

Changing differently: the outcomes of multilingualism in coastal west Arnhem land

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for panel: *Unsettling multilingualism: insights from non-polyglossic communities around the globe*

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RESEARCH UNIT FOR
INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE



ARC CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR
THE DYNAMICS OF LANGUAGE



Acknowledgement of country

I am speaking to you today from Melbourne – Naarm, the land of the Wurundjeri people whose language is Woi wurrung



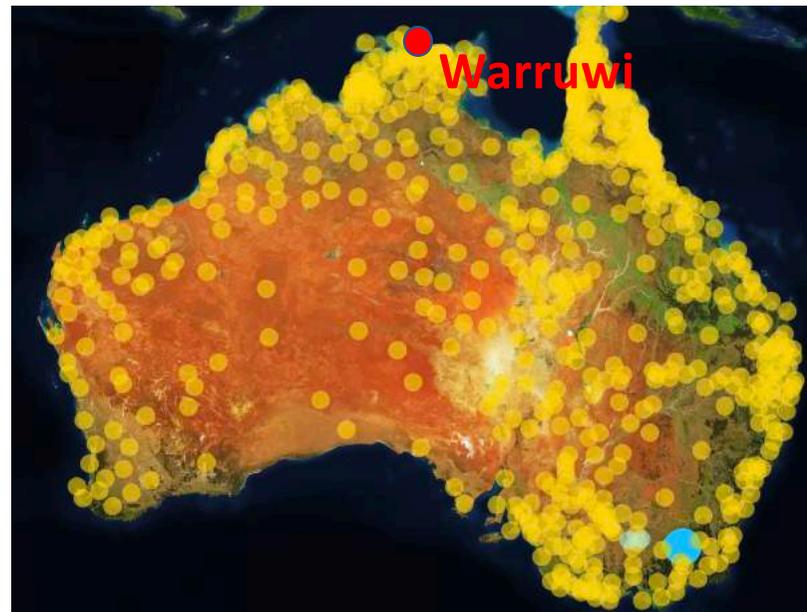
22nd June 2017: Wurundjeri Elders address the state government parliament using Woi wurrung language. Speaking: Aunty Alice Kolasa

Research partnership with Warruwi Community

- the foundation of the research presented here
- making relationality in the work visible



Ruth Singer and Janet Mardbinda



map by First Languages Australia <https://gambay.com.au>
*yellow dots show language locations



Jamie Milpur and Margaret Marrangku



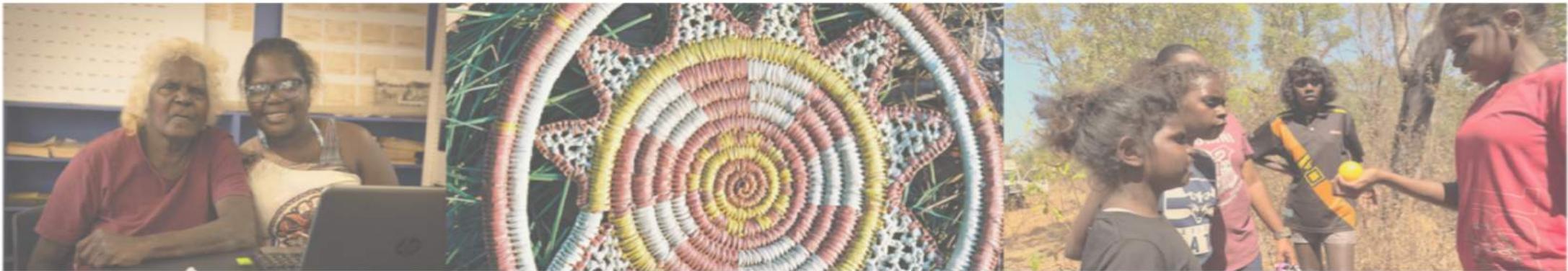
Janet Mardbinda and Sally Luta



Rachel Meiyinbara and Isabel O'Keeffe

Talk plan:

1. Conceptualisations of non-polyglossic multilingualism
2. The expanding scope of non-polyglossic multilingualism
3. Outcomes of language contact in western Arnhem land



