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Comparative Lexical Documentation for Australian Languages

keyword: Australian Indigenous languages

The increasing production of language documentation in digital form and the development of common technical standards (Bird and Simons 2003) increases the opportunities for comparative analysis over multiple sources. This has obvious potential for applications in lexicography and studies of lexical semantics, language variation and historical linguistics of Australian languages. This talk will first discuss general principles and implementation for these purposes, and will then describe a system which is currently being used for studies of Western Desert dialects and Nyungar historical sources (Dench 1989).

The main goals of this model include:

- fidelity to the original sources by providing a systematic representation of items in source documents
- multiple alternative descriptions at all levels, including annotations on an item in a source in order to represent, for example, competing classifications of lexical category or different uses of language and dialect names
- the definition of sets of items within and across source documents and other groupings, including but not limited to correspondence sets
- transparency (extending Woodbury 2003) in the sense that for each analysis both the researcher(s) who propose the analysis and the specific sources of data on which it is based are clearly identified and the data can be inspected.
- access methods which respect cultural sensitivities, intellectual rights and commercial interests, and in which open access constitutes publication.
- co-ordination of co-operative research using online interfaces
- multiple interfaces for different users and uses
- articulation with other online resources on Australian languages, including the new AUSTLANG database developed by AIATSIS