



'Wangka Kutju'

Pintupi-Luritja
Translator Project

July 2019



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COVER ARTWORK

This painting by Barbara Marks Nampitjinpa depicts her father's country after the rain, with a river and waterholes full of water. On one side are the fathers and grandfathers (Tjanpitjinpa), on the other side are their sons (Tjangala). They are all Luritja mob, telling stories and passing on the tjukurpa. These stories were told in the old days on the ground, drawing by hand in the sand. 'That's how we learned from our grandfathers' side'. The painting includes some of the symbols used when men and women are painting up, representing some of the sacred places and the hunting grounds for kangaroo, or mala.



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1. THE WANGKA KUTJU PROJECT

We are Western Desert Nganampa Walytja Palyantjaku Tjutaku Aboriginal Corporation, also known as Purple House. Our mission is to improve the lives of people with renal failure, reunite families, and reduce the impact of kidney disease in our communities. We pride ourselves on strong Indigenous leadership.

In the 1990's Pintupi people from Western Desert communities grew concerned about their family members being forced to move away from community to receive treatment for end stage renal failure. Passionate about family, culture and country, a determined group of senior men and women created paintings for auction, raising over \$1 million to set up a dialysis service in Kintore. We now manage dialysis units in 16 remote communities, and two mobile dialysis trucks.

Central to our success are the strong relationships that have earned the respect of community members. We uphold the value of holistic services that are culturally relevant, working together with our patients and their families to make sure we are doing things the right way. We network across borders and with diverse cultures and language groups.

The prototype for the language translator was demonstrated by Brendan Kavanagh at a general meeting in 2018. Purple House Directors could see the potential for the translator to improve communication and promote their traditional language, while the process would provide employment for dialysis patients. The proposal for the project and the methodology was formally endorsed by the Directors.

In 2019 the United Nations General Assembly declared the International Year of Indigenous Languages to raise awareness of the crucial role languages play in people's daily lives.

'Through language, people preserve their community's history, customs and traditions, memory, unique models of thinking, meaning and expression' (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues)

The Australian government offered support to

organisations for facilitating maintenance of Aboriginal culture through languages and arts. We gratefully acknowledge the funding for this project from the Indigenous Languages and Arts (ILA) program.

'Language and art are essential to the wellbeing, culture and identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities'. (Department of Communications and the Arts)

In July 2018, focus groups were held in the Mount Liebig community 325km west of Alice Springs. Known locally as Watiyawanu, Mount Liebig is home to families with connections to Haasts Bluff, Papunya, Kintore and Kiwirrkurra. The prototype was presented to senior men and women who decided it was tjukarurru palyantjaku (doing it the right way).

A core group of women initially engaged with the project in Alice Springs, acting as content developers, advisors and experts in the Pintupi-Luritja language. Purple House staff and volunteers were invited to visit the group for mutual understanding of language and concepts relating to health care and governance.

The women's group decided to call the translator Wangka Kutju, two words with the collective meaning 'one voice'. Barbara Marks Nampitjinpa decided to present a beautiful painting, depicting her father's country in the heart of the Western Desert. The women and men agreed that the painting would be used as the main screen for the translator and the cover for the project report.

Wangka Kutju is the first software to provide real-time, sentence level translation between English and Pintupi-Luritja, with text to speech capabilities. It uses sophisticated functions to translate full sentences in real time, rather than providing a static database of words.

Wangka Kutju is a unique interactive communication device which aligns with the Purple House model of care. It has the ability to enhance two-way learning and relay important information to, and from, the people we support.

We acknowledge the elders and traditional owners of the Western Desert region whose language informs the translator, holding knowledge



and preserving traditional language for future generations.

Meet Irene Nangala

A Pintupi-Luritja elder, Irene Nangala was a lead tester in the women's group, while also providing her vocal talent as the female voice for Wangka Kutju's text-to-speech audio.

Irene has had a long involvement with Purple House, advocating for remote dialysis services. She is the Central Australian representative on Kidney Health Australia's national consumer group. Irene started dialysis treatment in 2013 and spends her time between Alice Springs, and Kintore where she is a Papunya Tula artist.