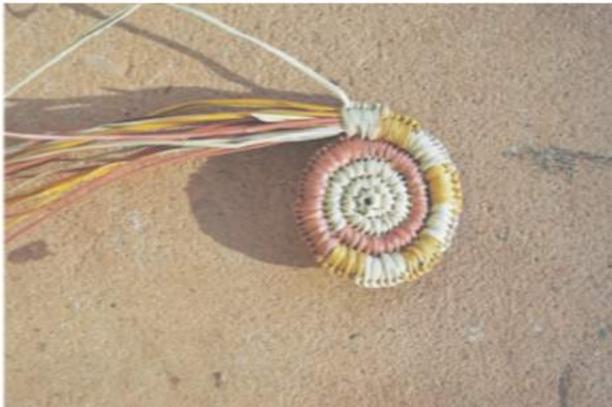
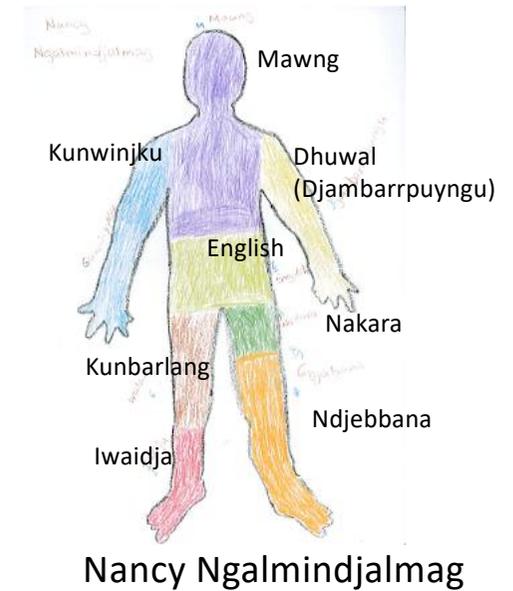


Conceptualisations of non-polyglossic multilingualism

Image: Rachel Meiyinbara and granddaughter Janet Mardbinda (Warruwi Community) working on the transcription and translation of Mawng, Kunwinjku, English and Kunbarlang language in multilingual recording sessions.

Multilingualism at Warruwi Community

- Nine languages from four Indigenous language families are still spoken in a community of 400 people
- Adults are highly multilingual (8 languages not uncommon)
- Most children grow up speaking 2 or more languages from birth
- Receptive multilingualism is a common practice



Why 'small-scale multilingualism' ?

Small-scale multilingualism is understood as a kind of societal multilingualism that supports many small languages

Singer and Harris (2016: 167) proposed these features:

1. Local languages have a relatively small number of speakers
2. Marriages across language groups are the norm
3. Multiple languages are used within families/households
4. Highly multilingual repertoires are unremarkable

Issues with using the term 'small-scale multilingualism':

- Clancy and Davis (2019) challenge the related category 'small-scale societies'
- associated with the exoticisation and romanticisation of societies
- presents them as separate when they are bound to other societies in relations of exploitation

What is meant by non-polyglossic?

Another feature of small-scale multilingualism is the lack of polyglossia (Francois 2012, Lüpke 2016a, Singer and Harris 2016)

- polyglossia does exist, for example with English in a special position in Arnhem land, or Portuguese or Spanish in the Amazon
- but the **focus** is on relations between Indigenous people, rather than on relations between Indigenous people and their national government/the coloniser
- majority of studies of multilingualism focus on relations between Indigenous languages and a dominant language
- moving beyond the polyglossia / domain separation, Fishmanian approach to multilingualism
- so is non-polyglossic a feature of the speech community or a research lens?
- is non-polyglossic a synonym for 'small-scale multilingual' or a superordinate category?

Small-scale multilingualism as a regional system (Epps 2020)

The system extends beyond each language/language group

- a large-scale multilingual speech community (Epps and Stenzel 2013)
- cross-linguistic patterns of variation may be evident (e.g. Rumsey 2018)

The system extends beyond language itself:

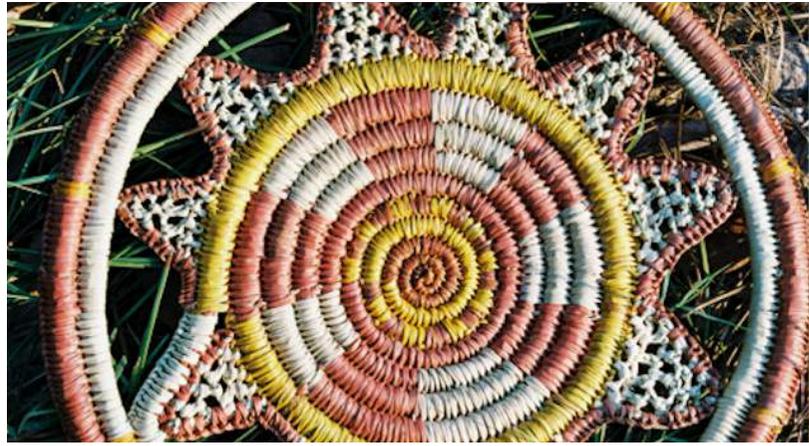
- Regional socio-political frameworks underpin patterns of multilingualism
 - specific villages/communities may be more or less multilingual
- different to a sprachbund (linguistic area) - not defined by language features

“Yet while local perspectives emphasize difference – both in language and cultural practice – the distinctions among groups facilitate their functioning together as a system of interdependent, complementary parts (Epps 2020).

