HOW ONE **'AUS' CODE** BECAME MANY

Between 250 and 300 language groups and around 800 dialectal varieties were spoken across the Australian continent at the time of European settlement in 1788. Across the nation there is a treasure trove of historical materials documenting these languages, with varying degrees of linguistic rigour, from early word lists to modern complex grammatical descriptions. Along with such references is a wealth of written materials in a range of languages including works by Indigenous peoples in first language, often with translations.

Now, there is a new tool to describe Australian Indigenous language material held in collections and make them more accessible. For the first time, libraries all over Australia and across the world will be able to use an appropriate, authorised standard to identify Australian Indigenous language materials in their collections, replacing the single MARC language code 'aus' with codes for hundreds of different language varieties.

This transformation of collection description was made possible in October 2018 when the Library of Congress accepted a proposal developed by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and the National Library of Australia to add Austlang to the MARC Language Source Codes list (bit.ly/2QhRSgr).

Austlang (bit.ly/2P2ykbs) is a unique web-based resource on Australian Indigenous languages that is developed and maintained by AIATSIS. Austlang contains records for over 1,200 language varieties, both current and historical, and it uses unique codes to identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

The recognition of Austlang codes in MARC will significantly improve the discovery of Australian Indigenous language material in libraries. For the first time, libraries will be able to better describe and create access to Australian Indigenous language material, working towards a more visible recognition of Indigenous voices and cultures in our collections. Austlang provides identification of a more comprehensive range of Australian Indigenous languages than any other code currently recognised or used.

AIATSIS and the National Library of Australia continue to work together to implement Austlang in our institutions' collection description. At the time of writing, both organisations were identifying the development and training work required to implement locally and exploring ideas on how to share this knowledge with the Australian library sector in 2019. It is envisaged that webinars and guides on how to implement Austlang will be available.

In 2019 the National Library of Australia's Trove service will introduce several enhancements to support discovery and access to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander material. Through embedding the Austlang codes into collection metadata that flows into Trove, visitors will be able to search and browse for collection items from specific language groups.

This year is the International Year of Indigenous Languages (bit.ly/2FJwUmD) and the overarching theme is 'Indigenous languages matter for development, peace building and reconciliation'. UNESCO emphasises that 'languages play a crucial role in the daily lives of people, not only in education, communication, social integration and development, but also as a repository for each person's unique identity, cultural history, traditions and memory.'

The International Year of Indigenous Languages aims to raise awareness and promote Indigenous languages across five key areas: increasing understanding, reconciliation and international cooperation; creation of favourable conditions for knowledge-sharing and dissemination of good practices with regards to Indigenous languages; integration of Indigenous languages into standard setting; empowerment through capacity building; and growth and development through elaboration of new knowledge.

AIATSIS and the National Library of Australia encourage libraries all over Australia to develop events and activities that not only celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, but also support community efforts to document and record their language knowledge.

Implementing Austlang in our collection description is one significant action that we can all take.

Editor's Note: to see more on what ALIA is doing for the International Year of Indigenous Languages, look out for the March/April 2019 issue of *INCITE*, themed 'Indigenous matters'.

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