Irene grew up in Papunya where she worked as a store cashier and teacher's assistant, then studied in Darwin with Bachelor Institute. Irene worked on the Luritja Dictionary (IAD Press) and the Pintupi-Luritja bible translation with Ken Hanson. She has been Chairperson of Kintore Community Council.

"We gotta talk up, this is for our grandchildren so they can learn. They gotta talk up too, join up with kardiya to speak in language and in English. We don't

wanna just sit down, boring one. This is good for us, to work together. It's for our people". (Irene Nangala)

2. DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Nganana pukuḷpa warrka ngaatja palyanu.
Nganana translator nyangu kampiyutangka.
Nganana yunytjurringu palunya palyantjanytju
nganampa wangkatjarra. Nganana wangkangu
yirrititja tjuḷalawana, Nganana tjananya tjapinu
alpamilantjaku. Nganana wiika tjuḷangka palyalpayi.
Wangkapayi Pintupi-Luritja tjuḷangu warrkarringu
Tjapangatilawana palunya tjukarurrntjaku.
Nganana palunya nintinu mayutju tjuḷakutu. Tjana
wangkangu yuwa, ngaatja palya, ngaatja tjukaruru
palyanu.

We were happy to do this project. We looked at the translator on the computer. We wanted to make it in our language. We talked to elders and asked them to help us right from the start. We were meeting every week, testing it and changing it, making it better. Pintupi-Luritja speakers worked with Brendan to get it right, how we wanted it. We showed it to Directors and they said yes, this is good, we did this the right way.



Meet Bobby West

Bobby has been a Director for Purple House for many years, and he is involved in a number of community boards and committees for his community. Bobby was an active participant in the men's group for this project, and his wife Lorna attended the women's group.

Bobby is a Papunya Tula Artist and shareholder. He was involved in the collaborative Kiwirrkurra men's painting auctioned as part of the Western Desert Dialysis Appeal for \$340,000. In 2011 Bobby won the General Painting Award in the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards.

Bobby commenced dialysis treatment in 2014.