How does multilingualism extend beyond language?

It has been argued that in regions of small-scale multilingualism, the high value that groups place on their distinctiveness is related to the cultivation of diversity in a number of areas, including language (Epps 2020; Evans 2018).

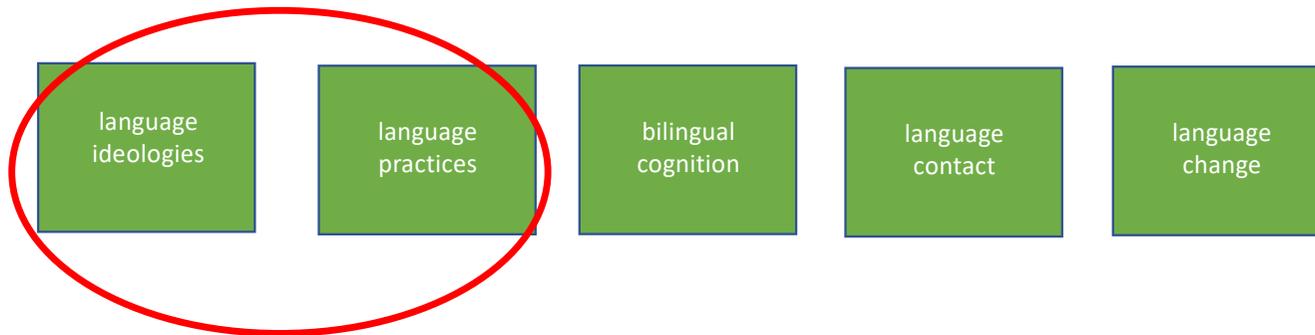
- Being 'different together' (Brown 2016) is the cornerstone of Indigenous Australian social organisation at a regional level (Garde 2008, Sutton 1991).
- In the Grassfields of Cameroon: multilingualism gives access to more 'spiritual power' – multiple languages means connections to multiple villages, each with a chief who heads a different cult (di Carlo 2016)
- Vaupés: complementary trades – the manufacture of different items by each language group, makes groups rely on one another



The expanding scope of non-polyglossic multilingualism

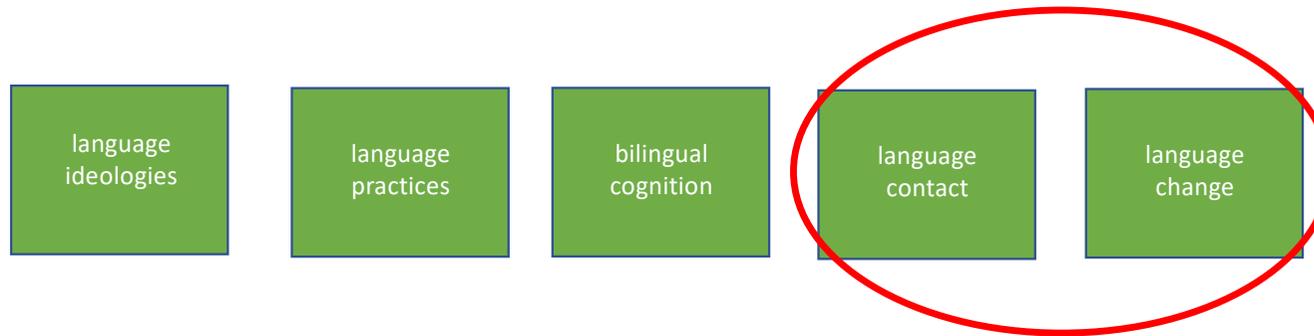
Image: Wall mat weaving of pandanus palm by Jenny Manmurulu, Mawng language educator, Waruwi school

Studies initially focused on ideologies and practice



- Linguists specializing in language documentation, drew on ethnographic methods from linguistic anthropology and qualitative sociolinguistics
- Emphasis on long-term collaborations with community members and local universities

New direction of research



In regions of small-scale multilingualism?

→ do specific multilingual practices create conditions for different kinds of language change?

How might we identify these pathways for language change?



