INTERIM REPORT - RESEARCH GRANTS

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Research activities since last report

The project has finished the first and much of the second stages planned.

We have developed the initial website as a repository of historical archives. This site has been demonstrated at two workshops. Firstly with Elders in Lismore and then with Members of the Clarence River Community in Redfern.

The archival material was collected from AIATSIS Library, the State Library, Richmond River Historical Society (where material from the Clarence River Historical Society is now stored) and Trove online. This material has been scanned and optical character recognition has been used to make the material more accessible where possible.

The material was sorted into thematic headings and uploaded to web pages using this structure. Permission has been gained for little of this material to be made public, so the site remains private at present. The process of permission was deliberately delayed as it was thought better that we find which material is more useful before we go through this process.

We now have a structure for historical study for the Clarence River area and during the early settlement period under study. The themes are early contact, adapting to new country, stories of living on country, massacre, losing culture, economy of settlement, and change in educational methods, as originally proposed. However at present we find more material relates to the first three areas. In future workshops this may change.

The second stage is half complete, with the web services mostly developed, but requiring further testing. We have an interactive wiki site where the archival material is now displayed, under password protection. Users can upload audio, video (and text) items as comments to the original archival material. The wiki format was chosen as it suited the knowledge sharing idea of the site, and the use of commenting to link annotations and additional information to the original material provided an appropriate interface for knowledge sorting.

We have also been able to integrate novel image editing and video segmentation software to improve user ability to link to relevant material and the accessibility on low bandwidth, but reducing downloads to only relevant segments. The website design was presented at the International Conference on Web-Based Learning in China last week.

The services have not yet been tested with the users, and need to be user friendly to novice users. However the site is nearly ready for this testing. Also some paper mockups have already been carried out with community members to verify the suitability of the material and the usefulness of the site.

These provide guidance as to how the site will be used, and how the users will interpret the existing interface. As such studies have guided the development so far, we hope the final site will not require great edits after the first 'live' workshop.

Proposed activities for next period

From the previous workshops held, we are now planning the following steps.

1. Enhancements to website required before 'live' workshop:

We will need to improve the access permissions to enable different groups of users to have different privileges.

Also we have yet to add tools to improve the annotation of new resources uploaded by users, which will include the approximate location and historic period

Search mechanism to final related material that is not directly linked to a particular page.

2. Hold workshop in Redfern to follow up from paper mockup with live site, and upload material recorded there. This workshop will enable us to establish:

Which archival material is useful and needs to be made public

What other material to search out and

What other people who may contribute, both in Redfern and in Clarence area

3. Do some further work to improve the site and collect more archival resources, as well as permission for previously collected material.

4. Hold final workshop in Grafton with local community members

5. Provide final functionality to site based on usability issues at these workshops

We will then present the website as completed to that stage at workshops and conferences for comment, and promote the site as an opportunity for community to contribute to the collection of their history. The software will also be distributed on an open source website, with the option of other programmers contributing to its development

Findings to date / other comments

It was useful to start the main workshops in Redfern as we are finding that those removed from country are often more interested in talking about their history. It may be the dislocation has provided a need to keep retelling the story, so it is fresh in people's mind.

Also the existence of many new software developments, such as video annotation, HTML5 for viewing material online, and Restful architectures have sped up the software development

greatly. It has been very exciting sharing information with others in this area, including a German group who are developing similar software to share stories around the history of Afghanistan prior to the recent effects of bombing. This material is being used to train anthropologist coming into the area, explaining what they are seeing, and what was there before. This is a similar project to ours, as we hope this material will assist in training people in the history of the Clarence River area, and how the Bundjalung people perceive this history.

Finally discussions with other developers has raised the common perception, that Oral Histories collected from a group may be contradictory, that some may not be 'true'. Interestingly, we find that the same process seems to hold true for the modern story telling, as for the telling of traditional, law-giving, stories. That is, the story teller will often finish a story with the information that this is all they can tell, and give the name of the person who can tell more, or whose story is relevant to the next part of the story. This provides a mechanism to retain 'truth' or consistency on the stories.

Signature :   Cat Kutay   Date : 15.. / 12 / …2010