Series: The Role of Linguists in Indigenous Community Language Programs in Australia[1]

Between duty statement and reality – The "Linguist/Coordinator" at an Australian Indigenous language centre

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The size of Australian Indigenous language centres varies from small programs with a single employment position up to large organisations which may involve several linguists, a manager and a range of support staff. This article is based on the linguist's work at an organisation at the smaller end of the scale – *Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring* Language and Culture Centre (MDWg), which operates out of Kununurra in the remote East Kimberley Region of Western Australia. Following a brief introduction to the context and history of language work at MDWg, the author sheds light on typical community expectations, which cover an array of different language-related and non-linguistic tasks. In a scenario where the linguist and coordinator roles are assigned to a single person it becomes clear that the range of duties can be overwhelmingly diverse and go beyond anything a linguist is exposed to during his/her academic studies. The article proceeds by identifying a range of challenges for a linguist/coordinator, addressing issues such as efficiency, balance, burnout and career planning. For each challenge, possible solutions are offered, with the vision of turning challenge into opportunity. The article concludes with a set of recommendations directed at various stakeholders in the work of Indigenous language centres.

WHAT AM I?
Sometimes it seems I am the linguist, manager, cleaner, bookkeeper, chauffeur, receptionist, supervisor, gardener, teacher, technician, liaison officer, archivist, social worker … – all at once?
Maybe I'm the LINGUIST/COORDINATOR.

1. INTRODUCTION. It is a well-known fact that the average citizen hardly knows what a linguist is or does. Probably even fewer people are aware of a linguist's role at an Aboriginal language centre. Most people seem to have the perception that such a linguist does "translation", "writing down the language", or "teaching" (apart from the common misconception that linguists mainly exist to correct other people's spelling mistakes) and it appears difficult to associate a "language centre linguist" with academic work. Linguists who work within an academic environment undoubtedly have a more qualified view of what their language centre colleagues engage in though even

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they may not be fully aware of the typical tasks and challenges that are on the daily menu in such an environment. This article aims at shedding some light onto this matter – from the perspective of a linguist at an Aboriginal language centre.

Other authors have reported on the relationship between academics and communities in a fieldwork context (e.g. Grenoble & Whaley 2006, 192-195; Crowley 2007, 151-176; Yamada 2007; Grinevald 1998). While this differs from the language centre scenario in many ways (notably in that it is a relationship based on employment of an academic by the community), a "mutually beneficial relationship" as cited in Amery (2000: 11) can still be formed between the community and a linguist at a language centre. One of the additional benefits for the community is that they are in a position to exercise complete control over the work of their employee, which guarantees that the community's interests are addressed as a priority. The linguist benefits from this relationship by receiving compensation for his/her work and – where the community allows the controlled dissemination of linguistic data – by raising his/her profile through publications.

One can distinguish between "project" linguists who may be engaged by a regional or local language program for a very specific linguistic task (such as producing a dictionary or grammar), and the "linguist/coordinator" whose role entails a series of responsibilities which may appear less related to the typical work of a linguist. This article focuses on the latter and discusses the "side effects" of being in the role of a linguist/coordinator at a language centre, with the added responsibilities mentioned above. The account presented here is based on personal experience in a specific context – the linguist/coordinator role at *Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring* in the East Kimberley region of Western Australia – but the situation analysis under investigation addresses factors which may be relevant to any linguist/coordinator in a language centre environment anywhere in Australia or overseas. An analysis of community expectations (Section 2) is followed by a discussion of issues for which possible solutions are offered (Section 3). The article concludes with a series of recommendations to the various stakeholders of language work.

2. CONTEXT AND HISTORY. Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre (henceforth MDWg) is the "public face" of Mirima Council Aboriginal Corporation, a body whose functions focus on language and culture maintenance for the Miriwoong and Gajirrabeng people but also include other kinds of community support. It is located in the township of Kununurra in the Kimberley Region of Western Australia and can be characterised as remote, with significant driving distances to other regional centres or capital cities (Darwin 850 km; Broome 1,100 km; Alice Springs 1,700 km; Perth, the state capital, 3,200 km). The town has a good infrastructure with branches of most state government departments and agencies, schools, shops and recreational opportunities. Miriwoong country roughly stretches from about 40 km west of Kununurra to 100 km east, across the border into the Northern Territory. In the southern direction, Miriwoong land covers most of what is now covered by Lake Argyle. Gajirrabeng country begins just north of Kununurra and stretches all the way to the coast and slightly towards the east, bordering Jaminjung and Ngarinman land.

Kununurra is a very young town; it recently celebrated the 50th anniversary of its foundation (1961), which was based on the introduction of the Ord River Irrigation Scheme and the construction of two major dams which now enclose Lake Kununurra and

created the largest inland sea in Australia, Lake Argyle. These constructions had a major impact on the lifestyle of Miriwoong people as many sites of significance were inundated and seasonal movements along and across the river ceased. With the introduction of equal wages in 1966, people moved from cattle stations into settlements, including the new township of Kununurra. Following a history which had been overtly hostile towards the use of traditional languages, Miriwoong and its neighbouring languages have suffered immensely and are now severely to critically endangered. People's lifestyle was affected dramatically and this resulted in severe socioeconomic issues which have caused an array of problems in the community. The wider community tends to perceive the symptoms of social disadvantage negatively which in some cases may lead to expressions of overgeneralisation, prejudice and discrimination.

Mirima Council is the incorporated body which formally started the language program in 1988, following almost two decades of more or less informal involvement with linguists. The language centre (MDWg) was built in 1991; an extension of the existing facilities followed more recently, in 2010.

The first linguist to work with Miriwoong people in Kununurra was Frances Kofod; she arrived as a research assistant from UNE in 1971 and made various recordings of Miriwoong and neighbouring languages throughout the early 1970s. Over time, the university-based task of language recording grew into a work which formally continued with a grant for the language centre in 1988. Since 1992 Kofod has been engaged intermittently with MDWg in various functions (Newry 2002: 42-43).