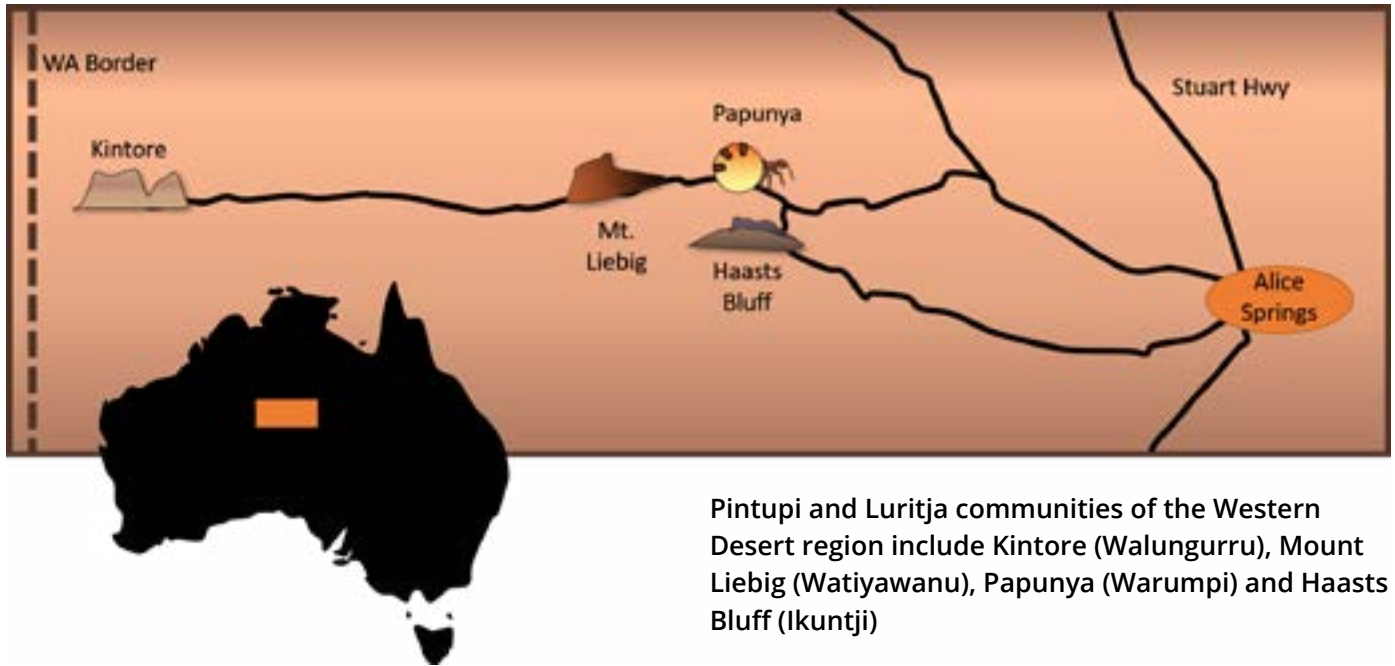
3. THE PINTUPI-LURITJA LANGUAGE

Pintupi and Luritja are two similar but overlapping dialects of the Western Desert language (Hansen, 2011:vii). The dialects which make up the Western

Desert language can be divided into western and eastern groups on the basis of grammatical features and vocabularies. Pintupi-Luritja combines some of the dialect features of the eastern and western groups and is influenced by close contact with Western Arrernte and Warlpiri (Heffernan and Heffernan, 1999:2-3). The Central Land Council describes Pintupi speakers as coming from the Western Australian desert region around Kiwirrkurra community, and that Pintupi-Luritja speakers have had more contact with Hermannsburg, Papunya and Haasts Bluff.

Heffernan (1996) distinguishes two groups of Luritja communities. The southern groups are those that speak with a strong Yankunytjatjara influence, and these, by and large, are made up of the communities south of Hermannsburg (including Jay Creek). The other group, Pintupi-Luritja, extends to the north-west and west of Hermannsburg. The major communities where Pintupi-Luritja is spoken are Haasts Bluff, Papunya, Mt Liebig and Kintore.

Some speakers are to be found in the Kimberley region, in Halls Creek and Balgo, but most live in the NT, principally at Papunya and outstations, Haast's



Pintupi and Luritja communities of the Western Desert region include Kintore (Walungurru), Mount Liebig (Watiyawanu), Papunya (Warumpi) and Haasts Bluff (Ikuntji)

Bluff, Mount Liebig area, Kintore and outstations, Kiwirrkurra; also some at Areyonga, Yuendumu, Docker River, Nyirrpi, Hermannsburg and Glen Helen (particularly Luritja).

Source: <https://collection.aiatsis.gov.au/austlang/language/c7.1>

"Speakers of Pintupi tend to come from across the border in the WA desert region around Kiwirrkura community. People who identify as Pintupi tend to be from the west, whereas Pintupi Luritja speakers tend to have had more contact with the mission at Hermannsburg and the ration stations at Papunya and Haasts Bluff". (Central Land Council)

<https://www.clc.org.au/index.php?/articles/info/aboriginal-languages/>

4. ARTWORK

Barbara's painting, depicting Luritja country around Mount Liebig, served as inspiration for Wangka Kutju's visual design. Barbara was a lead tester in women's group. She attended most of the group sessions and encouraged others to speak up. Barbara was born at Haasts Bluff, then later moved to Papunya where she worked at the old clinic as an Aboriginal Health Worker. Permission was given to use this painting beyond her lifetime for purposes relating to the Wangka Kutju language translator.

See artwork on cover and page 1.