Outcomes of language contact in western Arnhem land

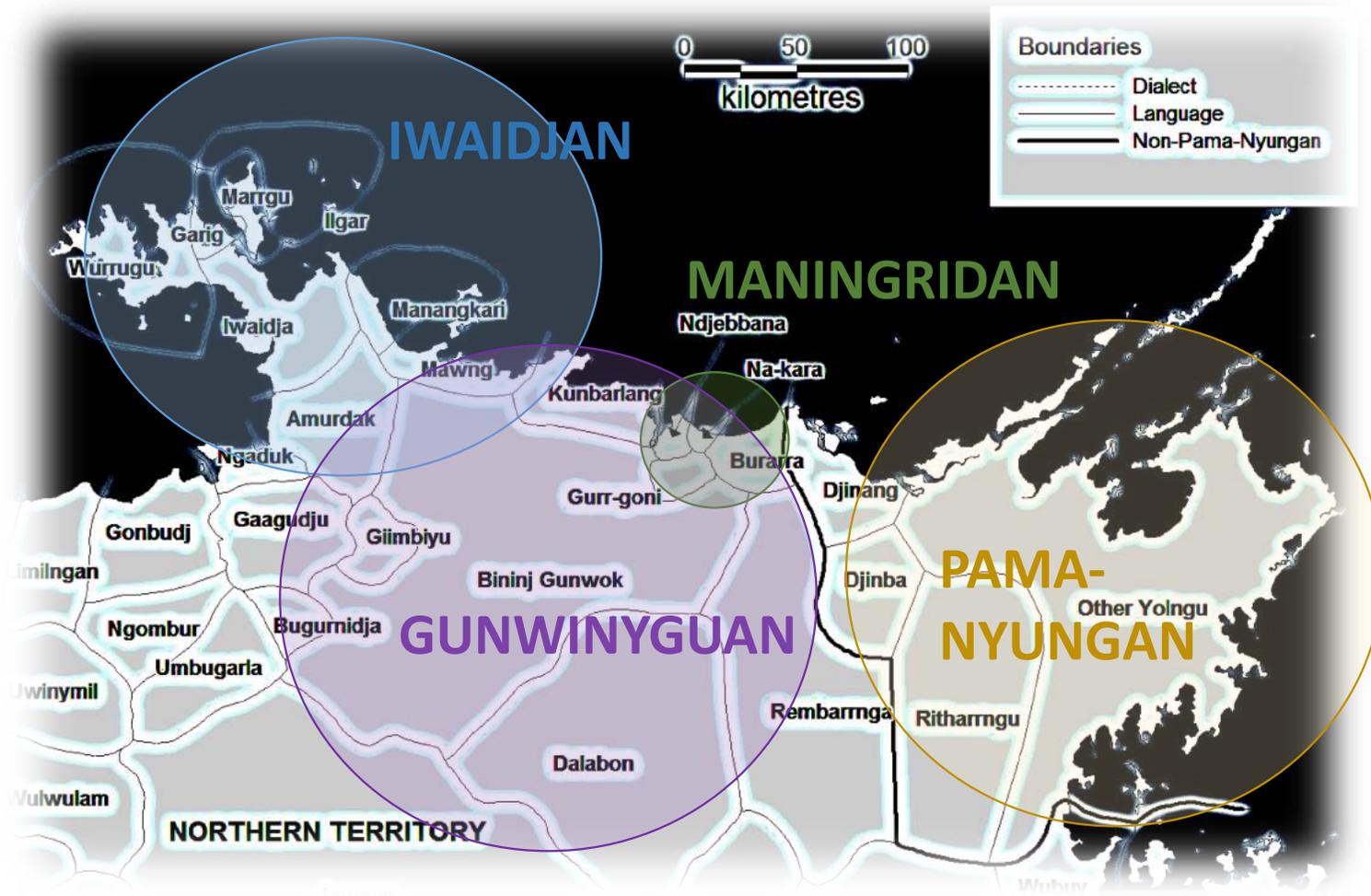
Image: Nancy Ngalmindjalmag (right), speaker of Mawng, Kunwinjku and Kunbarlang with her sisters Daisy and Jessie (Warruwi Community). Photo: Elizabeth Langslow.

