

# Mirima Linguistic Forum

Monday, 28<sup>th</sup> August 2017

Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre (MDWg) would like to announce its 15<sup>th</sup> Linguistic Forum to take place on Monday, 28<sup>th</sup> of August, starting at 2pm. The forum will be held at Mirima Language Centre, Kununurra.

We are very pleased to announce the following presentation:

## Why Save the Indigenous Sign Languages?

by Prof. Marie Carla D. Adone,  
University of Cologne (Germany)

### Bio:

MARIE CARLA D. ADONE is the Chair of Applied Linguistics and one of the Directors of Australian Studies in the English Department, University of Cologne, Germany. She has served as the president of the Society for Pidgin and Creole Linguistics. She has done fieldwork in Mauritius, the Seychelles, Australia and Jamaica. In Australia she has spent some time in the Ngukurr community and worked as a linguist in several communities in the early nineties. Prof. Adone was part of the EuroBABEL project funded by European Science Foundation (the Eurocores Programmes) and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (the German National Science Foundation). She has published several books and articles on Creole languages, Sign languages and First Language Acquisition.

*The Mirima Linguistic Forum is an initiative by MDWg to bring together people with an academic interest in Indigenous studies. While our focus is on language and culture, ideally with a reference to local Indigenous matters, we welcome contributions on related topics. Presentations occur in an informal and relaxed atmosphere and we leave plenty of time for discussion and exchange. The forum is open to all; if you happen to be in the Kununurra area and would like to present on a topic of interest - please let us know: [info@mirima.org.au](mailto:info@mirima.org.au).*

ABSTRACT:

## Why Save the Indigenous Sign Languages?

In this paper I address the issue of endangerment with respect to alternate sign languages in Australia and discuss the possible causes for the loss of these alternate sign languages. Among a wide array of factors we find a lack of understanding and awareness for these languages, because of their status as alternate sign languages used by the hearing communities. Many of these signing languages have survived colonization, however in some places there are some very faint traces of these languages left.

In the first part of the paper I give an overview on these alternate signing systems which coexist with spoken languages. The domains and contexts in which these sign languages are still used, are shrinking. In the second part of the paper I assess the vitality of these sign languages. After identifying the key factors contributing to the endangerment of languages, I focus on the factor of intergenerational transmission that is no longer taking place in some communities due to children are sent outside the communities to attend secondary school. Furthermore, these children do not attend ceremonies and are not involved in certain cultural practices.

The paper concludes constructively by proposing the immediate documentation of these sign languages and by making some recommendations to keep these languages alive.