Another long-standing employee of Mirima Council was Daniel Suggitt, who worked at MDWg from 1994 to 1999. Unlike Kofod, he had a non-linguistic background and thus had a stronger focus on the coordination of tasks – which was not without challenges. In an interview with language worker Glennis Newry (2001), he says:

> "The hardest thing in this job was to work with the community in the way that people wanted me to. And to do what they wanted. The Programs we were doing were school programs, working in schools and government departments, working with the adult classes and any programs involved in producing anything in general. It was hard to balance what the general public wanted and what the community wanted, that was probably the hardest thing that I've found. It was a great challenge though, I found it really interesting to try to make everybody be happy with what was happening but that wasn't always possible. ... – I found the hardest thing, you know, being a *gardiya* [white Australian], was having to stand in the middle. On the one hand, this was what a lot of people wanted, but other people wanted something else. My job was to make both people understand. But I mean that's really the nature of the job! The difficulty of this job is to make people understand the reasons why we need to do things in a certain way and getting to appreciate it." (Newry 2002: 44)

The author of the present article commenced his work at MDWg in mid 2005. After years of linguistic fieldwork, research and documentation on languages in West Africa and the Amazon, this meant a major change of career – notably with many unexpected consequences. Having been involved in extended periods of fieldwork and the subsequent immersion in different cultures provided an advantage in taking on a job at a language

centre. Nevertheless, the jump from a largely academic environment with extended periods of fieldwork in a village context, to a daily routine of involvement in a town-based Aboriginal community initially came as a shock. It was a transition from focussed and largely independent research to a life with an array of unexpected tasks and requests.

The status of Miriwoong and Gajirrabeng was alarming, much more so than in endangered language groups experienced previously. In 2005, MDWg managed two projects: one was *Language Maintenance* – a government grant to support the general operation of the language centre, with a relatively unspecified array of language-related activities; the other one focussed on the production of a Gajirrabeng dictionary for which two part-time linguists were employed. MDWg had virtually no self-generated income at this stage but managed to support a linguist/coordinator full-time and a part-time bookkeeper at basic rates. Four language workers were engaged through benefits via the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) and limited funds were available to appoint community members for language consultancy on a casual basis. Apart from a simple building with some office space, a reception area and a work room, MDWg's infrastructure consisted of a vehicle for language centre activities, three computers and some recording equipment. Isolated links to a few organisations were in place, such as with the Department of Water which had previously engaged in an interpretive signage project with MDWg. A cultural awareness training course was offered once or twice a year to staff employed at selected community agencies.

During the years since 2006, the work of MDWg started to grow in all areas. By the end of 2011, the size of the facilities had more than doubled, measurable income was generated through activities as a service provider, five language workers were employed directly by MDWg part-time on award wages, and an administrative office was employed to support the day-to-day operations. There were five different projects, all focussing on different aspects of language maintenance and revitalisation and funded by four different organisations/programs. The workload in order to manage these various activities also had more than doubled and an additional full-time position was created in 2012 to oversee the financial and corporate affairs of the organisation. The focus of this article will be on the period which led to the expanded status of the centre (2005-2011) as this illustrates the combination of linguistic and non-linguistic tasks.

In the following sections the variety of linguistic and non-linguistic tasks are described, based on the situation at MDWg.[2] It should be noted that the organisation is governed by a board of Indigenous directors as an Aboriginal Corporation. The link between non-indigenous staff, daily operations and the Miriwoong community can be characterised as very strong.

3. COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS. When a language centre advertises for a linguist, this is usually what they get. At the same time, the community may need someone to manage, coordinate, train and provide support in other areas. Finding all this in the one person could be considered good luck.

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[2] A more detailed account of MDWg's activities can be found in Olawsky (2010).

The community may sometimes have a partial picture of how many tasks are involved in operating a language centre. Some expectations are included in the official job description and attached duty statement but other expectations may be implied in more subtle ways. Almost unavoidably, a language program needs someone "who can get the money to run the project" with the goal to "help us keep the language alive", both of which may have serious ramifications, depending on the size and complexity of the program. These two areas are not necessarily part of the expertise that a linguist acquires during his/her studies. Below is a position description developed by directors for the linguist/coordinator role at Mirima Council.

> *Duty statement for Senior Linguist/Coordinator*
> 1. Coordinate language work (recording, teaching, broadcasting, materials production) at the direction of the Board.
> 2. Supervise language workers and facilitate language worker training.
> 3. Supervise project officers and provide assistance to project activities when required.
> 4. Prepare reports to the Board on local, regional and national issues and seek direction from the council.
> 5. Monitor, on a regular basis, all Language Centre budgets and accounts in consultation with the Assistant Coordinator.
> 6. Work closely with staff, council members and Chairperson.

The criteria listed above can be divided into three types of tasks: language-related responsibilities, administrative/managerial tasks, and community support as is discussed in the following sections.

3.1 LANGUAGE WORK. Language-related tasks strongly reflect the community's vision behind setting up a language program, that is, people's desire to have their language documented, maintained and preserved – or revitalised/revived, where this applies. Put simply, the Miriwoong and Gajirrabeng community have an important goal in mind: language transfer to future generations. While this could be a home-based task under normal circumstances in a non-endangered language context, present day history is that traditional languages are no longer the ones used at home. As the duty statement above reflects, the community is well aware of potential strategies to achieve language transfer, which includes documentation and archiving ("recording"), resource development ("materials production"), dissemination of language in the wider community ("radio broadcasting"), as well as the organisation of language classes ("teaching"). Basically, these duties can be characterised as an implementation of language maintenance strategies. A task such as "coordinate language work" would seem a simple assignment to complete but remains a rather empty term if not specified in detail. In the following, language-related tasks are structured as six main types of activities illustrations of what they may incorporate.

(a) Language classes.

The linguist has to ensure that language classes are organised and taught on a regular basis as an important and very direct way of ensuring language transfer occurs. There are different age and target groups which may each require different pedagogical approaches. For teenagers who participate in a weekly language class as part of their school curriculum, lessons will be more structured than language transfer occurring on a bush trip with families.

