

Researchers working to document Indigenous languages

August 20 2015



An ANU Summer Scholarship program offers students the chance to assist with dictionaries for a number of Aboriginal languages. Credit: Graeme Churchard, Flickr.

Researchers at the Australian National University (ANU) are working to document some of Australia's oldest Indigenous languages which are at risk of being lost forever.

The ANU is currently offering a Summer Scholarship program for students to assist in working on dictionaries for a number of Aboriginal languages.

Professor Jane Simpson of the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language said the work was crucial.

"If we don't act now we will lose a valuable part of our heritage. Australia has already lost many Indigenous languages, and we're going to lose more," Professor Simpson said.

"These dictionaries will be treasure-houses of information on [language](#), society, [natural history](#), land and cultural traditions."

Researchers are working with communities on materials from highly endangered languages such as Mithaka from South West Queensland, Dalabon from Arnhem Land, Warumungu of Tennant Creek and Ngarrindjeri from southern South Australia.

Professor Simpson said documenting a language gave valuable insight into how its speakers see the world.

"We can find out which plants are important to people, what animals are important to people, what they use them for. A language is a window onto natural history knowledge," she said.

"We can develop an understanding of social systems such as land ownership and kinship structures."

Other projects include assembling early 20th century documentation of the Mithaka language to add to a dictionary that will help Mithaka people revive their language.

Also being supported is the biggest dictionary of any Australian language, the long-awaited Warlpiri Dictionary, which was begun more than 40 years ago.

"The Warlpiri [dictionary](#) will become the most comprehensive of any Aboriginal language in terms of the number of words and the richness of information about those words," Professor Simpson said.

Applications for the eight-week Summer Research Scholarship program are now open to all Australian based university students.

The program will run between 23 November 2015 and 22 January 2015 with students to receive return travel to Canberra, full board on campus and a weekly allowance.

More information: See here for more details - [www.anu.edu.au/study/study-opt ... mer-research-program](http://www.anu.edu.au/study/study-opt...mer-research-program)

Provided by Australian National University

Citation: Researchers working to document Indigenous languages (2015, August 20) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-08-document-indigenous-languages.html>

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