

Mirima Linguistic Forum

Monday, 22nd March 2021

Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre (MDWg) would like to announce its 26th Linguistic Forum to take place on Monday, 22nd of March 2021, starting at 4pm (AWST - Western Australia). The forum will be held at Mirima Language Centre, Kununurra with the possibility of joining online.

→ To join online via Zoom, please request a link from manager@mirima.org.au.

This meeting will host the following presentation:

Investing in Aboriginal Languages

Steven Bird, Cathy Bow

Top End Language Lab, Charles Darwin University

STEVEN BIRD is designing new approaches to language maintenance and revitalisation in collaboration with speech communities in diasporas and ancestral homelands. Steven studied computer science at the University of Melbourne before completing a PhD in computational linguistics at the University of Edinburgh in 1990. He has conducted fieldwork on endangered languages in West Africa, South America, Central Asia, Melanesia, and Australia. He has held academic positions at the Universities of Edinburgh, Pennsylvania, Melbourne, and UC Berkeley. He serves as linguist at the Nawarddeken Academy, an Aboriginal school in West Arnhem.

CATHY BOW is a linguist with research experience in both descriptive and applied linguistics. She has described the sound system of an African language, investigated language development in children with impaired hearing, explored endangered language documentation, and researched the language and communication needs of international medical graduates. Cathy has worked as a teacher of English as an Additional Language, and as a trainer and coach for language learners. She works as project manager for the Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages, and co-ordinator of the Digital Language Shell and the online Bininj Kunwok language and culture course. Cathy completed her PhD 'Entanglements of digital technologies and Indigenous language work in the Northern Territory' in November 2020 through Charles Darwin University and the Australian National University.

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: manager@mirima.org.au.

ABSTRACT

Investing in Aboriginal Languages

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In this broadly accessible presentation, we will report on a new project to develop a systematic account of Aboriginal language programs and what makes them effective and sustainable. Working with language centres, we are collecting an evidence base, leading to a comprehensive model of language revitalisation and maintenance, and how it operates in each place, and for whom. The model will inform local and national organisations that invest in Aboriginal languages. The project involves a two-way collaboration with Aboriginal people across the NT and WA that is designed to elevate local voices and build local capacity for designing and evaluating programs, businesses and technologies for keeping Aboriginal languages strong. The direct benefits of the project are cultural, keeping Aboriginal languages strong so that Australia's first voices can continue to be heard. Wider benefits include community wellbeing, improved race relations, caring for country, and participation in the local economy. The project is funded by the Australian Research Council.