In order to make language classes happen, a series of steps is followed. The student/learner groups need to be identified and contacted. This usually involves liaising with schools or agencies, or through promoting classes. The different learner groups at MDWg include two school-based classes, a group associated to the Department of Environment and Conservation, a playgroup run by Save the Children, and a class composed of individuals from the wider public. Lessons are usually taught by or in combination with language workers; a curriculum is set up for each school term, meetings with teachers are held (where applicable) and special activities such as excursions are planned. The preparation for each language lesson involves the identification of a topic and language content, the production of slide shows, preparation of language games and compilation of language-learning exercises. The linguist/coordinator may play a leading role in many of these preparatory steps. The delivery of regular classes is usually conducted by language workers, sometimes with the involvement of external language consultants (elders) and the linguist, where appropriate. The materials are not typically "one size fits all" as they need to be modified according to the target group. Differences apply in terms of gender, age group, proficiency or specialisation of each target group. A suitable definition of the linguist/coordinator's role in the context "language classes" would probably be that of an educational supervisor.

(b) Extracurricular language activities

While the language classes above largely target an audience outside the core Indigenous community (by including learners from other Indigenous groups, specialised students such as rangers and non-indigenous participants), the support of language transfer between older and younger community members is a relevant part of language teaching. Most commonly, this would occur on fieldtrips during which senior speakers talk about the country visited. In this scenario, younger people (who would have a passive knowledge of the language at best) take on the role of listeners, which reflects a more traditional style of learning: listen, observe, wait – and replicate when the time has come. While such activities require little intervention by the linguist/coordinator, he/she may be involved in documentation through audio and/or audiovisual recordings, where specific support staff is unavailable. The major work load for the linguist/coordinator for this activity would be of a logistic nature and include organising vehicles and fuel, catering, driving, and consultant payments; where a trip is undertaken with a specific goal, it may be necessary to streamline the activities during the day. The role of a linguist/coordinator on such days is best described as having a highly coordinating function.

(c) Materials production

The development of teaching resources and reference materials is another important aspect of language work. Teaching resources may include slide shows for use in class, multimedia files, literacy materials – really any kind of resources used in language classes or extracurricular activities ranging from printed media, audio resources, language videos (requiring filming and editing skills), to computer-based tools. In contrast, reference materials include dictionaries and grammars. While the teaching resources strongly relate to the role of a "teacher" or a literacy expert, the development of reference materials is much more the core business of a linguist. A linguist provides the expert knowledge required to record, analyse and render linguistic structures in a way which will benefit current and future generations. For instance, the production of a dictionary involves more than just a compilation of words in two languages. A quality dictionary should at least include references to word class, grammatical features such as gender, classifier and morphology (where applicable), and examples for usage of each entry. To collect all these data may take years of recording, elicitation and observation. In the case of MDWg, it was decided that two different dictionaries should be produced, one for the Miriwoong community and one for use by the wider public, which would be subject to substantial editing and review by the community. While a first version of the community dictionary was completed in 2009, work towards the public edition is still in progress.

To comprehensively document the grammar of a language is an even harder task, as the researcher should have extensive knowledge of linguistic structures, as well as the ability to represent these structures in a way which makes sense to the "outside world". Among the various tasks required to draw conclusions on a language's grammar are transcription, inter-linearisation, glossing, and linguistic analysis. The complexity of these linguistic tasks should not be underestimated as making a recording (and ensuring adequate quality, inclusion of metadata and archiving) is only the first step in language documentation. A single lengthy recording can easily result in weeks of follow-up work involving additional speakers for clarification in order to acquire a thorough word by word and morpheme by morpheme understanding of the text, providing a free translation and entering these data into inter-linearisation software. Turning such linguistic analysis into descriptive words can be equally time-consuming and will require comparison with similar data in order to draw conclusions, let alone the study of existing literature on relevant aspects of the area under investigation.

Ideally, the output of such research would include two versions of the grammar: one which makes detailed reference to and includes technical terms which can be understood by anyone with a linguistic background – and one which is rendered in a way that makes it user-friendly for the actual speakers of the language. Both dictionary and grammar are projects with a long-term outlook which may take a minimum of five years to complete in an academic environment. Given the array of other tasks described here, it could take much longer for a linguist/coordinator to reach this goal. However, there are strategies which may still make it feasible to face this challenge (cf. Section 3).

(d) Archiving

Though this task is not specifically listed in the MDWg duty statement (and could possibly fall under materials production), all recordings must be archived. Copies of archived data are stored electronically on a local server and as hardcopies in an archive room; in addition, backup copies are sent to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) archive in Canberra. The archiving process usually involves editing of the recordings, with different types of software used for audio and audiovisual media, generating output files in different digital formats (such as WAV/MP3 and AVI/MPEG). Catalogues need to be kept up to date according to existing archiving policies for metadata in order to make all data easy to find. Upon request, copies of specific recordings are made available to community members on user-friendly media such as DVD or CD. Some materials may be of a restricted nature (i.e. gender-specific or contain recordings of deceased people) and must be marked accordingly. Where an archive policy and relevant procedures are not in place, useful strategies need to be developed, including guidelines referring to data recording, digitisation procedures, editing and output formats. One does not need to be a trained archivist or technician to complete all archiving tasks, but the time and effort invested in these can be significant.

(e) Cultural activity

While not listed as a specific task, the support of cultural activities such as corroborees (traditional performances) may be an element of the linguist/coordinator's responsibilities. Typically, this would involve logistic support, such as liaising with external event organisers, managing transport and compensation for participants, as well as documentation, usually video production. Comparable to activities outlined in (b), "event coordinator" might be an appropriate term for these tasks.

(f) Other services

A language centre may provide additional services which require the linguist/coordinator to teach to a wider audience. In the case of MDWg, this applies to regular cultural awareness workshops offered to a range of agencies involved with the Indigenous community. The teaching content of these seminars includes aspects of linguistic description, history as well as cultural knowledge, which the linguist may need to acquire. Another recurring task is the response to language-related requests from the wider public, which usually require liaising with senior language speakers and other community members in order to address the request. Requests may involve anything from simple translations, finding an Indigenous name for a project or a building, up to large scale interpretive signage projects, for which different kinds of information may be required. To give an example, the signage for a National Park may require tracing back the names of plants growing along a specific walking trail which can result in substantial community consultation where these names have been long forgotten. The process of determining the traditional use of plants along the trail may involve extensive research, and the completion stage for interpretive signs usually entails photography as well as text production.

