Research Infrastructures for Language Resources – the Australian Perspective

Linda Barwick

University of Sydney

In this talk I will discuss the prospective place of research infrastructure for the humanities in general, and for language resources in particular, in the context of Australian demography and current Australian government initiatives for supporting research infrastructure through the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS) and the E-Research Initiative. Examples will be provided from PARADISEC (the Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures), an Australian collaborative research facility for providing services of digital preservation, curation and online access to Australian researchers' field recordings of endangered languages and musics of the Asia-Pacific region.

Since Australia is a large country with a relatively small geographically dispersed population, government investment in communication and transport infrastructure has been essential to constitution and governance of the national community. In 2004 the Australian Government announced the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS), allocating funding of A\$542 million until 2010/11, with the expectation of further funding from the states and other funding agencies such as the Australian Research Council (ARC). NCRIS aims to support research areas in which Australia has the potential to do excellent world-class research, and which fit in with government-approved national research priorities (economic development, social and health related outcomes, environmental sustainability and national security).

Although Australian researchers in regional languages and cultures continue to undertake world-class research (hence meeting criterion 1), the humanities in general and language studies in particular are not favoured under the national research priorities as they are currently defined. The NCRIS strategy therefore at present only supports generic infrastructure requirements of humanities research (such as libraries and repository storage). Various humanities bodies in Australia, including the Australian Academy of the Humanities, are currently lobbying the government to improve recognition of the role of the humanities in Australia's international research standing, and hence improve funding for language resource infrastructure. One good feature of NCRIS is its recognition of the changing nature of national and international research, with its emerging emphasis on multi-disciplinary, networked, collaborative research teams.

Another Australian government initiative that is focussed in this direction is the current development of an e-Research infrastructure strategy. Although at an early stage, the e-Research coordination committee does recognise explicitly the needs and interests of the humanities and social sciences. This committee bases Australia's e-Research infrastructure strategy on existing and planned robust high-bandwidth advanced communications networks; distributed high-performance computing and data storage capacities; accessible data and information repositories and research instruments and facilities; and agreed standards and coordinated middleware development. In 2005 the ARC introduced a pilot funding scheme in e-Research, in which several of the funded projects have a language orientation (including the EthnoER project in which PARADISEC is currently participating).