5. DEVELOPMENT TEAM

Minyma/Kungka

- Irene Nangala
- Marilyn Nangala
- Barbara Marks
- Sylvana Marks
- Mavis Nampitjinpa
- Wentjia Napaltjarri
- Pamela Morgan
- Ivy Nangala Smith
- Laurel Nangala
- Kaylene Collins
- Emily Napanangka
- Maisie Campbell
- Desma Kantamarra
- Audrey Turner
- Aileen Kantamarra
- Nabula Scobie
- Barbara Minor
- Petrina Martin



- Munatji Brumby
- Miriam Wheeler
- Rosanna McCormack
- Petra Turner

- Richard Minor
- Reggie Baldock

Many thanks to all the participants and other visitors to the language group meetings.

Wati

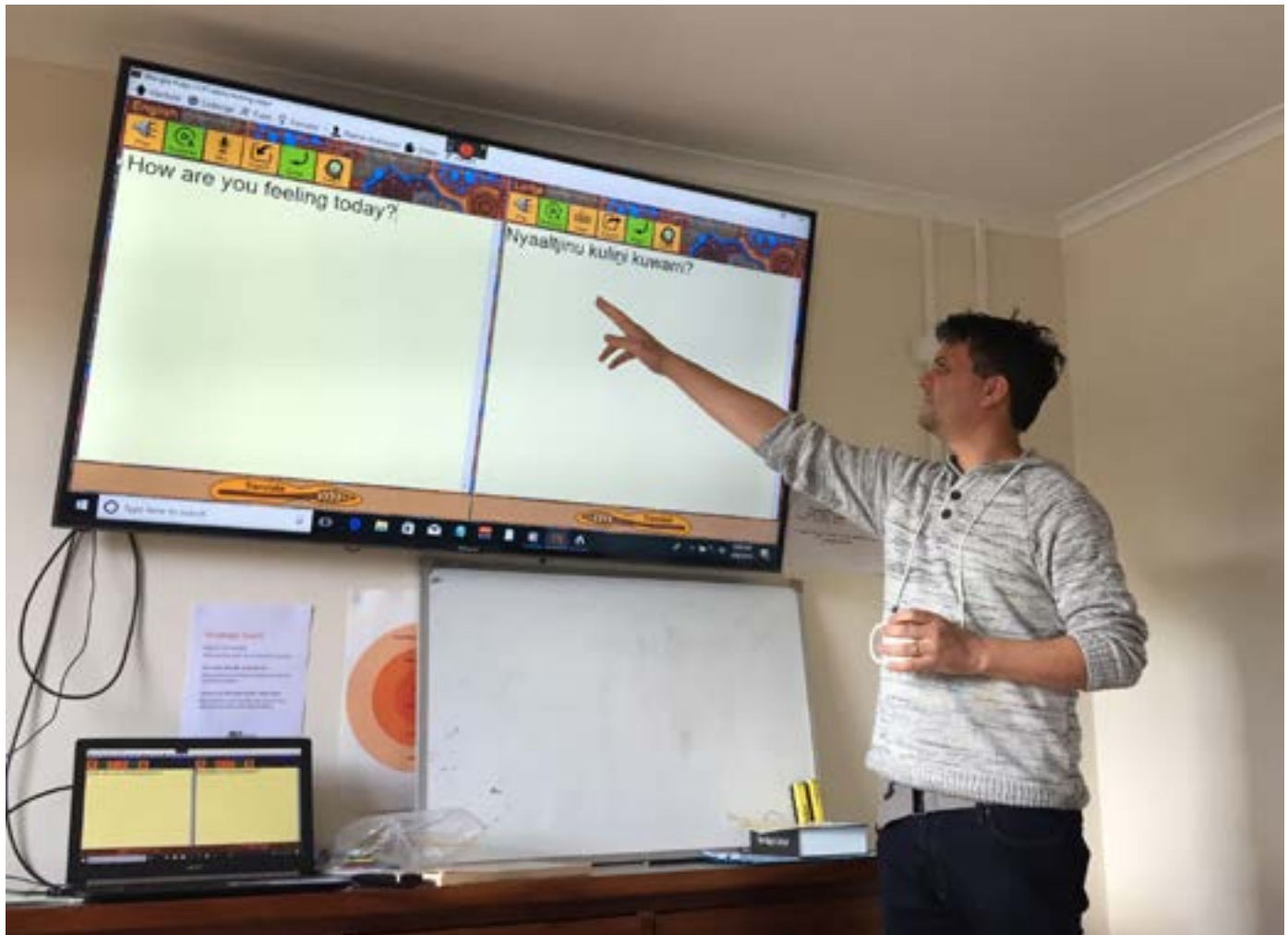
- Jake Tjapaltjarri James
- Bobby West
- Maurice Tjanpitjinpa Jackson
- Tony Eggle
- Shawn Doolan
- Walter Jugadai
- Mike Tjakamarra
- Bruce Eggle
- Bundi Rowe