Many activities at MDWg in fact require a blend of the tasks and responsibilities listed in (a)-(f). For administrative and accounting purposes, it is useful to keep the activities for projects funded by different funding bodies separate. For instance, there may be a grammar project whose primary goal is the production of a descriptive grammar and requires mostly tasks from category (c). However, field trips (b) and archiving (d) are unavoidably part of the required responsibilities as well. A Master-Apprentice program as is in place at MDWg aims at facilitating language transfer between fluent and partial speakers (b); yet, the ramifications of such a project easily cover tasks from all other categories as well. Activities must also be coordinated and conducted in a way which facilitates the acquittal of funds according to funding policy.

The activities described above can all be characterised as language-related, some in a very direct sense and others in a more indirect way. In practice, this will also include the development of existing and new forms of keeping the language alive. This requires reading, planning and adaptation of strategies for the local context. The following section discusses those aspects which are best defined as managerial tasks.

3.2 ADMINISTRATIVE/MANAGERIAL TASKS. Based on the duty statement, the other functions of the linguist/coordinator are focussed on staff supervision, reporting requirements and the monitoring of budgets, all in close consultation with the governing board. On the one hand, this accurately describes part of the responsibilities but it also leaves another area unmentioned – the unavoidable task of securing funding. Since this is the task with the highest priority – without funding the centre would virtually cease to exist – it is listed in first place, followed by an account of other managerial and administrative duties.

(a) Securing funding

One of the most important steps in making a language centre operational is to attract funding. In most cases this is not merely done by a simple grant application but involves detailed study of the relevant funding bodies and their programs to match the requirements of the centre or language program. Operational funding, specific projects, infrastructure, and the acquisition of assets may all require different funding sources which need to be identified in the first place. To give an example, over a period of five years MDWg received funding from seven different sources.

Once the eligibility for funding has been established, actively liaising with funding bodies is another potential step in order to discuss details and establish a relationship with funding partners. The final task usually is to formally apply for grants, based on a specific process defined by the funding partner – typically involving application forms, templates or questionnaires. Addressing the specific criteria in these guidelines generally means developing completely new applications for each project and funding partner.

(b) Monitoring of budgets and accounts

Spending the funds awarded to the organisation may seem a simple matter but in fact requires thorough coordination as all acquittals must occur according to the respective funding agreements; expenditures must be based on the agreed budget within an agreed timeframe. For major expenses, consultation with the board of directors may be required.

Financial reports are prepared and submitted to funding bodies periodically (also see (e) below), bills need to be paid and invoices are issued according to standard business procedures. These are usually dealt with by the bookkeeper or financial officer but may need to be supervised by the linguist/coordinator.

(c) Staff supervision

Providing training and assistance to Indigenous and non-indigenous staff members is featured in two of the listed responsibilities in the duty statement displayed in Section 2, which reflects the high level of significance this function has for the governing board. Where the linguist/coordinator is the highest ranking staff member, he/she is in charge of supervising other employees. Indigenous language workers play a vital role for the operation of a language centre as they engage in the development of resource materials, class preparation and language teaching. New recruits for such a position may have limited knowledge and experience in these areas and even senior language workers may require professional development in a variety of fields, including literacy, technical and computer-related skills as well as guidance in language documentation and linguistics. Training activities may occur in different ways: by facilitating on-site workshops with external trainers, by enrolling the staff member in an external course, and through on-the-job training on a day to day basis. At MDWg all three strategies are common.

Project officers (project linguists) might have some experience in language documentation and grammar/dictionary production but additional support through a senior linguist may prove useful. Even though not spelled out in the duty statement, supervision may extend to staff management in terms of recruiting and retaining new staff. Developing duty statements, knowledge about relevant employment regulations, leave conditions, travel and employment contracts may be required as well as an understanding of performance measures and evaluation of staff members.

(d) Corporate governance

A close relationship exists between linguist/coordinator and the board of directors, who represent the governing body of the language centre. Meetings with the chairperson, executive committee, directors and corporation members play an important role in managing the organisation's affairs. These meetings, scheduled at regular intervals, involve preparations such as setting up agendas, notifications, formulating requests and reports, inviting external parties as well as considering logistic factors including venue, transport and catering. Where correspondence is required, letters may need to be prepared in cooperation with board members; member lists must be kept up to date and any changes to the organisation's structure must be communicated to the relevant authorities. Apart from liaising regularly with the board or the chairperson in regard to language-related and managerial matters (major decisions, day-to-day business, progress reports, keeping of deadlines, employment issues, project development, community issues), assistance with corporate governance also is part of the linguist/coordinator's role (outlined as "Work closely with staff, council members and Chairperson" in the duty statement). The board may not always be aware of recent developments in the sector such as institutional changes and aspects of compliance with government policies. The

linguist/coordinator helps ensure that corporate requirements are dealt with according to regulations.

(e) Reporting requirements
Reports are typically filed in two different areas: 1) internal reports which are part of the responsibilities discussed in (d) and which are between the linguist/coordinator and the board or community; 2) external reports which make up the larger proportion of reporting requirements: all grant agreements require the recipient of funds to provide periodical reports on the progress, performance and budget of a project. In some cases, this may involve templates or standardised questions whereas other grants require comprehensive statements about the outcomes of each activity. These reports may be expected quarterly or six-monthly, usually complemented by a complete annual report. The amount of time required to complete and submit all reports can be substantial since the quality of a report will affect the likelihood of future funding. In addition to these, reports to the Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations also are a regular requirement.

