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**Networking practitioners
working to record,
retrieve & reintroduce
endangered languages**

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RATIONALE

The maintenance and transmission of cultural and biological diversity is crucially linked to the maintenance of linguistic diversity. The task of maintaining indigenous languages is multifaceted, with activities including language documentation, literature production, education (language nests, school and community language programs), archiving data, development of specialist tools, and training at all levels of people involved in language maintenance activities.

These wide-ranging activities have by and large been developed and undertaken on the basis of interests and needs identified by individuals, communities and organisations. This has seen exciting initiatives launched and comprehensive expertise acquired in all facets of language revitalisation and maintenance. However, to date there has been very little pooling of expertise, and similar information requests and problems have been faced by those wanting to engage with indigenous languages at the local level. As each practitioner has varying levels of expertise related to the type of language work they have experienced, a need has emerged for sharing ideas and techniques to promote good methodologies which result in more productive outcomes for speakers and practitioners.

It is within this scenario that a Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity is being developed as a peak body with a broader focus than any of the individual activities or programs. The need for a body such as this has been apparent for some time — to target a comprehensive approach to language maintenance, develop a network between language maintenance practitioners, and support linguistic diversity by maintaining a website of resources, together with occasional symposia and conferences in the region.

GOALS

The Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity aims to link all major participants, including speakers of indigenous languages and their descendants in homeland and diaspora settings, linguists, staff of language centres, educators (in many different educational settings), archivists, specialists in the development of appropriate technology, and key regional institutions (community, government, nongovernment). As the Network develops, we anticipate the links expanding as other areas of expertise are identified.

The Network will focus on language maintenance activities in the region broadly bounded by Australia, Indonesia, East Timor, Malaysia, Brunei and Melanesia — a region marked by high levels of both linguistic diversity and language endangerment. Beyond the region, Network members also link with international networks such as Terralingua (USA), the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project (UK), Endangered Languages Fund (USA), Foundation for Endangered Languages (UK), EMELD, and DELAMAN. These and other associations ensure that we are working in concert with international colleagues and can take advantage of new techniques and standards as they arise.

The RNLD will provide a means of linking newcomers to the field with experienced practitioners, as well as providing advice on issues that are commonly encountered, for example:

- ◆ methods in language documentation
- ◆ training programs which can provide the necessary skills to language maintenance practitioners
- ◆ appropriate technological approaches to language data (from cardfiles to XML encoded digital data)
- ◆ techniques for producing archival recordings
- ◆ research methods for locating archival material
- ◆ guidance in interpreting archival material
- ◆ drawing on archival material for linguistic and cultural revival
- ◆ dictionary production
- ◆ links to expertise in associated fields

ACTIVITIES

The foci of Network activities will include:

- ❖ Functioning as a resource pool for any individual or organisation undertaking language maintenance activities. The Network website will provide a means of building a database of skills and interests, and detailed information about language maintenance work within the region. An email list will facilitate the dissemination of information and enable language maintenance practitioners to draw upon the skills and experiences of others.
- ❖ Best practice for documentation, for example, the approaches being developed by the Pacific And Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures (PARADISEC), the Electronic Metastructure for Endangered languages (EMELD), the Digital Endangered Languages and Musics Archive Network (DELAMAN), and Open Language Archives Community (OLAC).
- ❖ Training approaches, for example, those utilised regionally at the University of the South Pacific, Vanuatu, and in Australia at Batchelor College (NT), Pundulmurra College (WA), and those being developed within the *Language Endangerment Studies* courses to commence in 2006 at MA, Postgraduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate and Faculty Certificate levels at Monash University (Victoria).
- ❖ Archiving drawing on the experience of PARADISEC and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS).