

# 11 *Maintaining song traditions and languages together at Warruwi (western Arnhem Land)*

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## Abstract

As Indigenous musicians, language activists, scholars, educators, and others from around Australia undertake a variety of approaches in their efforts to revitalise song and language, in this chapter we provide a snapshot of the situation in Warruwi community, western Arnhem Land. Here, sustaining the local performance tradition of *manyardi* ceremonies and songs relies on maintaining diversity, and the task of documenting both linguistic and musical diversity has relied on intercultural collaboration and an interdisciplinary approach.

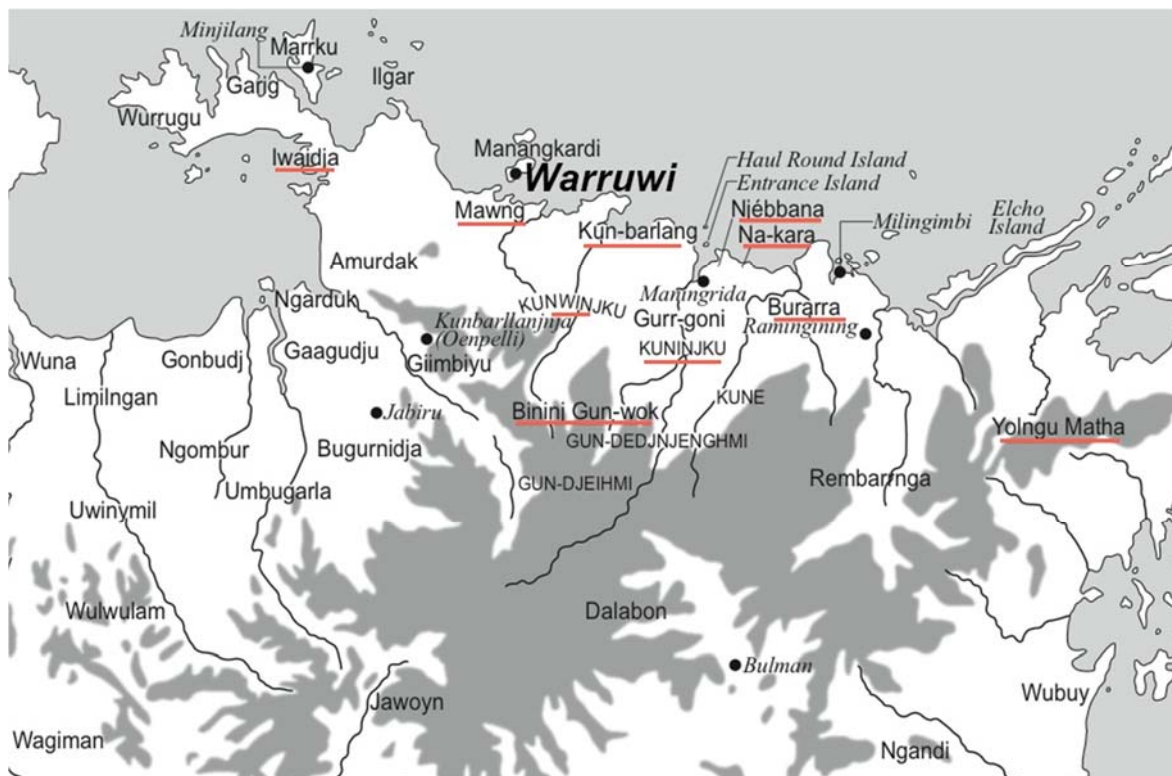
Warruwi is a highly multilingual community where multiple small languages are still being spoken, and individually-owned song-sets (distinct repertoires of songs) continue to be performed in public ceremony and passed on to children. In this chapter, we suggest that it is the maintenance of this diversity of languages and songs – rather than just maintaining individual languages or song-sets – which is highly valued by the community.

For over a decade, a team of linguists, musicologists, Indigenous ceremony holders and educators has been working together on aspects of language and song at Warruwi. This collaboration has produced new insights into the social practices and ideologies that underpin the creation and maintenance of linguistic and musical diversity, and has led to the documentation of new expressions, particularly in the Mawng language. Interdisciplinary research on *manyardi* has expanded the documentation of lexical resources, such as patterns of polysemy and idiomatic expressions, and contributed to a more complex understanding of the meanings expressed through music and dance. From the perspective of David and Jenny Manmurulu – ceremony holders and educators for the Inyjalarrku (mermaid) song-set – this collaborative research has reinforced the ways in which performing *manyardi* not only expresses important aspects of their language, but also has the potential to unite the ancestral past with the future, as they draw on spirits of the country, while teaching the next generation to carry on singing and dancing.

*Keywords:* idioms, Inyjalarrku, language transmission, manyardi, Mawng, multilingualism, music education, music diversity

## 1 Linguistic and musical diversity in western Arnhem Land and Warruwi community

Across western Arnhem Land multilingualism is the norm, and in the community of Warruwi, on Goulburn Island, adults typically speak between three to eight languages, while most children speak at least two Indigenous languages from birth (Singer and Harris 2016:1-2). Up to 10 different languages are spoken at Warruwi, in spite of its small population of around 400 residents. There are many small languages in the area, which people continue to maintain through complex patterns of multilingualism within families. These include the Iwaidjan languages of Mawng (tied to clan estates on Goulburn Island and along the coast of the mainland opposite Goulburn Island) and Iwaidja (from the Cobourg Peninsula). Also spoken at Warruwi are the Gunwinyguan languages Bininj Gunwok (a *lingua franca* for the mainland community of Gunbalanya, associated with clan estates located on or around the Arnhem Land escarpment or ‘stone country’) and Kun-barlang (Warlang); Maningridan languages such as Ndjébbana (Gunavidji), Burarra, Nakara; and varieties of Yolngu-matha from northeast Arnhem Land, as well as English (Singer and Harris 2016:7). Map 11.1 shows the pre-contact location of Aboriginal languages in the Top End, according to their associated clan estates. Languages that are today spoken at Warruwi are underlined in red.