Meet Jake Tjapaltjarri

Jake Tjapaltjarri provides the male voice for Wangka Kutju's text-to-speech audio and was a major contributor to the men's group. Born in Papunya, Jake later moved to Kintore to complete his schooling. He then worked as a Pintupi language teacher at the school in Kiwirrkurra.

6. THE PROGRAMMER

Brendan Kavanagh developed the original prototype translation engine and presented the project idea to Purple House. Brendan facilitated sessions with the developers in Mount Liebigh and Alice Springs, while



working as programmer for the software to function in the Pintupi-Luritja language.

Brendan has over ten years' experience in training, assessment and resource development in the Northern Territory with Aboriginal Health Workers and Aboriginal Rangers, and several years' experience teaching English as a second language in China.

Brendan recently completed a Masters Degree in Applied Linguistics with Macquarie University. His other qualifications include a Bachelor of Arts in Professional and Creative Writing, a Postgraduate Certificate in Adult Literacy and Numeracy, and a Diploma in Training Design and Development.

Wangka Kutju has been a partnership between Purple House and Brendan's resource development business 'Highway Learning'. Previous projects by Highway Learning include:

The 'Thanga' database and GPS tracking system, developed for Thamarrurr Development Corporation as a resource for the National Disability Insurance

Scheme. Its function is to record and evaluate NDIS client activities in the Northern Territory community of Wadeye.

LLN4U Language, Literacy and Numeracy software, developed for Central Australian Remote Health Development Service (CARHDS) to provide a snapshot of Aboriginal Health Worker language, literacy and numeracy skills in accordance with the Australian Core Skills Framework.

www.highwaylearning.com



7. PROGRAMMING

Wangka Kutju was programmed using a vb.net framework for Windows applications. The initial function was to take a string of text from English, then apply a series of rules to convert it to a string of text in Pintupi-Luritja. The following is a simplified breakdown of the series of sub-processes that this entails:

1. User types a sentence in English, then presses the translate button:

Can I interest you in a cup of tea?

2. Machine checks for existing translations at sentence level.

Can I interest you in a cup of tea? "Nyuntu yunyjtjuringanyi ti tjikintjaku?"

3. If no previous translations exist, the machine simplifies the English. User types a sentence in English, then presses the translate button:

Can I interest you in a cup of tea? Do you want a cup of tea?

4. Words are identified as parts of speech then broken into phrases, clauses and sentences.

Do	You	Want	A	Cup	Of	Tea
question	Pronoun	Verb	article	Noun	preposition	noun
Verb phrase	Subject phrase	Verb phrase	Object phrase			

5. Sections are reordered and words are translated to their Luritja equivalents.

You	Tea	Want	-present tense
Nyuntu	Ti	Root	Suffa
Subject	Object	Yunyjtjuri-	-nganyi
		Verb	

6. Luritja sentence is proofread for grammatical errors, word agreement and previous corrections that the user has made under similar circumstances:

You	are wanting	tea	to drink	?
Nyuntu	yunyjtjuringanyi	ti	tjikintjaku	?

The result is a translated sentence, which is then converted from text to speech.

Can I interest you in a cup of tea? "Nyuntu yunyjtjuringanyi ti tjikintjaku?"

However, language is more complicated than following a series of rules. Therefore, the testing sessions were essential to determine how the language is used in reality.

