and political
- It is easy to fall into simplistic “solutions” that do not work, either linguistically or socio-politically (see Wilkins 1992, Amery 2009)

What did I learn?

- Be ready to listen and try to understand what people mean by what they say
- Leave your own politics at the door
- Look for solutions and sustainable outcomes through open and equitable discussions in a realistic context
- Develop concrete outcomes but be careful not to promise too much and raise expectations that cannot be fulfilled and that will lead to disappointment
- Sometimes you just need to shut up and be patient – timing and personalities can be the most important variables
- Be even more patient ☺

Thank you!

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Peter K. 2014. And still they speak Diyari: the life history of an endangered language. *Ethnorema* 10, 1-17.

Austin, Peter K. 2023. Making 2,180 pages more useful: the Diyari dictionary of Rev. J. G. Reuther. In Eda Dehermi & Christopher Moseley (eds.) *Endangered Languages in the 21st Century*, 241-257. London: Routledge.

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Wilkins, David P. 1992. Linguistic research under aboriginal control: A personal account of fieldwork in Central Australia. *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 12,171–200.

Woodbury, Anthony C. 2011. Language documentation.” In Peter K. Austin & Julia Sallabank *The Cambridge Handbook of Endangered* Languages, 159–186. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press