**Map 11.1:** A reconstruction of pre-contact language-land associations in western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory. (Underlined language varieties are those spoken at Warruwi.<sup>1</sup>)

Just as Warruwi is recognised for its linguistic diversity, so too can it be considered a hub of musical diversity for the region (see Barwick et al. 2007:9). *Manyardi* (or *kun-borrk* in Bininj Gunwok) are

<sup>1</sup> Map by Chandra Jayasuriya (University of Melbourne) commissioned by Isabel O’Keeffe and edited by David Bickerdike; based on various linguistic data compiled by Mark Harvey as well as Bininj Gunwok dialect information by Evans (2003). The Bininj Gunwok dialects are indicated by upper case lettering.

clapstick- and didjeridu-accompanied songs which are performed for both formal occasions involving dance – such as funeral ceremonies, *Mamurrng* (diplomacy) ceremonies, *Inyimany ja najaman* (girls’ puberty) ceremonies, local festivals and celebrations – and also informal occasions, such as trips to one’s clan estate, or song documentation and elicitation sessions (which may not involve dancing) with scholars from outside of the community. As they have done for many generations, numerous singers at Warruwi regularly perform songs from their named *manyardi* repertoires or ‘song-sets’ (Barwick, O’Keeffe, Singer 2013:47; Garde 2006:61; O’Keeffe 2007:48). These song-sets have been handed down to singers by their male relatives, and are associated with particular languages from the region, including dialects that are no longer spoken, such as Manangkardi (once spoken by people on North and South Goulburn Island and associated with the Mirrijpu/Yalarrkuku song-set) and Ngurtikin (a variety of Mawng spoken by people living on the western side of the mainland and associated with David Manmurulu’s Inyjalarrku song-set). Recordings of *manyardi* over the past decade made by ceremony holders at Warruwi in collaboration with musicologists and linguists reflect this diversity, as do earlier recordings made in Warruwi in the 1940s to 1960s by anthropologist Ronald Berndt and Sandra Le Brun Holmes.<sup>2</sup> Table 11.1 shows a total of 14 distinct western Arnhem Land song-sets recorded in Warruwi, associated with nine different languages from the region, as well as three different clan song series belonging to the *manikay* genre from northeastern Arnhem Land (shaded).<sup>3</sup> The main singers resident at Warruwi today are custodians of the Inyjalarrku (mermaid), Milyarryarr (black heron) and Mirrijpu/Yalarrkuku (seagull) song-sets.

**Table 11.1:** *Manyardi/kun-borrk* and *manikay* recorded at Warruwi from 1940s to 2013, showing the song-set name, singer/s, associated language/s, recordist and recording details<sup>4</sup>

Song-set	(lead) singer/s	Language association	Recording details
Diyama (cockles)	Anjawartunga Maxwell	Burarra	Birch and A. Brown (2006) Barwick et al. (2011-2015)
Inyjalarrku (mermaid)	David, Rupert, and Renfred Manmurulu	Mawng (Ngurtikin)	Le Brun Holmes (1965), Barwick et al. (2011-2015) Brown (2013)
Itpiyitpi (grasshopper)	David Gameraidj, Magundili Nungalomin [Nangaluminy]	Mawng, Kunwinjku and Kun-barlang	Berndt & Berndt (1970), Berndt & Phillips (1973) (recorded in 1964) Le Brun Holmes (1965)

<sup>2</sup> More recent researchers who have collaborated with Warruwi ceremony holders and other songmen from western Arnhem Land include Meiki Apted, Linda Barwick, Bruce Birch, Reuben Brown, Nicholas Evans, Murray Garde, Allan Marett, Isabel O’Keeffe and Ruth Singer. Relevant research projects include ‘The West Arnhem Land Song Project’ funded by Hans Rausing’s Endangered Languages Project, Singer’s DECRA research project ‘What makes a multilingual community?’ as well as an honours thesis by Apted (2007) and PhD dissertations by Brown (2016) and O’Keeffe (2017).

<sup>3</sup> Associated languages include both spoken languages and spirit languages, which share similarities with their spoken counterparts but are not translatable (see Apted 2010, O’Keeffe 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Brown’s fieldwork recordings are in the process of being deposited under collection RB1 in PARADISEC’s archive, while Singer’s recordings are under collection RS1 in PARADISEC and also at ELAR and AIATSIS. Further details of these recordings can also be found in Brown’s (2016) and O’Keeffe’s (2017) dissertations. For citations in this chapter that are derived from Brown’s and O’Keeffe’s fieldwork recordings, a footnote provides details of the speaker’s name, recording ID (including the date of recording [YYYYMMDD] and recordist ID – Reuben Brown [RB], Isabel O’Keeffe [IO] or with maiden surname Bickerdike [IB], Ruth Singer [RS]), and relevant time code where available. For details of published material by Birch and A. Brown (2006), Le Brun Holmes (1965), Berndt & Berndt (1951), Berndt & Berndt (1970), Berndt & Phillips (1973) and Berndt (1987) see the list of references at the end of the chapter. The *manikay* clan songs from Eastern Arnhem Land are indicated with shading at the end of Table 11.1.