In addition to the translation component, there were several features implemented to support the ongoing development of the software. These included text-to-speech Pintupi-Luritja audio, the capacity for Wangka Kutju to learn from the user's corrections and the ability to share these corrections with other users.

8. USING WANGKA KUTJU

The premise behind Wangka Kutju is simple. Type a sentence into one textbox, then press the translate button below. Your text will then be translated into the other textbox. The left textbox is for English and the right textbox is for Luritja. (See opposite page.)

Icons

The icons above each textbox perform the following functions:



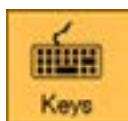
Click to play the text below as audio.



When selected, the text below will automatically be played as audio after a translation has been processed.



When selected, the machine will enter “record mode”. It will assume that you are using voice recognition software and every time the text changes, the translation will automatically process.



Click to have a Luritja keyboard appear on the screen. This will allow you to type Luritja characters, including the retroflex L , N and T .



Click to import a text file.



Click to export the Luritja output into a text or audio file.



When selected, pressing the enter key will process the translation. When unselected, pressing the enter key will create a new line of text.



Press this button to teach your corrections to Wangka Kutju

Features

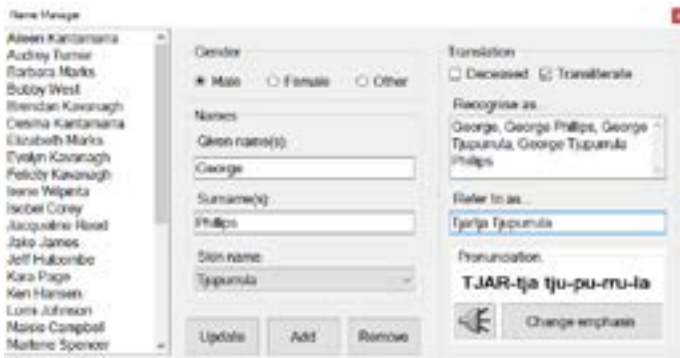
Wangka Kutju includes many customisable features. The vocabulary adder allows the user to insert and link terminology in both English and Pintupi-Luritja. This allows the software to continuously learn through user input.

At an advanced level, users can also input entire phrases with variables attached to them.



Using the name manager, users can decide how people’s names are recognised, translated and pronounced. If an individual is marked as “deceased”, their name will be registered “Kuumanytjayi”, as is culturally appropriate.

Users can teach the Wangka Kutju by making a few corrections and then pressing the learn button. Advanced users can use a menu to mark the specific conditions under which a correction should occur in the future. As corrections are entered, Wangka Kutju increases in its translation accuracy.



By pressing the “share” button, users can upload their corrections and new vocabulary, while downloading from other users. A filter system is used to decide whose changes to accept, and whether these changes can replace old information.

User	Date	ADD	Replace?
Max@company	2/6/2020 11:52am	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Judy@company	7/6/2020 3:39pm	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. TESTING AND TRAINING

Over a period of six months, sessions were facilitated by Brendan to develop the software with expert input from Pintupi-Luritja elders alongside English-speaking health workers and other visitors.

The goal for developers was to determine which sentences, phrases and vocabulary were likely to be used in a standard health setting, and then teach the machine to translate these sentences for Pintupi-Luritja speaking patients.

The process began with the English-speaker writing a sentence into the machine. The machine would then process the translation, providing an output for Pintupi-Luritja speakers to analyse and correct. Corrections were then fed back to the machine which continually adjusted and evolved in a technical ‘learning’ process.

This stage of the project provided employment for Pintupi-Luritja developers, supported with ILA funding to pay an hourly rate. Participants were proud to receive recognition and the opportunity to contribute while in town for dialysis treatment.

Group sessions were often loud and lively as the correct words and terms were debated in a two-way learning process. Participants became enthusiastic and determined to make sure the content was correct.

English speaking visitors to group sessions enjoyed practicing their Pintupi-Luritja language skills, while traditional language speakers commented that they enjoyed practicing their spelling, reading, writing and editing skills in both languages simultaneously.