Reconstructing contact between three languages



Focus: contact between the Iwaidjan language Mawng and two languages of the Gunwinyguan language family:

- Kunbarlang
 - Kunwinjku variety of Bininj Kunwok dialect group
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- Kunbarlang and Mawng are associated with land on the coast while Kunwinjku is associated with land inland
 - Kunbarlang is the only language in the large Gunwinyguan language family that is on the coast



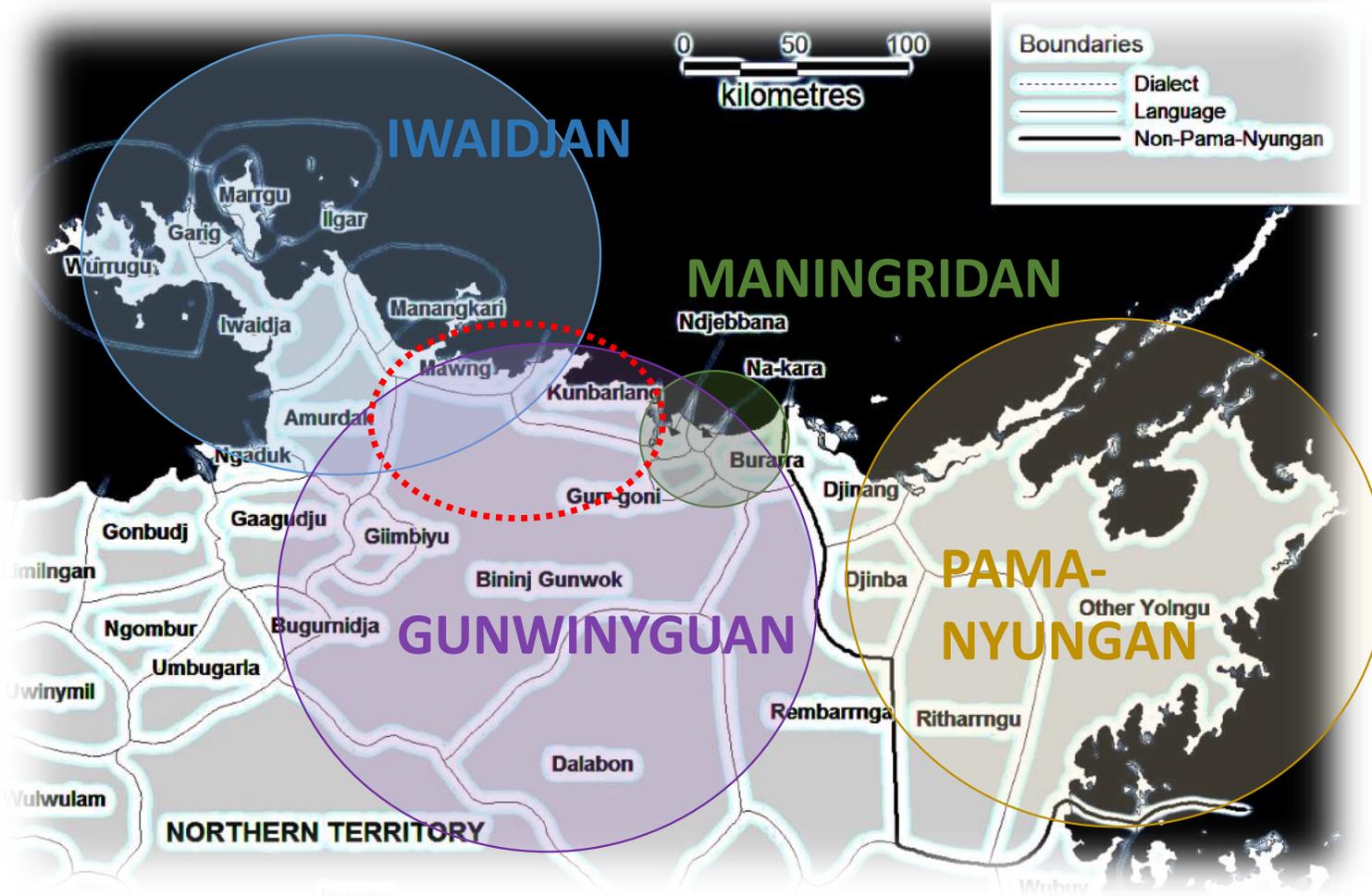
The Arnhem Land context

Four coloured circles show the four language families in Arnhem land with matching coloured labels

Black words are the names of languages

Reconstruction of pre-contact language-land associations: Arnhem Land

Map: Mark Harvey



Red circle shows the area associated with the three languages in contact:

Mawng,
Kunbarlang
Kunwinjku variety of
Bininj Kunwok

Reconstruction of pre-contact language-land associations: Arnhem Land

Map: Mark Harvey

Two Gunwinyguan languages: Kunbarlang and Kunwinjku

Kunwinjku variety of Bininj Kunwok

- A 'large' language of the area
- Now the most-used variety of the Bininj Kunwok (BKW) dialect group which has ca 1200 speakers
- Most Mawng-speaking adults also speak Kunwinjku