Kaddikkaddik (oyster catcher)	Ngaloman [Ngalorlman], Mangulugulu, Andrew Nadumalu	Kun-barlang	Berndt (1987) (recorded in 1961 and 1964)
Kalajbarri (frigate bird)/Ldhaha (sea)	Archie Brown	Iwaidja	Barwick et al. (2011-2015)
Kunbarlang (love songs)	Balilbalil [Barlirlbarlirl]	Kun-barlang	Berndt & Berndt (1951) (written texts only)
Marrwakara (goanna)	John Guwadbu 'No. 2' and Joseph Gamulgi; Harold Warrabin	Mawng	Berndt (1987) (recorded in 1961 and 1964) Le Brun Holmes (1965) Barwick et al. (2011-2015) Brown (2012)
Milyarryarr (black heron)	Johnny Namayiwa, Henry Guwiyul	Marrku, Manangkardi and Ilgar	Barwick et al. (2011-2015) Brown (2013)
Mirrijpu/Yalarrku ku (seagull)	Solomon Ganawa, Solomon Nangamu, Russell Agalara	Manangkardi	Barwick et al. (2011-2015) Brown (2013)
Nakurrututu (mudfish)	Malangawa/ Malangkawa	Mawng	Berndt & Berndt (1970) (written texts only, recorded in 1961)
Ngarnarru	Billy Nawaloinjba	Manangkardi	Barwick et al. (2011-2015)
Nginji ('giant')/Ngili ('mosquito')	Frank Nabalimirri	Mawng	Le Brun Holmes (1965) Barwick et al. (2011-2015)
Ulurrunbu (floating island)	Archie Brown	Manangkardi	Barwick et al. (2011-2015)
Yanajanak (stone country spirits)	Charlie Mangulda	Amurdak	Barwick et al. (2011-2015)
Galpu clan songs	Fred Mathaman	Galpu clan variety of Dhangu	Barwick et al. (2011-2015)
Gumatj clan songs	Johnny Burrwanga	Gumatj clan variety of Dhuwal	Barwick et al. (2011-2015)
Murrungun clan songs	Joe Moscow and Terry Gandadila	Murrungun clan variety of Djinang	Barwick et al. (2011-2015)

## 2 'Different together': maintaining diversity

What does the presence of both musical and linguistic diversity at Waruwi tell us about Arrarrkpi (Aboriginal) society? As Barwick, Birch and Evans suggest, 'linguistic diversity clearly does not arise in a social vacuum. It is cultivated and maintained by sociolinguistic practices, and supported by cultural beliefs' (2007:7). Nowhere else are these sociolinguistic practices and cultural beliefs more clearly enacted than in the ceremonial performance of *manyardi*. In response to a question about the difference in musical style between *manyardi* and *manikay*, James Gulamuwu (Inyjalarrku singer and brother of David Manmurulu) answered: 'Yeah, like we all different together. Yolŋu people [of northeastern Arnhem Land] they play different, we [of western Arnhem Land] play us mob different.'<sup>5</sup> Gulamuwu's characterisation of 'different together' alludes to a 'conscious differentiation' (Barwick 2011:348) – both within western Arnhem Land repertoires and within musical genres of the Top End region – that occurs 'together' in a shared ceremonial social space and within a unified musical framework. Such dialogism accords with Nicholas Evans' (2010:14) characterisation of western Arnhem Land languages and multilingualism, which he suggests is supported by the 'constructive fostering of variegation'. Indeed, the constructiveness of language

<sup>5</sup> James Gulamuwu, 20110903RBMPMRIL07, 00:26:12.555–00:26:23.977.



variegation is a theme of the story of the ancestress Warramurrungunji (told in multiple languages), who travelled from Croker Island, over Warruwi and over the mainland toward Gunbalanya and the stone country, depositing different languages as she went (Evans 2010; O'Keeffe 2017).<sup>6</sup>

While western Arnhem Land songmen are responsible for leading the singing of their particular songs in ceremony, they rely on each other for didjeridu accompaniment and vocal 'back up', and therefore must be familiar with one another's songs and their particular clapstick and didjeridu rhythms, in order to carry out the performance. As David Manmurulu (Brown et al. 2013) suggests, the success of a ceremonial performance is highly dependent on whether everyone comes together to take part:

When we have like funeral ceremonies and all that, if we [Inyjalarrku group] come and sing and nobody gets up and dance . . . then we feel no good again, we feel bad, and then our song will go bad again. But if we all happy, like dance all the ladies and even the young kids, children, dance, that makes us happy, and we can get the song going very good, very well. We sing happily, get together, dancing, good. We say *karryaryakpakpa ja manyardi*<sup>7</sup>, then it comes back good again, then we feel like, especially me when I sing, I feel good.

Equally, while female ceremony holders are responsible for preparing aspects of the ceremony (painting themselves and younger girls with white ochre in the body design that evokes the animal or spirit after which their associated song-set is named) and ensuring that the dancing fits with the ceremonial action, they must also be familiar with the full repertoire of songs, and sensitive to their male counterparts who are dancing as well as leading the singing. Jenny Manmurulu (Brown et al. 2013) described the extensive process through which she and her family together learnt a 'farewell song' that David Manmurulu received in a dream, then taught it to other members of the community:

With this song, the farewell song, it took us a while to practise, because when David's dad [George Winunguj] passed away in 1994, when David dreamt about this song, and then it took us two or three years . . . he was saying 'oh, Jenny, we have to try this', and he was telling the boys [David and Jenny's sons Rupert, Renfred and Reuben] 'we have to try [singing] this song'. So when [they all] start singing this song about a couple of month later, he said to me, 'well Jenny, I'll have to show you, I'll have to perform you the dance, so you can teach the other ladies and young girls, doing this goodbye song.'

Just as speakers at Warruwi might 'code-switch' or address one another in different languages such as Mawng and Biniñ Gunwok (Singer and Harris 2016), so too do singers take turns in leading the ceremony, so that songs from each group's repertoires are interspersed throughout the performance (Brown 2016). With careful attention to song ordering, ceremony leaders highlight particular songs which resonate with particular stages in the ceremony, or with an aspect of the identity of the main recipient of the ceremony (such as a recipient of the Mamurrng diplomacy ceremony, or a deceased spirit for whom a funeral ceremony is being held). Such is the multi-modality of western Arnhem Land performance that all of the occasions when *manyardi* was recorded at Warruwi (represented in Table 11.1) involved two or more different songs-sets performed together (apart from one solo performance of Milyarryarr for an *Inyimany ja najaman* ceremony).

One of these occasions was a Mamurrng (diplomacy) ceremony performed in 2012 for Reuben Brown and research collaborators (including Barwick, Marett, O'Keeffe, Birch, and others), as well

<sup>6</sup> The idea that performance enacts complementary phenomena pertaining to both the human and ancestral worlds has also been explored in relation to *manikay* of north-east Arnhem Land. See, for example, Fiona Magowan's (2007) analysis of the situated knowledge involved in learning and performing *manyikay*, and Franca Tamisari's (2002) phenomenological analysis of the anthropology of *manikay* performance.

<sup>7</sup> The meaning of this word might be translated: 'support and energise the musicians [in the same way that water refreshes the thirsty and parched]'.

as Brown's adopted Bininj (Aboriginal) family from Gunbalanya.<sup>8</sup> The performance involved an elaborate dance staged over two nights in which each performer enacted the handing over of a wooden pole (decorated with brightly coloured tassels of wool, with the hair of the recipient woven into the central tassel with beeswax). As Jenny Manmurulu (JM) and David Manmurulu (DM) explain in conversation with Isabel O'Keeffe (IO) (Brown et al. 2013):

JM: [The Mamurrng] it's a gift ceremony where, when a person say 'oh I like to give this thing to maybe a hair or a shell, or maybe a bone of fish, or anything', and it's like a concert thing where people ask to come and sing and dance, perform

...

DM: to see the dancing and the song...

JM: ... different style of dancing and the songs

IO: And so it brings people together sometimes from Warruwi and lots of different communities?

JM: Lots... if this family member [is] based at Warruwi, he'll bring other people that lives maybe Maningrida, Oenpelli, Minjilang, Croker Island or [Warruwi], you know, they give us time to get those people there and then we do a big performance there for them...

As 'givers' of the *mamurrng* in the 2012 ceremony, both the Inyjalarrku and Yanajanak groups had to support one another to carry out the performance:

the two songs joins together – combine together, and we all share the dancing, no matter... We had to paint Inyjalarrku body paint, but we still had to dance the Yanajanak [song-set].<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, although ceremonies such as the Mamurrng are about residents – such as those from Warruwi and neighbouring communities – articulating their particular language and clan identities by performing their 'different styles', such differences are clearly inclusive and complementary, rather than exclusive or divisive.

### 3 Deepening lexical documentation through musical documentation and vice versa

All languages are rich in idiomatic expressions with meanings that are not the sum of their parts; for example, 'to take somebody's side' (Pawley 2007; Wray 2012). However, initial work on little-documented languages such as Mawng, Kunbarlang or Kunwinjku tends not to dwell on these kinds of expressions. The basic morphosyntactic machinery is more often the focus of initial fieldwork, along with commonly used nouns and verbs. In addition, language speakers may avoid using as many idiomatic expressions as usual with linguists whose language proficiency is still developing.

One risk for field linguists is to inadvertently document a simple version of the language being researched, which may bypass more sophisticated expressions with idiomatic meanings. For example, the smaller a dictionary, the fewer the senses that tend to be listed per lexeme. In any

<sup>8</sup> Brown carried out extensive fieldwork in Gunbalanya from 2011–2013 for his PhD thesis. Like many other *Balanda* 'non-Indigenous people' who live in or have ongoing ties with members of the community, he was given a place within the extensive kinship network in western Arnhem Land, and adopted by Donna Nadjamerrek as her sibling. Nadjamerrek attended the Mamurrng ceremony, along with other family members, and sat with the recipient group. For a further account of this ceremony, see Brown (2017). For accounts of other diplomacy ceremonies from the region, see Wild and Hiatt (1986) and Borsboom (1978).

<sup>9</sup> Jenny Manmurulu, 20121103RB01, 16:38–17:46

language, however, most lexemes are used in many different ways. Given the limitations on linguists in terms of time and range of contexts in which to capture the use of a word, collaboration with ceremony holders and musicologists can provide a way to access quite complex expressions in a language. New senses of words and new idiomatic expressions tend to develop through metaphorical extension of meanings from the concrete realm to the abstract realm (Evans and Wilkins 2000). Haviland (2006) demonstrates how ethnographic research such as musicology really underpins lexical documentation. What he calls ‘context-free linguistics’ only gets us so far: it may not necessarily allow us to access those parts of a language in which unique concepts and metaphorical, abstract ideas are expressed. The expressions that came up in the musicological research with Mawng-speaking musicians contained few new words that had not previously been documented by linguists, but instead fleshed out the range of senses for known words, and brought up many new idioms and complex verb constructions.

### 3.1 Documenting lexical knowledge

Although it has been critiqued, the Boasian ideal of a grammar, a dictionary and a text corpus still persists in the new field of language documentation (Gippert, Himmelmann & Mosel 2006). However, constructing a diverse and well-annotated corpus is increasingly seen as more important than a fuller grammatical description. For example, in Himmelmann (1998) and Gippert et al. (2006), the ‘sketch grammar’ appears to have taken the place of the full grammar. Despite this shift, the dictionary nevertheless holds its ground, as a collection of lexical knowledge. But what do linguists document when documenting lexical knowledge? They document individual lexemes (i.e. words), the different senses that the lexemes have, the different ways they can be used and also idioms and other multi-word lexical units such as complex verbs. Typical methods for extending a dictionary are domain-based elicitation and corpus expansion, as well as participating in and documenting particular activities, such as house-building (Haviland 2006; Mosel 2004).

Much of the expressive resources of a language lie in the polysemous senses of words and in their idiomatic combinations with other words, such as those shown in Table 11.2 and examples (1) to (3). However, multi-word combinations are often only listed in endangered language dictionaries when it is unavoidable for the linguist – such as when complex verbs composed of two lexemes are common (cf. Pawley 1993). Some examples of these kinds of complex verbs in Australian languages are coverb constructions in Mawng and Murrinhpatha complex verb stems. Noun-verb idioms can be harder to pick, as they do not have strict rules (for example, governing the order of the noun and the verb). In Mawng for example, a coverb must directly follow its verb with no intervening words, but a noun that forms a noun-verb idiom with a verb can be positioned quite freely in the sentence. Three examples of idioms involving the word *wirrngak* are shown in examples (1) to (3) and summarised in Table 11.2.

