10 years of Linguistics in the Pub

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Abstract

In December 2009 the first 'Linguistics in the Pub' event was held in Melbourne. For over a decade Linguistics in the Pub (LIP) has been a space for linguists, language workers and language activists to discuss a wide range of topics, covering practical, theoretical and ethical elements of language work. In this paper we provide an overview of the themes that have emerged from these discussions. LIP events have been in step with major shifts in language documentation over the last decade including the decolonisation of research, critical approaches to linguistic data management, and engaging in public discourse around minoritised languages. Most importantly, LIP provides a space for peer learning, professional development and engagement with topics beyond core-curriculum for junior researchers, in which LIP creates a transparent and equitable approach to scholarly support. We conclude the article by providing instructions and insights for setting up LIP-style events, for other researchers who are interested in replicating this model of capacity-building in language documentation, linguistics more broadly, or other disciplines.

Keywords: linguistics, training, community, capacity building, education, decolonisation

1.   Introduction

In late 2009 a group of linguists and language workers in Melbourne began to organise a series of monthly informal conversations on topics of current interest.[1] Participants were drawn from Melbourne's three universities with linguistics departments; The University of Melbourne, La Trobe University and Monash University, and local language centres, Living Languages (then RNLD) and the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (VACL). These events were called Linguistics in the Pub (LIP),[2] the pub being relevant as an informal space that was not associated with a university (and, in fact, many early LIP events were actually held at a cafe in Parkville).

During the 10 years of LIP there have been over 80 events held in Melbourne. In this article we reflect on how LIP activities have reflected major conversations and shifts happening in linguistics. We begin with a brief history of LIP as a cross-institutional community space (§1). We then discuss some of the themes that have emerged from LIP discussions over the decade and how LIP has shaped the work of participants (§2). We conclude with some practical advice for readers interested in replicating the LIP model in their own linguistics community or research community in other disciplines (§3). We are writing this article as two ongoing organisers and participants in LIP events. Use of 'we' is in reference to the two authors, unless otherwise specified.

2.   A brief history of Linguistics in the Pub

LIP is a venue to discuss doing linguistic work. Each month a topic is proposed, and circulated with a summary of the intended discussion points, and any supporting literature. The Melbourne LIP events have often had a strong focus on language documentation, Australian Indigenous communities and migrant community languages, but this has shifted to broader topics across linguistic subfields, reflecting the interests of language workers and the research community in the city.

LIP is inspired by other similarly located events, including Politics in the Pub[3] and Science in the Pub,[4] but is fundamentally different in its audience and aims. Other "in the pub"

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[1] Please note, all URLs cited in this paper have been captured using The Internet Archive. If a URL is no longer active, please preface it with http://web.archive.org; for example, http://web.archive.org/www.rnld.org/LIP
[2] www.rnld.org/LIP Accessed 18 Feb 2020
[3] www.politicsinthepub.org.au Accessed 17 Aug 2021
[4] www.scienceinthepub.com/intro.html Accessed 17 Aug 2021

events tend to focus on bringing in experts to talk to an audience outside of the field, as a form of outreach, community education and entertainment. LIP has always focused on bringing researchers and practitioners together. While LIP makes no presumptions about level of expertise, and often has participants who range from new students to experts in the topic, the focus of the discussion is always practical application of the topic under discussion, rather than public outreach.

The topic of a LIP discussion session is planned and advertised in advance. Topics often emerge from a previous session. They may also be suggested by organisers, participants, or visiting linguists. The first organiser was the second author, who was then joined by the first author as co-organiser. Since about 2015, a committee of 4-6 members has organised the event. A full list of topics and dates can be found in the appendix. Some Melbourne LIP events have been written up by participants as blog post summaries on the PARADISEC blog.[5] There are 32 blog summaries from the first 10 years of events. These summaries provide an overview of major themes from the discussions on the night. They are anonymised, unless a person says they are happy to be directly quoted. These summaries have allowed wider participation, and for people to revisit conversations.

