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AUSTLANG – The need to incorporate recent linguistic analysis into the system at the base level

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The development of AUSTLANG v1.0 is very welcome in that it makes the information in the AIATSIS data base (which is also the system underlying the AIATSIS MURA catalogue) more available and transparent. However AUSTLANG also makes evident some problems with the way the data base treats the classification of those Indigenous languages for which there was very limited linguistic analysis available to those who created the AIATSIS codes. Recent interest in the Indigenous language heritage of New South Wales and Victoria, and associated language reclamation projects, makes the potential use of AUSTLANG considerable. However, it is hard to see how the data base will be able to be user effective for the languages in this area, (and perhaps other historically similar areas of Australia.) without the editing of some source material and the revising of some of the AIATSIS codes, on which the AUSTLANG structure is based.

This paper will examine the AUSTLANG data for the Upper Murray area and compare it with the more recent classifications of Dixon (1980, 2002) and of Blake & Reid (1998) and the research of Bowe (2002), Bowe & Morey (1999), identifying problematic discrepancies between the AIATSIS/ AUSTLANG classification and these more recent classifications. The paper argues that the more certain linguistic classification, based on language analysis rather than information that primarily links references to group/ language names and geographic locations warrants a revision of some of the AIATSIS codes particularly if they are to be also used for a language application as is the case with AUSTLANG. It is hard to see how simply adding more classification information and OZBIB bibliographic information to the current entries would solve the problem.

The creation of a web accessible site creates an imperative that the status of the information presented there be clear to the non-specialist. Let us interact with the AUSTLANG project to make this come about.

References

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