In example (1) the word *wirrngak* combines with the verb *-maju* ‘suffer, be sick, die’ to create an idiom meaning ‘be hungry’. Both words that comprise the multi-word construction are shown in bold.

- (1)<sup>10</sup> ‘Ngawu ka-ta-nyi wiwi la **wirrngak** marrik an-maju-ng’  
 come 2sg/3ED-eat-I2 DC CONJ hunger NEG 2sg-suffer-I1  
 ‘Wiwi come and eat so you won’t be hungry (later on).’<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Abbreviations used in the interlinear glosses are listed at the end of this chapter. The pronominal prefixes of transitive verbs are glossed by giving the features of the subject followed by the object, separated by a forward slash (/). Coverb constructions are presented by displaying the meaning of the coverb construction as a whole under the coverb. The inflecting verb has a gloss in capitals. Articles are glossed simply with their gender, e.g. *ja* ‘MA’ is the Masculine gender.

<sup>11</sup> The text was found by Singer in written and edited form, in the early 2000s at Waruwu School, with no author or date listed. It was then archived with the Northern Territory Archive Service. ‘MS Text 1 Yinkarnark1:37’ is Singer’s reference, as used in her archive deposit of the transcription file.

In example (2) the word *wirrngak* combines with a complex verb, a coverb construction, which already involves two separate words, *-ma* ‘get’ and the coverb ‘*rturrk*’. In combination these words form a coverb construction meaning ‘pull’. This two-word construction can then further combine with the word *wirrngak* to create an idiom meaning ‘make (someone) upset’ as in example (2).

- (2) *La anima-j rturrk-pu wirrngak.*  
 and 3MA/3LL-GET-PP make.upset -3pl.OBL life  
 He really upset them.<sup>12</sup>

Another commonly used idiom involving *wirrngak* combines the word with the verb *-aka* ‘throw’ to mean ‘breathe’ as in example (3).

- (3) *Juka jita warranyngiw marrik ang-aka-y mira ta wirrngak.*  
 DEM.P.FE FE child NEG 3GEN/3LL-throw-11 EMPH2 LL breath  
 This child is not breathing properly.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 11.2:** Idiomatic expressions that involve the word *wirrngak* ‘breath, life force’

	Noun-verb idiom	Meaning	Description of multiword combination
1	<i>-maju wirrngak</i>	be hungry	With verb <i>-maju</i> ‘suffer’
2	<i>-ma rturrk [OBL] wirrngak</i>	make really upset	With coverb construction <i>-ma rturrk</i> meaning ‘pull’
3	<i>-aka ta wirrngak</i>	1.breathe 2.rest 3.take a holiday	With verb <i>-aka</i> ‘throw’ and Land gender article <i>ta</i>

### 3.2 Deepening lexical knowledge through musical documentation

Ceremonial performance temporarily unites the concrete and abstract. Spiritual beliefs, stories and language are joined to the physical performance of music and dance. Franca Tamisari has shown how for Yolngu ‘the act of naming is made powerful and performative through externalisation and suggests a complex series of transformations in which body, language and place constitute each other’ (Tamisari 2002:96). Tamisari gives examples of nouns associated with dance movements that capture and reproduce movement and motion at particular places and in the body (2002: 97-98). The following three expressions were first recorded by Linda Barwick and Isabel O’Keeffe in discussion with David Manmurulu. These expressions similarly deepened the lexical documentation of the Mawng language, despite the fact that a lot of documentation had already been done on Mawng.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> This text was recorded by Heather Hinch and archived by Arthur Capell at AIATSIS. It is on AIATSIS tape HINCH\_H01\_00599A. Singer transcribed and translated it with Mawng speakers, ‘HH Text 6 Giant 019’ is Singer’s code, used in her archive deposits to refer to the transcription file.

<sup>13</sup> Example is from Hewett et al. (1990) – the Mawng dictionary, in the form it was before Singer began working on it.

<sup>14</sup> For example, a dictionary of 3500 words (Singer et al. 2015), a thesis (Singer 2006) and two books (Capell and Hinch 1970, Singer 2016) on the language, and the collection of texts by various linguists from 1964 to the present (see Singer 2006: Appendix 2).

*Expression 1: new sense of -aruki ‘climb’*

The verb *-aruki* ‘climb’ was originally recorded being used in a concrete sense, to refer to physical movement upwards in space, but it also refers to a rise in pitch in a song. The verb can also be nominalised to refer to a particular part of a song where the pitch changes, as shown in example (4).

- (4) *ja*                    *k-arr-aruki-n*  
 MA                    PR-1pl.in-rise.in.pitch-NP  
 the part [of the song] where we rise up in pitch<sup>15</sup>

At least one Inyjalarrku song also links the abstract and physical through the arm actions of the women’s dance (O’Keeffe 2017). In one section of the Inyjalarrku ‘farewell song’ (WALSP song ID IL18), the height of the women’s arm actions correlates with the descending pitch. Most of the song is accompanied by the women’s *wumarrk* ‘low’ dance action, in which women sway from side to side on the spot with their arms swinging by their sides. However at the start of line D (50) on the high vocal drone (an octave above the tonic), the women sway holding their arms at head height, performing the *wanji* ‘head’ dance action. As the melodic contour descends from the 8<sup>th</sup> degree of the scale to the 6<sup>th</sup>, the women move their arms to the *kumpil* ‘chest’ dance action, then as the melodic contour descends from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup>, the women perform the *arka* ‘halfway’ dance action. Finally as the melodic contour hovers around the 5<sup>th</sup> degree of the scale, the women return to the *wumarrk* ‘low’ dance action that accompanies most of the song (see Musical example 11.1 and Figure 11.1).