It was opportunity for cross-cultural understanding through language and dialogue between dialysis patients and health workers, and it was fun!

10. CHALLENGES

Building a digital translator is inevitably fraught with challenges, as even the world’s most advanced translation engines struggle to compare with the skills of a human being. A machine has no context of situation to serve as a reference, and therefore does not understand where, when, why, how or by whom a sentence is uttered. Under such circumstances, it will opt for the most literal translation, rather than applying creative choices to enhance meaning. The remedy is constant feedback from human users.

Another challenge is the lack of transferability between English and Pintupi-Luritja concepts. Just as the concept of a “skin system” is difficult to convey in English, concepts such as “risk management” were difficult to convey in Pintupi-Luritja. Participants were often creating new vocabulary, which relied on a great deal of debate and consensus. Sometimes the solution was to transliterate an English word, such as “rinula” for “renal”, while other solutions used Pintupi-Luritja to explain the concept, such as “waala palyalpayi” (house builder) to describe a “civil engineer”. Some of the new vocabulary can be seen in the table below:

Reaching consensus among Pintupi-Luritja participants was essential in coming to a decision, but this also had its challenges. Not only does the Pintupi-Luritja language encompass a wide variety of dialects, but there is also a difference in language



English	Luritja	Explanation
blood sugar	tjuuka ngurrkangka	"sugar in the blood"
insulin	niitil	"needle"
long-term	yurrunpa	"in front"
financial report	piipa maniku	"paper/book for the money"
income	mani tjarrpangu	"money entering"
expenditure	mani yungkunytjaku	"money to give"
purchase order book	piipangu payimilantjaku	"paper/book for buying"
biomedical_engineer	takaṯa mirritjina ngurrara	"doctor who belongs to medicine"
chairperson	mayutju	"boss"
treasurer	mayutju maniku	"boss for the money"

use between older and younger generations. Despite these differences, participants enjoyed the open dialogue as a means of embracing their language and culture. Language is never static, which is why Wangka Kutju's learning functions are a crucial element. Users can customise the tool in accordance with their own language use, while also having the ability to share their changes with other users.

11. TEXT TO SPEECH

A major component of the Wangka Kutju software is its ability to convert written Pintupi-Luritja text into spoken audio. This was viewed as a necessary function, as Pintupi-Luritja is traditionally an oral language and many speakers have limited experience with the writing system that was recently developed in the late 20th Century. The text-to-speech function was also considered useful for English speakers who struggle to understand the conventions for writing a traditional language.

The first step was to hire two Pintupi-Luritja speakers and record their voices. Our two vocal talents were Irene Nangala and Jake Tjapaltjarri, who provided the female and male voices respectively. The process involved reading a series of Pintupi-Luritja sentences out loud over three recording sessions. The audio was chopped up into 2000 audio samples, which included a mixture of phonemes, syllables and full words.

The software was then programmed to stitch the audio files back together into a new order as a single sound file, based on any text that has been typed by the user. To ensure that the audio sounds as natural as possible, each audio sample is stored as three different inflections. Most of the audio is produced as a flat, natural inflection. When a sentence ends as a statement, the audio drops to a low inflection. When a sentence ends as a question, the audio rises to a high inflection.

Currently, there is one limitation – the speaker can only use Pintupi-Luritja phonemes. This is only a problem if the speaker is required to say an English word, especially one that contains sounds that are uncommon in Pintupi-Luritja, such as 's' or 'z'. In this case, the speaker will revert to a Luritja phoneme, such as 'tj'.

Overall, the result is the first software to provide text to speech functionality for the Pintupi-Luritja language. Wangka Kutju also allows the user to export the audio into a wave file, which can be embedded into a PowerPoint presentation.

12. UNLIMITED POTENTIAL

The Wangka Kutju project has taken a great leap for Australian Indigenous Languages, providing real-time, sentence-level translation with text-to-speech capabilities.



Many participants have expressed that the application is valuable as a language teaching tool, both for English and Luritja speakers. Despite limited knowledge of linguistic terms, users can familiarise themselves with the language through experimentation, simply by entering written text and hearing the translation.