Kunbarlang

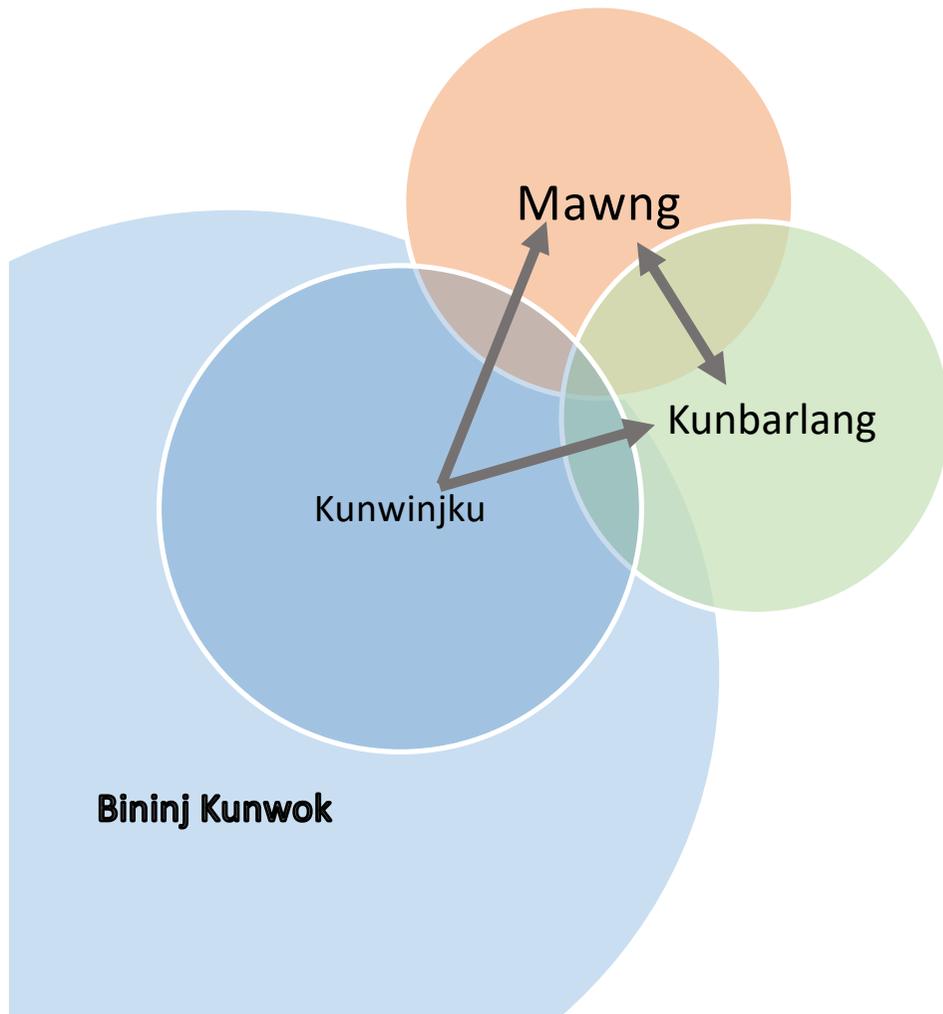
- The only Gunwinguan language spoken on the coast
- Few younger speakers
- Speakers usually also speak Kuninjku or Kunwinjku variety of BKW and often also Mawng

Shared vocabulary

	Kunbarlang	Bininj Kunwok
Mawng	20%	18%
Kunbarlang		32%

From Nash and Alpher 150 wordlist

Smaller and larger languages



- Kunwinjku is larger language while Mawng and Kunbarlang are smaller languages
- So we expect to find two-way 'interaction' between Mawng and Kunbarlang
- But there is mainly one-way 'influence' of Kunwinjku on the other two

Unusual grammatical constructions in Mawng and Kunbarlang

1. Noun markers (articles) that agree in gender e.g. *ta kunak* (LL land) (Singer 2016, Kapitonov 2019)
2. Grammaticalised coverb constructions e.g. *ngarran pularnngalk* 'I forgot' (Singer 2016, Kapitonov 2019)
 - rare in Arnhem Land but widespread in other regions
3. 'Fossilized periphrastic' reciprocal construction (Singer 2011, Evans and Singer 2015)
 - Very rare worldwide
 - Found in Mawng, Iwaidja and Kunbarlang



no unusual constructions common to Mawng and Kunwinjku
direction of influence appears to be Mawng>Kunbarlang

Possible explanations

Why sharing of unusual constructions between Mawng and Kunbarlang (but not Kunwinjku)?

- Both were probably always small languages (<1000 speakers)
- Long-term reciprocal marriage arrangements supported intensive bilingualism
- Enduring alliances between certain Kunbarlang and Mawng clans (e.g. Mayinjinaj clan aggregate)
- More intermarriage and exchange between coastal groups because of shared ways of life (saltwater/freshwater are significant cultural categories)

Why not more lexical sharing between Mawng and Kunbarlang?

