This case study outlines the development of one component of the interactive multimedia CD-ROM *Paakantyi* (Hercus & Nathan, 2002), emphasising the value of community consultation throughout the project lifespan. In our initial consultations with members of the Paakantyi community of NSW, Australia, about producing a CD-ROM to support their new language revival efforts, community members put forward the idea of a “talking dictionary.” The value that many aboriginal people place on dictionaries as symbols of a language’s significance is well-known, and, particularly following the publication of the (text-only) Kamilaroi/Gamilaraay Web Dictionary (Austin & Nathan, 1996), we had heard many people in many places express a preference to simply hear the words.

So, we set out to develop the first comprehensive interactive talking dictionary of an Australian indigenous language. This promised to be a challenge. Not only
was the design of a good speaking dictionary initially unknown, but the very serious degree of language loss in the community meant that we were unsure how many words we would even be able to include.

We did know that protocol required that recordings be made with Paakantyi language consultants whose authority to use language was recognised by the community. As we set out on our second field trip, we discussed methodologies for recording words for the talking dictionary. My co-researcher Luise Hercus, a prominent field linguist who had worked with the Paakantyi community over a period of forty years, wanted to make “authentic” recordings using traditional elicitation methods to both populate the talking dictionary and to further her research on the language. As the multimedia developer, I was more focused on recording enough words to create a reasonable-sized dictionary, and felt that due to limited language knowledge in the community we might need to “stage” many of the recordings by asking people to read words from lists.

The consultants themselves argued for authenticity; they invariably commented that if they were prompted with words that they were not familiar with (and, in the later editing process, their judgements governed the inclusion or otherwise of words). Nevertheless, the outcome surprised all the participants, researchers and community members alike. The number of words recorded (and other materials, see below) was beyond what any of us had expected, probably as a result of the unbridled enthusiasm of the consultants and our shared attention to methodology. During the three fieldwork visits, our “team” evolved comfortable working styles and the consultants found it increasingly easier to recall and pronounce words and expressions that they had not heard or used for decades. And as other community members saw the draft CD taking shape, they also offered to record with us.

We not only recorded many more words than anyone had thought possible, but also discovered important parameters for the talking dictionary’s design among the patterns of the consultants’ contributions. For example, our main consultants (Renie Mitchell, Lottie Williams, John Mitchell and Badger Bates) would often follow Paakantyi words with English glosses and explanations, and possibly some expressions to illustrate usage. For example, John Mitchell provided the recorded entry for the word *murarta* “fast, quick” (as in Hercus, 1993). He said: *mura-mararta,* “hurry up”… *Mura-mararta thikalanaapa,* “hurry up, I’m going home.” To accommodate such contributions, several non-trivial linguistic and functional design decisions needed to be made, including the following:

- Paakantyi speakers sometimes used forms that were different from those in the published dictionary. In some of these cases, the new data led to revision/correction of the dictionary; however, in most cases we simply juxtaposed the published (upper part of screen — see Figure 1) and the
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