With a commitment of expert knowledge and resourcing, the program could be adapted to function in other languages, converted for Android or iOS platforms, and developed for mobile devices to allow for greater portability.

Participants have particularly noted that the machine may have future uses in the legal system, as this is the area where they felt the need for improved communication.

The existing resource could be further refined for improved translation and speech accuracy. Purple House has committed to building on the success of the Wangka Kutju project to explore ways the resource can be incorporated within the organisation for multiple purposes, and continuing the momentum from this project.

13. SUMMARY

Wangka Kutju presented us with an opportunity to work together with a software programmer to develop language translation software in traditional

Pintupi-Luritja language.

Pintupi-Luritja elders, including Purple House board members, viewed the existing prototype and expressed their interest in developing the technology for the Pintupi-Luritja language.

Leadership by Western Desert elders has been pivotal in determining the design, accuracy and cultural safety of the resource. The project engaged Pintupi-Luritja speakers in the development and testing process, providing meaningful employment and empowering renal patients as leaders and teachers in their own language.

The end product gives a voice to patients, ultimately validating their language as a means of communication within the health sector. It will be valuable to non-Indigenous health workers as an effective method of developing their Pintupi-Luritja skills to better engage with patients.

Regular use of the translator within the Purple House holistic model of care will facilitate two-way language learning between patients and health workers. Relationships are stronger when we acknowledge the strength of Western Desert languages, supporting and valuing traditional voices.



14. REFERENCES

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
<https://aiatsis.gov.au>

Central Land Council <<http://www.clc.org.au/articles/info/aboriginal-languages/>>

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The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)

AIATSIS is a world-renowned research, collections and publishing organisation, promoting knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, traditions, languages and stories, past and present.

AUSTLANG contains information about each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language, which has been assembled from a number of referenced sources. AUSTLANG can be searched with language names, including a range of spellings and place names. AUSTLANG has a map and links to other web pages with information or resources about the language.



INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

“A year long opportunity to increase understanding, reconciliation and international cooperation around Indigenous language”

In 2016 the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues reported that 40 per cent of the estimated 6,700 languages spoken around the world were in danger of disappearing, with the majority of these being indigenous languages, putting the cultures and knowledge systems to which they belong at risk.

The United Nations General Assembly declared 2019 the International Year of Indigenous Languages to raise awareness of the crucial role languages play in people’s daily lives.

“IYIL2019 is an opportunity for all Australians to engage in a national conversation about Indigenous languages....to celebrate and recognise the diversity of Australian Indigenous languages and their importance in supporting cultural resurgence and shaping our national identity”

Indigenous languages matter for development, peace building and reconciliation.

Languages play a crucial role in the daily lives of people, not only as a tool for communication, education, social integration and development, but also as a repository for each person’s unique identity, cultural history, traditions and memory. But despite their immense value, languages around the world continue to disappear at an alarming rate.

It is through language that we communicate with the world, define our identity, express our history and culture, learn, defend our human rights and



participate in all aspects of society, to name but a few. Language is pivotal in the areas of human rights protection, good governance, peace building, reconciliation, and sustainable development.

Source: <https://en.iyl2019.org/>

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES & ARTS (ILA) SUPPORT

“The Australian Government’s vision is for an Australia where respect for our rich diversity begins with respect for the world’s oldest continuing culture, that of our First Australians. Cultural heritage and knowledge is passed on throughout each generation by language and art expression. Language and art contain complex understandings of a person’s values, identity, pride, self-worth and connection with others and their environment.”

The Indigenous Languages and Arts (ILA) program supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to revive and maintain languages. ILA provides funding to organisations that support participation in and maintenance of Australia’s Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultures through languages and arts.

The ILA grant program assists Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to express, preserve and maintain their cultures through languages and arts across Australia.

Source: <https://www.arts.gov.au/funding-and-support/indigenous-languages-and-arts-program>



Australian Government

Department of Communications and the Arts



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