- Reciprocal multilingual practices promote code separation, reducing lexical sharing

Defining 'unusual' kinds of language change

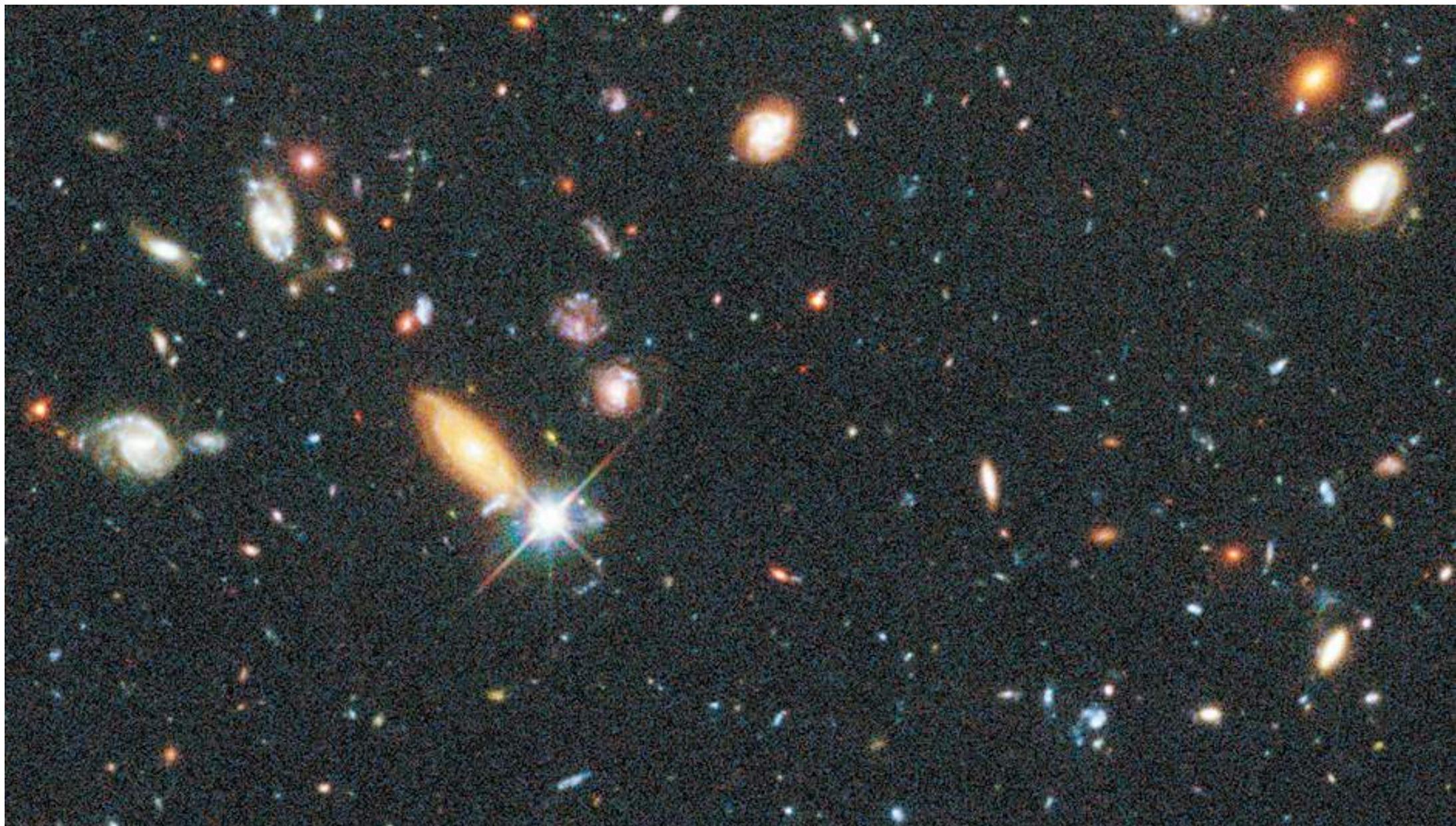
Are certain kinds of language change more common in small-scale multilingual contexts? (cf. Pakendorf 2019, Evans 2016)

- Work on language contact has not focused on these contexts but it has identified what kinds of changes are more or less common

If small-scale multilingualism is a useful category for research in multilingualism

- we would expect to find certain kinds of language change are more common
- due to certain kinds of language practices and ideologies being more common





Harvey (2011) compares the outcomes of language contact between a number of language 'neighbours' and finds it is always different

- Lack of hierarchical regional social organization means larger units are not fixed as they rely on alliances between clans
- Coastal Arnhem land is an area of relatively small clan estates, due to rich food supplies. This may have led to more long-term alliances between coastal clans and more intense language contact (cf. Aung Si 2019's 'coastal corridors').

- Inspired by work by Pattie Epps
 - Bower, Epps et al (2011) found much lower rates of borrowing among Amazonia languages of South America
 - Epps attributes this to minimisation of code-switching
 - Receptive multilingual practices may also be relevant (also requires minimisation code-switching)

Semi-automated gender comparison

Exploratory work with Sasha Wilmoth (Melbourne)

- Linking entries using the gloss field: Mawng (3500 words) and Kunbarlang (1100 words) dictionaries
 - 300 broad glosses matched
 - ~640 words matched in each language (over half the KB words available)
- How to analyse chance of gender matching where gloss matches? (ideas welcome)

Gloss	Word	detail gloss	gender
bark	wilam	bark canoe	MA
	bilem	bark canoe	VE
beach	ajput	sand ; beach	LL
	wadjud	sand; beach	LL
bay	larrku	bay	MA
	ngurlurrupi	corner ; corner of bay	LL
	rnim-dubbe	bay; inlet; indent	LL
billabong	wurl	billabong	LL
	yikubalmi	billabong	LL

Key: pinky-orange is Mawng, blue is Kunbarlang

Semantics of gender and noun class

	Mawng	Kunbarlang	Kunwinjku
Masc	animals (most)	animals (most)	animals (some)
	birds (some)	birds (some)	birds (some)
	snakes		snakes (some)
	song		
Fem	animals (some)	animals (some)	animals (some)
	birds (some)	birds (most)	birds (some)
		snakes	snakes (some)
Land	landscape features	landscape features	landscape features (some)
	language	language	language
	traditional knowledges	weather	weather
		body parts	body parts
Plants			household items
	plants	plants	plants
		plant foods	plant foods
		traditional knowledges	traditional knowledges
		song	song
Edible	household items		landscape features (some)
	plant foods		

Same for all three

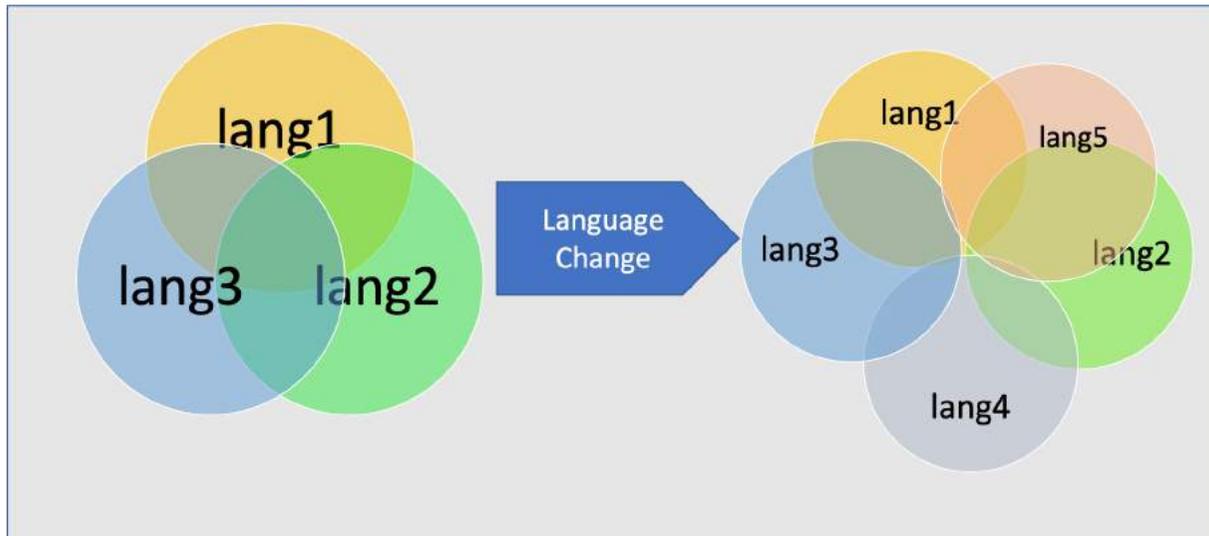
(not shown):

- Male/female humans
- Sun/moon
- Meat
- Honey
- Rocks/stones
- Plant products

Over many genders in Mawng:

- Body parts
- weather

Diversification occurs within the regional system



Overlap between languages – illustrates that they share many features due to language contact, including some kinds of variation