

Mirima Linguistic Forum

Wednesday 8th June 2022

Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre (MDWg) would like to announce its 29th Linguistic Forum to take place on Wednesday, 8th of June 2022, starting at 2:30pm (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 use the following link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83530869239>

If you would like to let us know that you are planning to join, we would love to hear from you via e-mail to ceo@mirima.org.au.

This meeting will host the following presentation:

Language is connection:

*The attitudes of education staff in Kununurra, WA
towards Indigenous languages and multilingualism*

Iris Menzies

Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre

Iris Menzies is from the Blue Mountains, NSW, and studied Linguistics and Spanish at the University of Sydney before moving to Kununurra in 2019 to volunteer at MDWg. She loved it so much that she then stayed on as Language Services Facilitator. In 2021 she completed a Masters of Applied Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition through the University of Oxford, before recently returning to MDWg as Language Education Facilitator.

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: ceo@mirima.org.au.

We tend not to put a time limit on our Forum. Most presentations may go for about 60 minutes, followed by 30 minutes of questions and discussion time - but we are very open to having longer or shorter presentations.

ABSTRACT

Language is connection: The attitudes of education staff in Kununurra, WA towards Indigenous languages and multilingualism

Iris Menzies

Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre

Is it useful to learn an Indigenous language? What is the role of language in reconciliation, connection, identity, and diversity – or the lack thereof? How do educational staff adapt to the variety of language resources which children bring to educational contexts? Do educational staff receive enough training about supporting EAL/D students (those who don't speak Standard Australian English at home) and about Indigenous languages? Where and how should such training be conducted?

In Kununurra, the local traditional Indigenous language, Miriwoong, is taught to 500 preschools and primary school children every week through the MDWg language program, and many students speak Aboriginal English/Kriol at home. The role of language, particularly Indigenous language, is therefore at the forefront of educational practice in Kununurra.

In 2020, as a part of my Masters degree, I conducted surveys and interviews with Indigenous and non-Indigenous education staff (including classroom teachers, support staff, and management/administration staff) from 1 primary school, 1 high school, and 4 preschools in Kununurra. Five Miriwoong language teachers were also interviewed. Staff were asked about their perceptions of the Miriwoong language program, traditional Indigenous languages in education, modern Indigenous languages (e.g. Kriol) in education, multilingualism, and the sufficiency of teacher training in these areas.

This talk will present the results of this study, outlining how education staff in Kununurra perceive:

- the language practices of their students
- the usefulness of Indigenous language, and
- the role language plays in connection to land and connection to people, through the facilitation of respect and through fulfilling practical communicative needs. This was described as impacting Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in some similar and some different ways, with a variety of outcomes.

The findings of this exploratory case study will then be applied to broader discussions related to language policy and multilingual pedagogy, within Kununurra and beyond.