(f) Administrative tasks
Even though administrative tasks remain unmentioned in the duty statement, functions related to administration are numerous and can only be highlighted here. Such tasks typically include all general aspects of building and site maintenance, vehicle maintenance and repair as well as the purchase of supplies and materials, or any issues with essential services such as phone lines or internet services. The acquisition of equipment, including furniture, technical equipment and computers may also be part of this role. Depending on the nature and scale of assets, solution-finding can become part of administrative functions as well. To select only one of these areas as an example, the term "building maintenance" may seem very plain but could involve an array of unexpected situations which may require the linguist/coordinator's attention: typical issues include building safety, fire extinguishers, fencing, parking, lights, plants, keys and locks, rubbish removal, alarm system, plumbing issues, renovation, water damage, burglary, pest control, or furniture replacement – one easily gets the idea of potential problems. Though the linguist/coordinator is certainly not expected to function as a plumber, removalist or engineer – he/she may still be the one who is expected to make necessary arrangements with service providers where the need arises. A similar situation applies to other areas mentioned further above; vehicles and computers are prominent candidates when it comes to the complexity of maintenance issues.

(g) Other responsibilities
There are other aspects relating to administration and management which are not listed in the duty statement but may apply nevertheless. The community may have expectations in terms of finding new strategies of language revitalisation, which cannot be realised without further developing activities and infrastructure. For some plans of growth, existing infrastructure may also have to be expanded as was the case at MDWg where a single building with limited shared space for office, training, language classes, administration, archiving and storage made it impossible to expand language activities. The ramifications of a building project in terms of sourcing funding opportunities and

dealing with logistics are beyond anyone's normal capacity. Any substantial development unavoidably involves additional efforts for all areas listed in (a)-(f), as well as the need to seek partnerships.

Other responsibilities may come with requirements imposed by funding bodies: at some stage, a government department made the creation of employment for Indigenous people a criterion which had to appear in the periodical performance indicators for funded projects. It was also deemed desirable that a language centre produce some activity-generated income. A further additional task is the need to promote the organisation's work through the media.

Just by looking at the range of "Other" tasks mentioned here, it would seem obvious that development and growth, employment and generating income clearly are the responsibility of a full-time manager, which undoubtedly puts a strong emphasis on the "Coordinator" component in the job title for a linguist. In a context where the linguist/coordinator holds the only full-time position, this implies a strong sense of responsibility and the readiness to take on any role not otherwise assigned. The involvement of the governing board in such a scenario is highly significant; a board of committed members who are prepared to take on some responsibility to "run" the organisation in teamwork with its employees can be invaluable.

3.3 COMMUNITY SUPPORT. Where a language centre is the gathering point for a community, it also shares the function of a resource centre. In the case of MDWg, Mirima Council was the first major organisation in Kununurra to take care of the Miriwoong community. In later years, other agencies grew from this and took on some aspects of community support. However, given Mirima's historical role as a support agency, some community members would still seek assistance from their initial point of reference rather than reaching out to newly created agencies. The expectations of the community from the language centre as an established place of community support are indeed numerous.

Assistance with paperwork undoubtedly plays a key role when it comes to community expectations. In a remote community where English (let alone formal English on official bills and documents) is not the first language, people with limited or no literacy skills at all frequently come to the language centre with all kinds of documents to have these translated, explained or processed – water and electricity bills, bank statements, infringement notices and court orders, insurance papers, Centrelink (social security) notifications and application forms, issues related to identity documents, birth certificates, résumés, nominations, licensing – the list is open, given the complexity of Western bureaucracy.

Until 2007, Mirima Council also coordinated a housing program for the community, which meant community members brought any issues with their house to the attention of the language centre – including services bills, outstanding rental payments, deductions, requests for repair and maintenance, complaints and disturbances around the property. Former linguist/coordinator Frances Kofod (who liked to spell out her role as the linguist/COORDINATOR!) once described the Language Centre as a place where "people come looking for people" – which hits the nail on the head. With no landlines or public phones available in the entire community, the language centre not only became a

focal gathering point but also a place to quickly make a phone call in order to track down a family member.

Requests for lifts, pick-ups for work or transfers of community members can be added to the array of expectations listed above. In a context where the language centre owns one of generally only a few vehicles in the community, these expectations would seem understandable, especially in cases of an emergency. Nevertheless, these as well as most other aspects of community support represent a challenge to assuring the key operations of a language program.

Many community expectations relating to general support can be characterised in sociological terms: relationships have the top priority in most Indigenous societies; in fact everything in traditional life is based on the way people relate to one other. A common way of introducing each other is to determine the degree of kinship between two sides. Certain family members are expected to show a higher level of courtesy to each other. Outsiders are evaluated based on their character, i.e. the level of respect the person shows to the community, the way he/she communicates, his/her loyalty, and his/her willingness to assist individuals with personal issues. In contrast, Western societies have been developing an environment in which planning, efficiency, and achievements in objectively measurable ways play a dominating role. To consider both sides can be a balancing act when it comes to matters such as recruitment: in the case of a job opening, a senior traditional person might first look at the degree of kinship (taking into account possible avoidance relationships), the opinion of close relatives about the person and the character of the person; formal qualifications may come second. Someone following a Western approach will evaluate the professional background of a candidate before even inviting the applicant for an interview. In determining the successful candidate, both sides have to work together to reach an acceptable outcome.

4. ISSUES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS/STRATEGIES. Given a situation such as that described in the preceding sections, the potential discrepancy between duty statement and reality becomes obvious. Within the context of a small language program (limited staff, low funding, 1-2 projects) the roles of linguist and coordinator can probably be combined to a certain extent but as a project grows this may no longer be viable. Trying to combine responsibilities related to language maintenance with management, administration and community support for a fully developed language program may easily result in overload and subsequent burnout. This section categorises the various issues and offers possible strategies to address these.

4.1 MISMATCH OF DUTIES AND ACHIEVABILITY. In most cases, the governing board of a language centre needs to employ someone who is suitably qualified to obtain funding, deal with government officials and fulfil reporting requirements – perhaps much more so than individual board members would be. For community members, the absence of connections to government/funding bodies, lack of relevant computer skills, or limited experience in dealing with authorities on a formal level can be serious hurdles in requesting grant funding. A limited understanding of legal obligations and not having experience in business management (where generating funds is an option) make the necessity of a designated staff member even more relevant. At the same time,

a language centre usually requires the expertise of a linguist – someone who is skilled and experienced in systematic language documentation, and who is able to develop and implement a range of language maintenance/revitalisation strategies for a specific language context as described in Section 2.1.

