

ABOUT MURRINY PATHA SONG

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It is important to document endangered domains of language use. In the domain of song texts greater challenges may be encountered than, for instance, in documenting narrative texts, because the song texts tend to be highly condensed versions of much larger narratives, and embedded in complex unstated world views. Not only are there multiple interpretations possible for a given song text but there may also be portions of the song text that are fundamentally uninterpretable, so one difficulty is presenting an account of the song text that is faithful to the original but does not give priority to one version over another (Walsh 2007). In this paper we will present examples of some of difficulties involved in such a documentation, and show that one must draw on multiple instances of intertextuality including myths, musical practice, bark paintings.

In 1997 the Murriny Patha (Murrinh-patha) songman and composer Lawrence Piyalem Kolumboort (1939-2006) recorded a session for the Wadeye Aboriginal Languages Centre (northwest Northern Territory, Australia) in which he discussed and performed the Murriny Patha song sets *malgarrin* and *djanba*. Our presentation will focus on *djanba*, a set of approximately 100 songs entirely in Murriny Patha language, which have great cultural and historical significance in Wadeye. In the recorded session Kolumboort set out in Murriny Patha details of the background and significance of a selection of *djanba* songs, followed by performances of them in which he was joined by other senior singers. Although Murriny Patha is one of the healthiest Australian languages, with approximately 3000 speakers, knowledge of *djanba* and other Murriny Patha song traditions is highly endangered, with all but one of the main performers from the 1997 performance now having passed away.

In 2006 members of the Murriny Patha song project*, working closely with a number of different speakers of the language, began to transcribe and gloss this authoritative explanation by a senior singer and composer. This presentation will set out the considerable difficulties faced by the transcribers in grappling with this material, due to Kolumboort's idiosyncratic and very speedy enunciation of Murriny Patha as well as the specialised knowledge of the subject matter and song styles needed for accurate glossing of not only the song text itself, but also its spoken exegesis (see also Barwick et al. 2007).

We will discuss the implications of these glossing and translation issues in our efforts to present our research in the community, through such means as the digital workstation in the Wadeye Knowledge Centre, publications for use in the school, and a published CD with transcriptions, translations and explanations of the songs (Barwick et al. 2005).

To an extent the same problems may arise in more detailed accounts of narrative and other texts and also in the presentation of dictionary material where a decision must be made about the extent to which the dictionary overlaps with a cultural encyclopaedia. However, the particular nature of song texts makes these issues unavoidable (see also Barwick 2006).

*A cross-disciplinary Australian Research Council Discovery Project whose members include Allan Marett and Linda Barwick (musicologists), Michael Walsh, Joe Blythe, Nick Reid and Lysbeth Ford (linguists).

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