**Musical example 11.1:** Musical transcription of line D (50) of Inyjalarrku song IL18 and associated dance actions (listen to Audio example 11.1)<sup>16</sup>

u::: a-ya rraya lan - maye layanmarraye lan - maye layanmarraye lan - maye ne:::

action: *wanji* ‘head’  
 contour: 8

*kumpil* ‘chest’  
 8-7b-6-5-6

*arka* ‘half way’  
 8-7b-6-8-7b-6-5

*wumarrk* ‘low’  
 5-6-5



**Audio example 11.1:** Inyjalarrku song IL18

<sup>15</sup> David Manmurulu, 20070424IB01, 00:08:52.874–00:08:54.344

<sup>16</sup> Refer to recording 20061114IB-24-IL18\_19, where Line D (50), transcribed in Musical example 11.1, occurs at 00:00:38.09–00:00:48.45 and at 00:01:12.04–00:01:22.70.



**Figure 11.1:** Inyjalarrku dance actions *wanji* 'head' (top left), *kumpil* 'chest' (top right), *arka* 'halfway' (bottom left), *wumarrk* 'low' (bottom right), performed by Jenny Manmurulu at Marrinymarriny ('Fraser Beach'), Goulburn Island (photo by Beth Luck, used with permission)



*Expression 2: Metaphor (nigi ‘mother’, -lijpularr ‘child’ and nulakpi ‘heavy’)*

The mother–child metaphor is productive in Mawng and is also found in neighbouring languages Kun-barlang and Bininj Gunwok. The use of the term *ja nigi ja manyardi* ‘the mother song’ adds to our understanding of this.<sup>17</sup> The use of *nigi* ‘mother (formal)’ to refer to the largest example of something and *-lijpularr* ‘child’ as the smaller counterparts was already documented. For example, to refer to the thumb in Mawng we say *nigi* ‘mother’ and to refer to the fingers we say *wi-lijpularr* (pl-child) ‘the children’. The term *nigi* ‘mother’ is also used to refer to the largest of the three types of louse, and to the larger clapstick of a clapstick pair. The use of the term *nigi* ‘mother’ to refer to a particular song provides an example of this metaphor being used in a more abstract sense.

Most song-sets in western Arnhem Land have at least one important song that is considered the *nigi* ‘mother song’ and is also referred to as *ja nu-lakpi* (MA MA-heavy) ‘heavy one.’ Its heaviness refers to its emotional impact, and the fact that it has the slowest tempo of all the songs in the song-set (often with numerous changes in the tempo and clapstick beating). Since it often draws a stage of the ceremony to a close, the *nigi* typically has the longest duration of all the songs in the song-set. As David Manmurulu points out, whereas the rest of the song-set is generally performed in no fixed order, the *nigi* is different: ‘We can start off with any song, as long as the *nigi* always be the last’. Particularly for funeral ceremonies, he says, ‘we always finish off with the *nigi* song’.<sup>18</sup>



**Figure 11.2:** Rupert Manmurulu (left) and David Manmurulu (right) dancing the giant dance (photo from still by Isabel O’Keeffe 2006, left, and from still by Manmurulu and Nabalimirri 2001, right)

This comment alludes to another abstract quality of the *nigi* song: when performed with women’s ceremonial dancing at the end of the funeral, as the coffin is interred in the grave, it reinforces the carrying of the deceased spirit home to their ancestral country (Brown 2014:179, O’Keeffe 2017). The Inyjalarrku *nigi* song (listen to Audio example 11.1),<sup>19</sup> along with the penultimate song (often

<sup>17</sup> The Mawng term *nigi* ‘mother’ is a term of reference (rather than address) and it is not used by children. When referring to the mother song (rather than a person) the masculine article *ja* is used, agreeing with ‘song’ or ‘dance’, which are classified as masculine gender in Mawng (*ja nigi* could also be used to refer to a mother’s brother). Similarly, the term *ja nu-lakpi* ‘the heavy one’ (in Mawng) includes the masculine article and prefix. Similar agreement can be seen with the term in Kun-barlang: *na-rdulumuk* (MA-heavy) ‘the heavy one’.

<sup>18</sup> David Manmurulu, 20070529LB01A 00:09:44.735–00:09:55.055; 20070818MA.

<sup>19</sup> Refer to recording 20061114IB-24-IL18\_19, where the *nigi* song starts at 00:01:38.52

called the ‘farewell song’), is sometimes accompanied by a special *yumparrparr* (‘giant dance’), danced by a single male dancer (David Manmurulu or his son Rupert Manmurulu – see Figure 11.2). This dance has further abstract significance, as *yumparrparr* ‘giants’ are associated with death and are said to fight over the bodies of the deceased and take the spirit of deceased people to the land of the dead (Berndt and Berndt 1988, Lamilami 1974).<sup>20</sup>

*Expression 3: Insights into the origins of the noun amurl*

The term *amurl* is used to refer to a women's dance action that is part of the dance accompanying the Inyjalarrku 'mermaid' song-set. For this action, the dancers raise one arm to their forehead and place the other on their hip and dip their heads slightly. They then switch over the position of their arms in time with the next gapped clapstick beat. The dance actions, including the *amurl* action, are regarded as having been given to the songman George Winunguj (David Manmurulu's father) by Inyjalarrku 'mermaids' (O'Keeffe 2017).

The term *amurl* can be used as a noun to refer to this dance action, or as part of a putative complex verb construction to refer to the performance of these poses, as illustrated in example (5). Singers can call out *ma amurl!* ('ok amurl') to remind women to do the dance action at the appropriate time in the song.

- (5) *kangp-i-n* *amurl*  
 3pl/3LL-pierce-NP *amurl*  
 they do *amurl* dance actions<sup>21</sup>



**Figure 11.3:** Jenny Manmurulu demonstrating the *amurl* dance action (photo by Ruth Singer)

<sup>20</sup> Also discussed by David Manmurulu in conversation with Isabel O’Keeffe, 20060724IB01.

<sup>21</sup> 20070405LB01, 01:03:55.120–01:03:57.040.