The problem may lie in the fact that there is a limited level of awareness regarding the actual complexity of these tasks. One issue becomes particularly evident – the fact that the unavoidable managerial duties appear to outnumber language-related tasks. While this is not based on a major mismatch between duty statement and actual tasks – the majority of responsibilities are in fact listed – one issue regards the hidden details of each assignment. Managerial functions are not named explicitly though they cover a substantial proportion of most duties. Supervision, coordination and monitoring are aspects of a daily routine which would be the responsibility of a manager or CEO in any mid-size business. Nevertheless, the relevance of all these routines in keeping a language centre functional is obvious. The inclusion of further development in most areas is also unquestionable if growth is to be achieved; stagnation is generally not regarded as favourable by funding bodies. Expansion again depends on sound management rather than on quality linguistic work.

The fact that purely administrative functions as discussed in Section 3.2(f) are absent from the duty statement but are essential to daily operations adds to the discrepancy between theory and reality. Administration, as well as community support, certainly is an element on the list of community expectations; where these are not met, there is potential for friction. Initially, tasks which are not explicitly included in the duty statement will be neglected. This may result in some negligence of community support which in turn could be interpreted as lack of understanding for issues based on relationships. In essence, it is a matter of different priorities: there is a tendency in Western culture to emphasise planning, goals and efficiency while Indigenous values tend to focus more strongly on interpersonal issues.

So, is there a solution in combining managerial and linguistic tasks? The ideal solution is to share these between different staff members, a linguist and a manager. However, this may not always be a feasible solution in the short term, as it usually means a substantial increase of funding – which is likely to be a long-term process. In the meantime, some compromises may be necessary. In the case of MDWg, a part-time administrative position was created with a relatively small amount of funding, largely based on activity-generated income. While this still leaves all managerial responsibilities with the linguist/coordinator, it shifts a substantial bulk of administrative and maintenance-related duties and ensures the smooth day-to-day operation of a language centre. At the same time, the linguist/coordinator may want to consider the following strategies in order to reserve enough time for language-related duties:

a) Reject some requests if they are not directly relevant to the language program. Example: a project proposal by an external party related to land management and language can be referred to another organisation, with possible partnerships focussing on the language component.

b) Delegate some requests and tasks to language workers or community members and educate/train these where necessary. Example: a translation task may well match the expertise of a community member who could be employed on a consultant basis.

c) Contract some tasks to external parties (if funding is available). Example: the roles of bookkeeping, cleaning, gardening services could be taken over by community members or contractors.

d) Ensure growth in activity-generated income: while this will initially involve further efforts, the increased availability of funding in the long term may result in the possibility to employ additional staff. Example: generating income through consultancy, language classes, facility hire or cultural training could provide the funds to employ an administrative officer.

e) Involve volunteers: there is a general desire in many city-based students to "get out and do something practical". This may even apply to members of the public in a remote community who have a vision of supporting Indigenous communities in one way or another. Example: MDWg attracts volunteers from interstate and overseas through an internship program; the benefits of this are invaluable – not only for the organisation but also for the intern. At the same time, MDWg aims at engaging local volunteers for specific tasks such as archiving or language worker support.

4.2 EFFICIENCY AND BALANCE. As mentioned in the previous section, the contrast between different priority settings has the potential to create friction. On the one hand, efficiency is indispensable in order to be successful with funding applications. Funding bodies want to see outcomes and are naturally more inclined to support language projects managed by a trusted organisation which has a history of successful activities and correct financial acquittals. Thus, reliability, efficiency and accuracy do play an important role. At the same time, the Indigenous community may have priorities which must be respected equally. Cultural obligations such as bereavement leave, funerals, domestic responsibilities and seasonal customary activities should be ranking at the same level of priority as Western values. Almost inevitably, the combination of the two will clash on some occasions. For instance, a workshop has been planned for which participants from a number of different organisations have registered. The activity will promote cultural awareness and traditional language as well as generate some income for the language centre – overall, an event which will strengthen the position of the organisation and fulfil important goals. However, if a death in the community occurs or the Indigenous presenter is suddenly faced with having to resolve an important domestic issue, the workshop may have to be cancelled on short notice. While this situation could potentially lead to disagreement, it is important to balance the different priority settings appropriately. For an Aboriginal-governed organisation it would seem more than reasonable to follow cultural protocol in making a decision to cancel an event for the above reasons. Where other reasons are put forward which are not based

on cultural protocol, a dialogue about the correct process would be in order. As in most circumstances, effective communication will be the key to finding an agreement.

Conflicts between outcome-based and relationship-based priorities may also occur in the way some projects are managed. One example from MDWg is the Master-Apprentice Language Learning Program – a highly successful initiative based on an immersion model for language learning. The project started with all participants receiving a fixed amount of compensation through payroll. This worked well for the community which benefitted from regular wages through project participants who further distributed their income to other family members – a way of support which was highly appreciated by the community. However, the early outcomes in terms of efficiency were poor and resulted in the stalling of funds by the funding body. New rules based on activity-based payments had to be introduced which led to much stronger outcomes. Initially, not all community members were happy with the decision and only gradually started to agree with the new system but since the decision was not in direct conflict with cultural protocol, it was eventually accepted. A stronger involvement of the community was also achieved by organising a training workshop. In the following years, the Master-Apprentice program at MDWg proved to be one of the most efficient activities with measurable progress in all participants (cf. Olawsky 2013).

4.3 BURNOUT. A linguist/coordinator working in a context as described here may go through periods of stress – which is a symptom well known by other professionals in almost any area. However, where ongoing responsibilities for language-related and non-linguistics tasks result in excessive work hours, one may be in danger of being burnt out. The following strategies to prevent this are based on personal experience and will require evaluation for each specific context.

a) Try to include study leave as part of the employment contract as this will help focus on important tasks from a distance.

b) Liaise with others who are in similar situations and ensure exchange about ongoing issues is not left out.

c) Keep a reasonable separation between personal and work life, which may seem drastic in a general sense but experience shows that reserving some space for privacy can lead to strong yet clearly-defined relationships with the community (also cf. Crowley 2007: 175 about crossing the boundary between linguist and community).

d) Think long-term: include growth and expansion in general planning. At MDWg, this initially generated a lot more work since funding had to be sought for extension buildings and further projects. In the area of personnel expansion, strategic training and capacitating of community and staff would at first imply strong efforts; however, expansion can be designed to turn to automatic mode once it gets to a stage where funding and additional staff are organised.