Participant numbers at LIP events have varied greatly, depending on topic, the time of year and the academic calendar. We have had events with only a handful of people, and others with over 20 participants. The venue for LIP has changed over the years. Early there was an attempt to move the venue to make travel easier for linguists from different parts of town. Eventually events were regularly hosted at locations near Melbourne University, which is also close to the CBD and public transport hubs. One challenge over the years has been to find venues with quiet function rooms that are happy for a group of people to use on a weeknight without charge. The gentrification of the area around Melbourne University has greatly reduced the number of options.

LIP has branched out from Melbourne on occasion. Melbourne LIP members have taken the event to InField 2010 in Oregon, USA; the 2012 annual conference of the Australian Linguistics Society in Perth; the Puliima Indigenous language and technology conference in 2013 Melbourne; and the 2018 Summer School of the Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language in Canberra. There have also been LIP event series held in other places; there were six events in Brisbane in 2013 and 2014,[6] two events in Canberra across

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[5] www.paradisec.org.au/blog/category/linguistics-in-the-pub/ Accessed 17 Aug 2021
[6] www.rnld.org/BLIP Accessed 17 Nov 2016

2014 and 2015,[7] and nine events in London, England between 2015 and 2017.[8] The first two of these were set up independently, and modeled on LIP in Melbourne, the London series was set up by the first author in collaboration with London colleagues. Sometimes these events drew on the existing catalogue of topics, or developed in a way that specifically served the interests of the local linguistics community. As an example of the former, the LIPIL discussion of urban fieldwork included discussion of local projects such as the The Sylheti Language Society[9] and Language Landscape[10] (Tsutsui-Billins, 2015). The durability of the Melbourne series in contrast to these other three LIP programs is likely due to a number of factors, including a sufficiently sized linguistics community in Melbourne, access to affordable and accessible venues, and a stable and durable organising committee.

During the COVID-19 lockdown in Australia from March through to June 2020, LIP adapted to the limitations on gathering due to COVID-19 with online meetings. The event was set up with participants registering through EventBrite and then receiving a link to a Zoom meeting. This had the obvious limitations that all video meetings have, but it also had the advantage of encouraging many who had heard about LIP to register and attend. This included linguists and language workers living outside of Melbourne, including participants from interstate and overseas. In particular, language workers at remote language centres in Australia were able to participate in the conversation. We did notice that there was a lower ratio of students at these online events, and that students were less likely to actively participate in the discussion. A session on 'fieldwork at a distance' featuring a panel of linguists based around Australia, the United States and Mexico attracted 60 to zoom and the live-streamed panel discussion has had more than 640 views.

## 3.	What does LIP do?

In this section we want to demonstrate some of the ways in which LIP enriches the community of linguistics workers who have participated over the years. We begin by looking at the range of topics that have been discussed and how these relate to key developments in our professional field over the last 10 years (§3.1); we then discuss the ways in which LIP helps

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[7] www.rnld.org/CLIPAccessed 17 Nov 2016
[8] www.rnld.org/LIPIL Accessed 04 June 2017
[9] soasunion.org/activities/society/7438/ Accessed 17 Aug 2021
[10] languagelandscape.org Accessed 17 Aug 2021

linguists in broadening their skills and knowledge while providing a space for reflection (§3.2); and finally we talk about the importance of decolonising linguistics in the Australian context, and the role of LIP can play in decolonising the discipline (§3.3). The material in this section is drawn from the back catalogue of LIP event topics, blog post summaries of events, and notes taken during the LIP 10 year anniversary event in March 2020, which was a reflection on the role of LIP in people's professional development over the last decade.

3.1.   *Tracing changes in our field, through the last 10 years of LIP topics*

Looking back on a decade of events, the topics discussed have been in step with developments both in the field of language documentation specifically, and within linguistics more generally.

The range of topics discussed across the ten years of LIP demonstrates the broadening of interests within the field of language documentation and community language work. We have had events looking at social variation within documentation projects (February and April 2012), on the importance of working with children as well as adults (November 2011μ, October 2012 and April 2014), and urban fieldwork (November 2012). There have been LIP sessions looking at traditional language documentation and description outputs including grammars (May 2010, May 2015), dictionaries (September 2010) and corpora (April 2016), with most taking a critical approach to data management, as discussed below. However, there have also been sessions looking at a more diverse range of output, including books in language (October 2010), visual art (March 2011) and supporting community projects (March 2016). There have also been topics that critically evaluate the role of fieldworking linguists, including informed consent (October 2010), best practice in language documentation (March 2012) and balancing academic and community outputs (November 2015).

LIP also reflects the state of the art in linguistics. One particular thematic thread that illustrates this is the way linguistic data has been discussed at LIP events over the decade. Linguistic data has been discussed in relation to encouraging Open Access (August 2011) and the importance of good practice in data archiving (July 2014), but with a realisation that the aspirations of transparent data practices are complicated by the intimate context of many field recordings (March 2014). Discussions about methods such as corpus-based approaches (April 2016), statistical models (September 2015) and grammar writing (February 2015) have often included discussion of data management, open data and research transparency. Discussions

of research data management that focus on open and transparent data and research practice precede LIP events (Thomason, 1994; Himmelmann 1998), however the last decade has seen this conversation become more common in linguistics (Gawne & Berez-Kroeker, 2018; Thieberger et al., 2016), with the development of an understanding of the need to focus on data management as good research practice; see as examples the Austin principles of data citation in linguistics (Berez-Kroeker, et al. 2018) and the Tromsø recommendations for citation of research data in linguistics (Andreassen, et al. 2019). This thematic thread came full circle with the October 2018 LIP event directly discussing linguistic data citation and the Austin principles. This mirrors the rise to prominence of discussion of data management and Open Access in the social sciences (Bollen et al., 2015; Chambers, 2017) and research more generally (see SPARC[11] and the Centre for Open Science[12]).

LIP not only reflects topics of interest, it has also played a role in shaping this discourse. A recent statement of the issues associated with making recordings from language documentation projects publicly accessible (Seyfeddinipur et al., 2019) cites Ruth Singer's (2014) blog post on this topic. A conference presentation exploring the concept of 'community' in language documentation, Gawne and Kelly (2013), cited the March 2010 LIP discussion as the genesis of the thinking that led to the presentation. Hanke (2017) acknowledges that conversations at LIP were invaluable in shaping the development of his approach to making software tools for collaborative language documentation.

3.2. *Skills, knowledge and reflection*

In this section we discuss some of the practical training and sharing of skills that has occurred in specific LIPs and the way that LIP facilitates professional development via peer support and mentoring. Central to all of this is the importance of LIP as a space for reflection on our work.

Some LIP events have been very practical, and skills focused. Examples include sessions on elicitation methods (April 2015), dictionaries (September 2010), and the June and July 2013 events that looked at software, websites and apps that are useful for language documentation. Sometimes session topics allow us to see the importance and use of particular research topics that we ourselves may never have the time or expertise to undertake, but that it is good to know are out there, and might be the basis of a good collaboration, such as the use of ultrasound in phonetics (September 2018), ethnobiology

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[11] http://sparcopen.org/ Accessed 17 Aug 2021
[12] http://cos.io/ Accessed 17 Aug 2021

(June 2011) and an interdisciplinary discussion about fieldwork in May 2013 with two other groups, the Archaeology Reading Group and the Ethnography Forum.

Coming together across different language centres and linguistics departments affords the opportunity to network and gives visitors and people new in town the chance to get to know linguists in Melbourne. It also gives students a chance to mingle with linguists whose experiences and perspectives are different to those of their supervisors and departments.

One way in which LIP provides a space for professional development is the way in which graduate students and early career researchers are supported beyond the development of skill sets and theory-based expertise. Burnout is a considerable issue for graduate students, often exacerbated by a lack of support, an overly-competitive environment and unrealistic expectations (Hunter & Devine, 2016). Providing a space that is supportive, and where both the positive and negative aspects of a life devoted to linguistic research can be openly discussed can counteract some of the observed known factors that lead to burnout and reduced PhD completion outcomes. One consistency across all of the topics discussed at LIP is the acknowledgement that we are all fallible and can only undertake so much. LIP models a professionalism that is open and honest and aspirational while also being realistic. It provides a chance for all of us to learn from the experiences of others.

LIP can also help students to be more aware of their own emotional wellbeing and share ideas for maintaining good mental health. This is particularly important for those involved in language documentation as students work closely with speakers of endangered communities, and spend a lot of time away from home, where their usual sources of support are (Bowern, 2008, Chelliah & de Reuse, 2011). Endangered languages communities are often politically marginalised communities who may be dealing with trauma and racism as a result of their colonisation and/or marginalisation. Students will confront political and ethical dilemmas in their role as outsider researcher, that their linguistics training does not prepare them for. In building reciprocal relationships with communities, students may take on many roles in addition to their research role, adding to the challenges of graduate research and those that face any researcher pursuing a large-scale project. As Velardo and Elliott (2018) note, many students are explicitly taught to be aware of the risk to participants in qualitative research projects, but risks to their own wellbeing are often considered in an ad hoc way. Although LIP does not replace well-designed doctoral training, it provides an additional peer-learning and peer-support structure.

The opportunity for reflection is one of the most important things that LIP provides.

Even topics that do not seem to address linguistic research practice still provide an opportunity to share experiences and reflect. For example, the March 2018 discussion of the treatment of language-related topics in mainstream media gave us all the space to reflect on how we can build clearer public communication into projects at various stages of the research lifecycle. By being outside of our regular workplaces, LIP enables a more open approach to discussing research and re-evaluation of our practice: whether that's reflecting on the tools and methods we use, the way we position our work in the larger social discourse, or the way we can change our work to do better by the speakers we work with.

3.3. How LIP can contribute to decolonising linguistics

LIP's initial focus was on language documentation as most regular attendees in the first few years were engaged in projects to document endangered languages spoken in Indigenous Australian or Pacific island communities. Regardless of the official discussion topic, the relationships that we as researchers have with these communities emerged as a strong thread in our discussions. Lacking a background in contemporary political, historical and anthropological understandings of these communities in which we worked, we were blindsided by the political and ethical challenges of our position as researchers. This was not helped by the fact that such issues are routinely framed as concerns that are personal in nature in the discipline of linguistics. The relatively narrow focus on language in our training isolated us from insights into the complexities of our positionality which started to emerge with the 'reflexive turn' in anthropology in the 1960's and 1970's (Asch, 2015). The first steps in this reflexive turn were acknowledging the damage that had been done by colonialisms, that colonisation is ongoing and that anthropology as a discipline had often supported the colonisation project; something that is yet to be broadly acknowledged in linguistics.

Although those of us working with endangered languages genuinely want to help the communities we work with, more than good intentions are needed for us to be part of the solution rather than the problem. Roche (2019) points out that the efforts of linguists resemble charity more than moves to support linguistic justice for marginalised communities. We tend to avoid directly addressing the political forces that drive language endangerment, which is why our third ever LIP session in March 2010, in which Travers Eira presented their paper 'Addressing the ground of language endangerment (Eira, 2007)' was quite an uncomfortable one. Some felt as linguists that they were personally under attack, although this was not the

intention of the presenter at all. Once linguists had shared their perspectives, the informal nature of the small gathering allowed participants to move on to building some common-ground. In these days of widespread Black Lives Matters protests, the aim of decolonising linguistics is hopefully seen as less radical.

Two recent events brought Indigenous community linguists and linguists based at universities together for constructive dialogues. In conjunction with a professional development workshop run by Living Languages for Indigenous community linguists from around Australia, we got together to hear about their struggles to revive their languages using obscure grammatical descriptions by (now deceased) linguists with a lack of support from linguists based at universities. In June 2018, authors Vicki Couzens, Tonya Stebbins and Travers Eira talked about their book '*Living Languages and New Approaches to Language Revitalisation Research'* (Stebbins et al., 2017) which takes a decolonising lens to linguistic work on Australian Indigenous languages. There were tense moments at each of these events when Indigenous participants challenged White university-based linguists, a sign not only that this ongoing dialogue is necessary, but that creating a discussion space outside of the university itself, can aid in such dialogues. These tensions usually stem from the differences in aims, resources and focus between the two groups. While some of these differences are beyond the control of the individuals concerned, being able to articulate them and work towards common understandings is valuable.

Decolonisation work is crucial for those who work with Indigenous communities doing language documentation, but it is just as important for linguists who do not. Decolonising and participant centering, are often a source of tension for academic linguists who are rewarded for being single-minded in the pursuit of knowledge. So how could we tell our peers that 'the relationship is the project' to cite the title of a recent book on community-engaged research coming out of Melbourne's research and arts community (Lillie et al. 2020). Linguists working on language documentation with minoritized communities are aware of the inequalities in power and privilege that must be navigated as part of any successful linguist-community collaboration. But linguists must ensure that diverse outcomes result from their work with communities if it is to continue: via further funding and the continuation of their career as a linguist. Informal discussions can help us to manage these professional tensions and learn how to sustainably work with the pressures arising from within academia. All this is to say that LIP is still very much an academic type of enterprise in that it is a space of talking, learning and reflecting, but not necessarily a place of action. It might prompt action, or support action

by individuals or other organisations and networks but it is not an activist group. Decolonisation is something we still have to actively engage with and participate in individually and we can do this better from a place of strength than one of marginalisation with less of the feeling of yelling from the sidelines of our discipline (Singer 2020).

4.   The logistics of setting up a LIP-style event

We hope that the previous section has illustrated some of the ways that LIP has helped a group of language workers and linguists in Melbourne to draw connections across their research and also to larger topics and themes in linguistics. In this final section we provide a more practical discussion of the logistics of setting up a LIP-style event. These events offer a way to build a community of scholars and practitioners that is cost-efficient and adaptable.

g An informal discussion group does not have to be particularly large; attendance numbers alone are not a good predictor of the quality of a conversation. The best LIP conversations come from having a group of participants with an interest in the topic and a diverse range of experiences and perspectives. LIP in Melbourne has a participant group that has shifted over the years, as students graduate and move on, new colleagues arrive, and research interests change. LIP draws on active members to propose and lead conversations on a topic they are interested in. Sometimes their interest comes from being an expert in a domain and wanting to share this knowledge with interested people, and other times the person leading the conversation is, themselves, learning about the area and wants to use LIP as a way to expand their understanding of the issue. As well as having a content leader, it can be good to have a general discussion moderator, who can help ensure the conversation moves forward and everyone gets a chance to speak. Blog summaries can make an excellent record of a discussion. It is worth having a separate person make notes and then write these into a summary (from experience, doing this sooner than later after the event makes this easiest!).

As well as the moderation of individual events, it's worth planning who will moderate and maintain the group. LIP in Melbourne has continued where other LIP series have not in large part because the second author has continued to lead the scheduling of events. This does not have to be an onerous task, but it is an important role. Once a topic is decided (often a LIP event concludes with discussion of potential topics for the next month), a short topic announcement is shared on the Linguistics in the Pub Facebook page and the mailing list for the Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity (RNLD). LIP was originally held under the

auspices of RNLD (now Living Languages[13]) and a back catalogue of announcements can be found on the RNLD web pages archived through the Internet Archive.[14]

Although LIP is nominally a pub-based event, it can be in any convivial environment that takes people out of their immediate professional space, and can serve as a neutral place for people meeting across different workplaces. As we hold our events in the evening after work, having somewhere with food helps bring people along. LIP originally toured around different pubs and venues in Melbourne's inner north, which provided a viable central point for people travelling from different universities and offices. Eventually we settled on a pub with a large private function space that they were happy to let us have if there were no prior bookings.

5.   Conclusion

At the end of the 10 year anniversary LIP event, the authors of this paper asked 'should we still be doing LIP?' The response from the 30 or so participants was overwhelmingly 'yes'. LIP fulfills a unique space in the professional development of linguists in Melbourne (and as long as we continue with online events, linguists around the world). LIP provides a supportive space where topics of direct relevance to the work of linguists can be discussed 'off record' and activities range from sharing practical skills to discussing topics of ethical and moral importance. It provides a space that cuts across institutional and disciplinary hierarchies so that Indigenous language workers, students and senior researchers can come together and talk about how we can do linguistics better.

Appendix: list of LIP events in Melbourne

Date	Event
November 2009	The role of SIL in language documentation
January 2010	Is there really that much difference between language documentation and language description?
March 2010	Addressing the ground of language endangerment (Eira 2007)
April 2010	RCLT draft fieldwork manual
May 2010	What should a good descriptive grammar include?
June 2010	How can we support language maintenance and revitalisation activities?
September 2010	Dictionaries and language documentation

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[13] www.livinglanguages.org.au/lip Accessed 17 Aug 2021
[14] https://web.archive.org/web/20200215000000*/http://www.rnld.org/MLIP Accessed 17 Aug 2021

October 2010	Informed Consent
November 2010	The benefits of collaboration between linguists and musicologists
December 2010	Language endangerment and contact languages
March 2011	Visual art and language documentation
April 2011	Elicitation techniques and fieldwork stimuli: show and tell
May 2011	Language standardisation, literacy and language endangerment
June 2011	Ethnobiology in Language Documentation
July 2011	Philology in Language Documentation and Description
August 2011	Open access and its implications for linguistic research
September 2011	Using video in language documentation
October 2011	Linguistics in the media
November 2011	Documenting child language
February 2012	Social Variation and Language Documentation
March 2012	Best and worst practice in Language Documentation
April 2012	Social Variation and Language Documentation
May 2012	More than just being there? The place of participant observation in linguistic fieldwork
June 2012	Technology: friend or foe?
July 2012	Zombie linguistics
August 2012	The distinction between language documentation and language description
September 2012	Crowd-sourcing in Language Documentation
October 2012	Researching child language in the field
November 2012	Urban fieldwork
March 2013	Things you can do with outputs from language documentation projects
April 2013	Things you can do with outputs from language documentation projects - part 2
May 2013	Models of community engagement in language documentation
May 2013	Special interdisciplinary LIP - Fieldwork across disciplines: what can we learn from each other?
June 2013	Useful software for language documentation work
July 2013	Useful and interesting websites and apps about endangered languages
August 2013	Reclaiming indigenous languages through linguistics
August 2013	LIP/Puliima crossover event - Getting the message across: talking to the media about Indigenous languages
October 2013	Getting our message across to the media: how to raise awareness about endangered languages
December 2013	Recording cultural events
February 2014	Supporting community researchers in the field

March 2014	Open access and intimate fieldwork
April 2014	Children in language documentation
June 2014	Crowd sourcing and endangered language documentation projects
July 2014	Sharing the load? Problems with the 'lone depositor' model for the archiving of materials in endangered language archives
September 2014	Descriptive linguistics and the variety of data types
October 2014	Issues in the documentation of newer language varieties
February 2015	Grammar writing
March 2015	Has the study of Australian languages been at the expense of work on Australian English variation?
April 2015	Elicitation methods
May 2015	Literacy in the field: how do the communities we work with use vernacular literacy?
June 2015	Translation in language documentation and revitalisation
July 2015	Language in education in multilingual contexts: beyond 'mother tongue' education
September 2015	New mathematical methods' in linguistics constitute the greatest intellectual fraud in the discipline since Chomsky
October 2015	Lexical and grammatical meaning, and grammaticalisation
November 2015	Here to help? – balancing research aims and community-oriented efforts in the field
March 2016	Guiding language consultants' individual projects: Negotiating organizational issues in the field
April 2016	Writing a corpus-based grammar of a previously undescribed language
May 2016	Promoting linguistic tools and data to other disciplines
June 2016	Social Media and Language Documentation
July 2016	The challenge that language variation poses to language description
Augu 2016	Ethics in linguistic fieldwork
November 2016	Including children in language documentation and revitalization
November 2016	Storytelling and Language Revitalisation
March 2017	Promoting language diversity in the field
April 2017	Why researching languages in the family is complicated and how it can be the most entertaining thing
May 2017	Typologist or not? At the interface of language description and typology
June 2017	Are Australia's Community Languages worth studying?
October 2017	Creating books in language
March 2018	Language in the Headlines
April 2018	Where to now for Australian English sociolinguistics?
May 2018	How linguists can support community-led language revitalisation
June 2018	Approaches to language revitalisation research
August 2018	Language policies in the High North: Making Indigenous language choices in globalised academia

September 2018	The role of ultrasound in linguistic description, theory and application
October 2018	Where does this sentence come from? Citing linguistic data
November 2018	Co-authoring and co-presenting research by linguists and community members: reflections on collaborations
February 2019	The International Year of Indigenous Languages - making the most of the opportunity
April 2019	Second dialect acquisition
May 2019	Maintaining minority languages: what does it actually mean to transmit a language to the next generation?
August 2019	Using new media to document indigenous multimodal communicative traditions

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