When O’Keeffe and Barwick first recorded the term *amurl*, David Manmurulu had said that the word ‘means something to the song’ and that the action was related to the Inyjalarrku beings who passed it on to people to dance.<sup>22</sup> However, it was not clear to O’Keeffe and Barwick what the dance action represented or where the term may have originated. Singer’s recording of the coverb construction for ‘dive’, which uses a similar term *murlmurl*, as illustrated in example (6), provided further clues.

- |     |   |                         |
|-----|---|-------------------------|
| (6) | <i>kangp-i-n</i><br>3pl/3LL-pierce-NP<br>they dive in <sup>23</sup> | <i>murlmurl</i><br>dive |
|-----|---|-------------------------|

Given that the expression *kangp-i-n amurl* (‘to do *amurl* dance movements’) uses the same verb as the coverb construction *-e murlmurl* (‘to dive’), this suggested a link between the two coverb constructions. This led O’Keeffe and Barwick to ask further questions of David and Jenny Manmurulu about the link between the *amurl* dance action and diving. It emerged that the *amurl* dance action represents the actions of the Inyjalarrku mermaid beings diving into the water. In performing the *amurl* action in ceremony, the women embody the Inyjalarrku ‘mermaids’ – who originally gave the dance actions – and express their connection with these mermaid beings. Jenny Manmurulu expressed this as, ‘it’s like being an Inyjalarrku – I can feel they are in me’.<sup>24</sup> The physical and metaphorical connection between the *amurl* dance movement and the way people – and Inyjalarrku – use their arms when diving into water, demonstrates the way in which performed and embodied knowledge arising from ceremonial contexts enriches our understanding of language.

#### 4 Maintaining ‘different together’ for the next generation

Intergenerational engagement in the social activities and performances around ceremony are a crucial part of maintaining the diversity and vitality of the *manyardi* song tradition of western Arnhem Land. As David Manmurulu suggests, most young people learn *manyardi* through a long-term process of participation and observation, until their older relatives feel that they are ready to take on the responsibility of leading ceremony:

When I was a little boy, then my father’s singing. I used to follow him around. Then when I grow up to 10 or 11 years old, or 12, I started practising, singing with my dad. Yeah, and that’s how I learned. Then when I grew up, my old man was getting old and I used to sing with him, all the way, then he seen me and he said ‘ok my son, it’s all yours, I’m too old, then I hand it over.’ So he hand it over to me and I start singing it. He was teaching me for Mamurrng, or teaching me to take young boys for circumcise, then he taught me everything then, that’s how I still follow the track from my father taught me. I’m teaching my three boys . . . then when I die, then my sons will take over, then it will go on and on . . . from generation to generation. Then when they die they pass it to their kids.<sup>25</sup>

This intergenerational learning has been facilitated by the integration of aspects of *manyardi* performance and associated knowledge into the mainstream education at Waruwi School, where Jenny Manmurulu is senior Indigenous teacher:

I’ve been dancing Inyjalarrku all my life and I’m teaching the young kids now . . . I teach other kids in the community on funerals or any special occasions that we have at Waruwi. And when we have cultural activities at school, I usually ask my husband to

<sup>22</sup> David Manmurulu, 20070420IB03 00:18:49.174–00:18:52.654 and 00:58:11.787–00:59:12.307.

<sup>23</sup> Singer et al. (2015).

<sup>24</sup> Discussion between Isabel O’Keeffe and Jenny Manmurulu, RS Tape 377.

<sup>25</sup> David Manmurulu interviewed by Isabel O’Keeffe, 20100403EC, 00:36:14.320–00:38:01.255.

come and sing, and I do a lot of the dancing, instructing with all the girls from age 5 to 17 year old students at Warruwi School (Jenny Manmurulu, in Brown et al. 2013).

Although the *manyardi* song tradition is strong at Warruwi, it nevertheless remains vulnerable without support structures around intergenerational learning. David and Jenny's son Rupert Manmurulu is proud of the strength of the Inyjalarrku group – which often has three or four singers singing in unison (whereas other groups tend to have one or two). However, he is also conscious of a lack of engagement among other younger people with their *manyardi*, and the implications of this:

Apart from my dad there's a lot of families back there [in western Arnhem Land], they've got their own songs and they've got sons, nephews and whatever else, y'know and their sons and nephews they don't look forward y'know towards what their father been doing, and their grandparents. They just want to go separate road, y'know. But for us, y'know, proud of my dad y'know he's been there, done it, so y'know if, one day, his days might go on, me and my brother here, we'll still be singing and all that, continuing on. We're showing our kids and we're even showing more of that our age – me and Reuben [Manmurulu's] age – like at home, and we're making all the other people, like old people, really very proud of us and they turning around and saying 'ah well, you look what them boys are doing, they carrying it on, they're singing and whatever, because their father really taught them well.'<sup>26</sup>



**Figure 11.4:** David Manmurulu and his sons (including Rupert on didjeridu) and grandsons perform and record Inyjalarrku at Warruwi (photo by Beth Luck, used with permission)

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<sup>26</sup> Rupert Manmurulu, 20070818MA.eaf.

Researchers also have an important role to play in supporting and maintaining diversity and vitality of language and music in western Arnhem Land and beyond. Experts such as Jenny Manmurulu and David Manmurulu have discussed their song tradition on numerous occasions alongside researchers in public forums.<sup>27</sup> This has generated greater interest and prestige for language and songs, not only among the wider public, but also within Aboriginal communities such as Waruwi.<sup>28</sup> Digital copies of audio and video recordings of *manyardi* made by researchers over the years are in constant circulation in the community, where they have been used as a teaching aid for learning songs, and as inspiration for new performances.<sup>29</sup> Unique events such as the 2012 Mamurrng ceremony at Waruwi for Brown (which was initiated with the ceremonial giving of a lock of Brown's hair to Manmurulu in 2011 and commissioned with funding from an ARC Discovery grant led by Barwick, Marett and historian Martin Thomas)<sup>30</sup>, have also ensured that intercultural research collaborations are articulated within Arrarrkpi cultural ceremonial practices that reinforce ongoing and reciprocal relationships and principles of diversity and complementarity.