Given the potential need to endure in a multi-task situation, one could stipulate that working as a linguist/coordinator at a language centre may not be for everybody, despite a series of strategies to overcome the challenges. A sturdy character, yet open to compromise and good communicative and intercultural skills will help, as well as a spiritual source which will build up one's internal strength.

4.4 PERSONAL ISSUES. Having said that the linguist/coordinator role may not be for everybody, one has to take into account the environment outside the work routine. Someone who considers himself/herself a "city person" and whose wellbeing depends on the diversity of entertainment and recreational options may find it hard to live in a remote community. Remoteness can be a relative term as there are language centres that are not only remote but also extremely isolated and small, with restrictions in supplies and transport; in turn, other language programs operate in towns which can be considered remote in a geographical sense (such as Kununurra, Port Hedland, Broome and Kalgoorlie) but generally support an adequate infrastructure and transport options. Yet, these still do not offer the same lifestyle as a major city would. Children's education or employment options for a partner can be an issue where one is accompanied by family members; housing is surprisingly unaffordable or may be hard to find; living expenses are generally above average due to transport costs.

In terms of offering a solution, there is not much one can do to change the remoteness or liveability of a place. However, district allowances, housing subsidies and an annual airfare allowance usually somewhat compensate for additional expenses. Moreover, with a positive attitude, a remote location may get an entirely different appeal as it offers lifestyle opportunities not available in the city.

4.5 CAREER PLANNING. Linguistics graduates who seek employment at a language centre sometimes do so as part of a career plan which sees this engagement as a useful contribution on the one hand and as a practical learning experience on the other. Sometimes this would involve a comparatively short-term stay, such as 1-2 years – which may work well for the linguist but can be of limited value for the language centre, as regular staff turnover does not work in favour of stability and continuity, let alone the building of relationships. However, the other side of the coin is that the longer a linguist works outside the academic community, the greater the risk of being detached from ongoing developments and being unable to find a way back into academic life. Working as a project linguist will probably leave enough time to keep those academic ties by engaging in presentations, participating in conferences and using extra time for publishing. For a linguist/coordinator, this task may prove more difficult, given the work load as described above.

For any linguist at an Indigenous language centre, keeping in touch with the linguistic world is essential and times to engage in linguistics-related events and activities should be set aside. Joining conferences is one way of keeping up to date. In the case of MDWg, the linguist/coordinator was granted four weeks of annual study leave which can be used for academic work as long as it is related to the languages supported by the language centre and is deemed useful by the governing board. Another strategy developed only recently at MDWg was the creation of a linguistic forum, which effectively brings

linguists from outside to the language centre rather than having to travel. This initiative helps stimulate linguistic work and facilitates exchange between fellow academics.

4.6 TURNING CHALLENGE INTO OPPORTUNITY. This section has discussed a series of issues related to working at a language centre and offered possible solutions to most of these. However, it is important that, while listing potential problems, the obvious benefits of working in such a role are not neglected.

a) Cultural immersion. The daily contact with the Indigenous community provides an opportunity for immersion which one could not possibly acquire anywhere else, except perhaps in a fieldwork situation for a limited period of time. The linguist/coordinator often has the privilege of experiencing cultural activities in a genuine context and getting to know aspects of life in another society from a very special perspective. Over time, with growing relationships, one is likely to learn about traditions which most people thought long gone.

b) Lifestyle. To some degree, the role of a linguist at a language centre is comparable to ongoing fieldwork, less the difficult living conditions one sometimes encounters, such as creeping through a jungle to get to a remote community. Rather than worrying about the next meal, one may in fact retreat to a comfortable, air-conditioned home at the end of the day, enjoying the benefits of studying a language in a safe haven and without life-threatening diseases or the need to travel for hundreds of kilometres. On weekends, one can enjoy the natural beauty of a remote location in a laid-back environment.

c) Life skills. Working at a language centre differs in many aspects from a university job and while this has been identified as a potential challenge here, it can be highly beneficial. Not sitting behind a desk or in a lecture hall for 40 hours a week is useful not only in the sense of developing new expertise. Apart from the variety of skills the linguist/coordinator may acquire in engaging in the array of tasks described above, the addition of interpersonal and management skills as well as acquiring the ability to master challenging situations can be considered as character-building.

d) Professional maturity and academic qualification. The diversity of tasks can turn linguists into all-rounders. Linguistic skills undergo a massive expansion on a practical level as the wide range of different aspects of language documentation, revitalisation, transfer and policy become part of the daily routine. The linguist gets to know most areas of a language, from lexicon to grammar; he/she gets insight into different language maintenance and revitalisation strategies and understands which ones work and which do not. In addition, the linguist/coordinator develops a high level of independence and professional maturity and will find ways of sharing new knowledge by contributing to academic research in a variety of ways.

As in any job, there are challenges as well as benefits associated to the role of a linguist/coordinator at a language centre. Ultimately, the advice would be to aim for growth and expansion and split the responsibilities between linguist and "coordinator" by creating separate positions. Finding the balance until this goal is achieved will depend on a variety of factors including the role of the community, board, and external circumstances, but will be largely subject to the individual linguist, whose task is to ensure that the benefits of their role outweighs the challenges.

5. ON THE LINGUIST'S WISH LIST: RECOMMENDATIONS. The previous sections describe a number of common issues sometimes faced by linguists in a linguist/coordinator role. The solutions offered above are of an "internal" nature in that they relate to possible strategies the linguist himself/herself can pursue. In the following, recommendations are made to other stakeholders in whose best interest it is to improve the sustainability of language centres and linguistic work in similar contexts. Each of the groups listed below will benefit directly or indirectly from the successful work of language centres and should therefore have a strategic interest in making the roles of linguists at language centres as viable as possible.

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS TO INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES. For Indigenous communities which are fighting for language and culture survival, the support by linguists and coordinators (in single or combined functions) plays a crucial role. They are concerned with attracting and retaining qualified and experienced staff, which is best achieved if the duties and responsibilities are clearly defined. In a small language program which is able to support only a single full-time staff member with combined responsibilities in language support, management and administration, the various duties should be identified in an unmistakable manner through precise duty statements and job descriptions. A linguist with the view of spending most of their time on language research and revitalisation is less likely to persist if in fact the bulk of duties is related to management, administration and community support. A long-term plan with a view for expansion may also include the creation of an additional position which will keep the different kinds of duties apart.

Granting linguists a certain level of freedom in regard to maintaining a link with universities will not only give their role a more diversified status but will undoubtedly promote the work of the language centre in public, which may assist in attracting additional external support.

When looking for a linguist, a community should also have in mind the following observation made by Speas (2009): "... asking a linguist to help you develop a language program is a bit like asking a mechanic to teach you how to drive" (Speas 2009: 24). Not every linguist is experienced in the different aspects of language work as discussed in Section 2.1 and a thorough evaluation of applicants and candidates may prove useful.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS TO ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS. Universities and other academic bodies are relevant stakeholders in the work of language centres in that language documentation forms the indispensable basis of linguistic research. The work done at, and data produced by, language programs represents a practical application of

linguistic theory and therefore merits ideological as well as practical support by academic institutions. Rice (2011) points out a common misunderstanding which reflects a distorted perception of linguists working at language centres:

> "... not all members at the dean's office understood what is meant by *community based research*, and that it was regarded by some as 'do good' work that was all well and good, but was not academic research. Instead, *community-based* research was confused with *community service* ..." (Rice 2011: 191).

She later clarifies that "there is little reason to think that the dictionaries, grammars, and texts that result from community-based research methods will be any less valuable than those undertaken using other methods" (Rice 2011: 194).

To assist the support of language centre work and what might be called "community linguists" by some, academic bodies could encourage the flow of students into language centre work, as well as making the transition from language centre work back into academic employment more feasible.

Cross-cultural preparation is another possible kind of support: while the majority of linguistics graduates remain attached to department-internal, often theoretically-oriented projects and studies, some could be given the opportunity to conduct research in combination with an Indigenous language centre. The provision of grants and subsidies for extended periods of involvement at a language centre would encourage more students to engage in practically-oriented research. This could apply, for example, to students wanting to do an internship at a language centre, without the implication of "doing linguistic fieldwork" with measurable outcomes but merely to acquire insight into language revitalisation work.

The inclusion of courses and seminars on language maintenance and revitalisation as well as on the status of languages within Australia (or other respective countries) would result in an increased interest from linguistics students for this area.

Inviting linguists working at language centres to lecture and present about their activities would not only benefit students to learn more about the practical sides of linguistic work; it would also assist linguists working in remote locations to keep in touch with the academic world.

Recruiting linguists who have worked at a language centre could be of advantage for a linguistics program: while typical duties such as teaching, remote/online delivery and grade supervision may not have been developed strongly in those candidates, they will contribute qualities usually less present in academics who have never worked outside the academic field: skills in management, communication, finance and general life skills are only some traits which define a highly qualified employee, in addition to experience in practical linguistic study including aspects of language documentation, literacy support, language maintenance and language policy. Universities could be expected to function as organisations with a vision beyond that of a commercial enterprise. The support of language centres and individuals who dedicate their time and skill to them should be included in the budget of every linguistics department in one way or another.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS TO LINGUISTS. The prospective linguist/coordinator at an Indigenous language centre has been in the focus of this article and only a few additional hints will be given here in terms of preparing for a potential engagement.

a) Consider an internship at a language centre as this is an ideal way to get to know the operation of a language program and to decide on how much further one is prepared to get involved.

b) Be open and flexible in regard to career planning. Where feasible, incorporate a few years of work at a language centre.

c) Have a certain level of dedication and commitment to a cause which will challenge you for a period of your life. Eventually, a dedicated person will reap the rewards in terms of maturity and experience, apart from the fact that they have contributed their part to the cause of supporting linguistic diversity.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENT AND AUTHORITIES. In recent years, Australian government bodies have made some progress in recognising the value of Indigenous languages. However, Australia is still a country with an extremely low level of awareness of (a) the significance of linguistic diversity, (b) the perilous state of most Indigenous languages and (c) the need for a boost in support of these languages (cf. AIATSIS 2005). It is time for governments to understand that language is as important as health, housing, employment and other sectors. While there is no formal data available, it is not difficult to see the correlation between language loss and Indigenous social disadvantage. Without language, a loss of identity will obstruct any progress in other areas and only increase social issues and the costs associated to addressing these.

In 2010/11, the *Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records* program of the Australian Government received 130 applications seeking over $22 million in funding, out of which only $7.9 million were allocated to support 63 projects. (Australian Government 2010). The shortage of funding for language programs should be addressed and sufficient resources be made available to language centres based on their actual needs. Based on personal experience it is relatively unproblematic to obtain funding which aims at strengthening Indigenous training and employment – which is a key milestone on the road to recovery from centuries of Indigenous disadvantage. However, it must be recognised that in some remote areas, Indigenous communities are still in need of support by committed and qualified experts, including non-Indigenous specialists, especially in the areas of language support and management. As a strategic goal in the long term, these should ideally be replaced by Indigenous community members but the transition to this may require more than a few years. Sustainable development of training and employment can only occur where qualified linguists and experienced managers are engaged at reasonable conditions to help develop the skills in collaboration with Indigenous communities; miracles should not be expected if nobody is there to capacitate those who are in need. By providing funding to external specialists to work in Indigenous language centres, authorities would assist with this transition in a practical way.

The linguistic community plays a role in convincing the authorities of the need for further support of language programs. In a society with an extremely low level of language awareness this may not be a simple task but it certainly is a worthy one.

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