## 5 Conclusion

In western Arnhem Land, systems that maintain and foster diversity are reflected in sociality and underpin not only language but also *manyardi* (ceremony/song). Waruwi community is possibly unique in terms of both its multilingualism and the diversity of its song-sets. These express connections not only to spoken languages but also to languages or dialects no longer spoken, as well as to spirit languages belonging to ancestral spirits of the country. These different songs, representing different clan estates and language groups, are juxtaposed in ceremonial performance, where performers must rely upon one another to achieve a common goal (i.e. good relations between neighbouring groups, or grieving and saying goodbye to deceased family members). Being 'different together' means articulating one's unique identity – tied to particular melodies, body designs, song words, rhythms, and movements that are passed on to family members – in a space where such differences are constructive and complementary.

The examples discussed in this chapter, which have led to deeper lexical understanding of Mawng and musical understanding of *manyardi*, have arisen from similarly synergistic three-way conversations between linguists, musicologists, and performers with specialist knowledge, in particular Jenny Manmurulu and David Manmurulu. Such collaborations follow in the footsteps of other research carried out together by linguists and musicologists on Australian song, as discussed in Barwick, Birch and Evans (2007:7). Based on these experiences, we suggest that the ideal of 'constructive variegation' or maintaining 'different together' can not only be applied to language and music from this region, but can also be conceived of as an interdisciplinary methodological principle for examining aspects of music and language together, as part of an intercultural approach involving both Arrarrkpi (Indigenous) and Balanda (non-Indigenous) working in both ceremonial and academic environments.

There are a number of benefits to such an approach. For linguists who want to extend the documentation of a language's lexical knowledge, a consideration is not only to add more lexemes,

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<sup>27</sup> David Manmurulu and Jenny Manmurulu have given public presentations and performances of *manyardi* at numerous symposia for Indigenous Music and Dance, conferences of the Musicological Society of Australia, as well as the AIATSIS 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary conference 2014.

<sup>28</sup> Barwick, Birch and Evans (2007:7) similarly found that the publication of a CD on *Jurtbirrk* songs led to a greater interest in documentation of Iwaidja language and song in Minjilang on Croker Island.

<sup>29</sup> See for example a video of a dance performed in Darwin in 2014 by students at Waruwi School who were taught by Sophie Kinnane and inspired by a recording of Inyjalarrku and *manyardi* ritual performance (Waruwi Community School 2014).

<sup>30</sup> The occasion in 2011 was the Annual Symposium for Indigenous Music and Dance in Darwin (where Brown was the youngest attendee), while the ARC Discovery Project (DP1096897), led by Barwick, Marett and historian Martin Thomas, was titled 'Intercultural inquiry in a trans-national context: exploring the legacy of the 1948 American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land'.

but also to elaborate on what is known about each lexeme: its senses and uses. Collaboration with specialists of song, such as performers and musicologists, can offer a way to record and understand expressions with more abstract meanings in the lexicon. These include more abstract senses of already recorded lexemes, noun-verb idioms and complex verbs. The pursuit of such work is also a good way of accessing emotion vocabulary, which for Australian Indigenous languages is often absent from traditional narratives. Deeper meanings of words such as *-marranguli* ‘be emotionally moved by weather, place, song’ can come out through discussions of how people feel about songs, rituals and working together to put ceremonies on. In the case of the documentation of Mawng, simply extending the corpus through collecting texts would probably not have deepened our understanding to the same extent, as most multi-word idioms are quite rare in texts.

The collaborative approach we have described has also been constructive for musicological documentation of *manyardi*. As Michael Walsh points out, for Indigenous Australian song traditions in general ‘we know too little about how people actually talk about song, and about local aesthetics. Too often Aboriginal musical nomenclature is absent or poorly documented in accounts of Aboriginal song traditions’ (2007:133). Without in-depth knowledge of the multiple languages in western Arnhem Land, it is difficult for musicologists to work out whether particular terms are specialised musical terms, everyday expressions, or special idiomatic expressions. Singer’s specialist knowledge of Mawng has also lent greater understanding of musical terminology documented by Barwick, Brown and O’Keeffe in collaboration with ceremony leaders such as David and Jenny Manmurulu, revealing richly layered meanings and symbolism behind *manyardi*.

Finally, this state of being ‘different together’ – of keeping diversity in both language and song – has been shown to rely upon the maintenance of three particular factors: the intergenerational learning and participation in *manyardi* by people of all ages; support for such learning; and the recognition, particularly among Balanda both within and outside the immediate community, that one’s unique ties to country, ancestry, and language, are articulated through ceremonial performance.

**Abbreviations used in Mawng examples:** 1 First person, 2 Second person, 3 Third person, CONJ Conjunction, DC Daughter’s child, DEM Demonstrative, P Proximal, D Distant, ABS Abstract (i.e. discourse demonstrative), ED Edible gender, EMPH2 Emphatic postverbal particle, FE Feminine gender, GEN Non-Masculine gender (i.e. any gender but Masculine), I1 Irrealis 1 tense-aspect-mood suffix, I2 Irrealis 2 tense-aspect-mood suffix, IN Inclusive pronominal category, KRDP K-reduplication suffix: encodes iterative or durative tense-aspect-mood, LL Land gender, MA Masculine gender, NEG Negative preverbal particle or prefix, NP Nonpast tense-aspect-mood suffix, OBL Oblique pronoun, pl Non-singular number (restricted mainly to humans), PP Past punctual tense-aspect-mood suffix, sg Singular number (restricted mainly to humans).

**Other abbreviations used in this text:** AIATSIS Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, ARC Australian Research Council, DECRA Discovery Early Career Research Award, ELAR Endangered Languages Archive, PARADISEC Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures, WALSP Western Arnhem Land Song Project.

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