

WORK PAPERS OF SIL-AAB

Series A Volume 10

**KRIOL OF NORTH AUSTRALIA
A LANGUAGE COMING OF AGE**

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This book is written
in memory of
Barnabas, Mordecai, Isaac and Douglas,
four great men
who had great patience
with an inquisitive munanga,
and it is
dedicated to
Holt Thompson and Dorothy Meehan,
the first two Anglo-Australians to recognize
the significance of Kriol
to such a degree that
they stood against the tide of opposition
and helped to establish
the Bamyili School Kriol bilingual education program.

Foreword

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CHAPTER 3

IS KRIOL AN ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE?

It was established in the previous chapter that Kriol is an autonomous language system which is used as a primary medium of communication by Aborigines in over two hundred and fifty Aboriginal communities in North Australia. Incredible as it may seem, however, many people, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, consider Kriol to be a non-Aboriginal language rather than an Aboriginal language. Sandefur (1981a, 1981f) and Roberts and Sandefur (1982) have put forth eight arguments as to why Kriol is clearly an Aboriginal language:

1. Although the development of Kriol was the result of the presence of Europeans and the English language, it was developed by Aborigines.
2. Grammatically, although Kriol has many features in common with English, it also has many features in common with traditional Aboriginal languages.
3. Semantically, Kriol embodies Aboriginal concepts and world view, not European ones.
4. Kriol is spoken fluently by thousands of Aborigines, and only by very few Europeans.
5. Kriol is the mother tongue of four generations of Aborigines, but not of Europeans.
6. Aborigines speaking to other Aborigines who speak different traditional languages feel more at ease and free to speak Kriol in preference to English.
7. Kriol is predominantly used by Aborigines with Aborigines, not Europeans.
8. No Europeans identify with Kriol, but many Aborigines do identify with it and claim it as their language.

The first argument has been implicit in the previous chapter and will also be covered in chapter four. The second argument is not discussed in this book, and those desiring to pursue the subject of the grammatical relationship between Kriol and traditional Aboriginal languages are referred to Hudson (1983a) and Sharpe (1983). The remainder of the arguments, while having been touched on in the previous chapter, will be discussed in this chapter. In particular, the arguments dealing with semantics⁶⁷ and identity will be looked at in some detail.

KRIOL AS A REFLECTION OF CONTEMPORARY ABORIGINAL SOCIETY

Kriol is the living language of a contemporary Aboriginal society. As such it is used not only for the transmission of that which is traditional, but also for the expression of that which is contemporary.

The transmission of Aboriginal values, knowledge and heritage in Aboriginal communities throughout the Kriol language area is a function

which is today largely performed through Kriol, although certainly not exclusively through Kriol. Traditional languages are still used as a transmission medium by some segments of most communities, but on the whole Kriol has become the primary medium for the transmission of the Aboriginal world view to the younger generations in most of the communities. In a few communities, such as Umbakumba, a traditional language is the primary transmission medium. In fewer still, such as Doomadgee, Aboriginal English has become the primary transmission medium. Very little transmission in any of the communities is by means of English.

In many communities where traditional languages are still used as a transmission medium, they are restricted to a small portion of the population, and often even within such portion of the population, Kriol may be heard more frequently than the traditional language. An example of this is at Ngukurr where the most virile traditional language is Ritharrngu. The 'Ritharrngu Mob' represent about fifteen percent of the total population. They are relatively late comers to the community, having shifted down from central Arnhem Land during the 1940s, some thirty years after the other major groups settled at Ngukurr. They are generally considered to be the least 'educated' group in terms of European education, and yet they are the most knowledgeable about traditional matters. They are the only group at Ngukurr in which a significant number of the younger adults can fluently speak the traditional language.⁶⁸ However, even in the Ritharrngu camp, the language most often observed to be in use is Kriol, not Ritharrngu. This is influenced in part by the fact that not everyone who resides in the Ritharrngu camp is Ritharrngu, that some of those who are Ritharrngu do not speak Ritharrngu, and that the peer group of many from the Ritharrngu camp are Kriol speakers outside the Ritharrngu Mob.

Ngukurr can serve as an example also of the complementary functions which are served by traditional language on the one hand and Kriol on the other. The only function exclusively served by traditional language is the singing of traditional songs, as in the bunggul (singing with didjeridoo and clapstick accompaniment). The Ritharrngu Mob is the only group at Ngukurr that regularly have the traditional bunggul for entertainment. Other groups rarely have a bunggul except in relation to formal traditional functions. The songs of the bunggul are all in traditional language, never in Kriol. Conversation between songs and about the songs, however, is usually in Kriol, especially if non-Ritharrngu speakers are present.

The fact that Kriol is not used at all in the singing of traditional songs is not surprising, for traditional songs in one language or dialect are never translated into another⁶⁹. When a person learns a traditional song, he learns it in the original language regardless of what his own language is and whether or not he understands the original language. A traditional 'song cycle' or connected series of songs tells the story of a creative being's journey through a number of different 'countries'. When the creative being moves out of one country and into another, the language in which the songs of that particular part of the journey are composed also changes from the language of the first country to that of the second. Note that each song in the cycle is composed in the language or dialect of the country about which it is telling the story and is never translated into another language. Thus it is impossible for any traditional songs to be in Kriol, at least until Kriol is old enough itself to have become traditional and for the songmen to have been 'given' original songs in it.⁷⁰ Kriol is used, however, in discussion of traditional songs, both in terms of their performance and their content and significance.

Although Kriol is not used in the singing of traditional songs, it has been observed to be used for other aspects of formal traditional functions. At Ngukurr, for example, Kriol has been observed to be the primary language used, and in most cases the only language used, in situations such as discussions on various aspects of the preparations for a ceremony (e.g. in giving instructions on readying the ceremony ground and sending out messengers, in debate on the reckoning of the descent line of a man whose parents had married wrong so the correct ceremonial functions could be handed over to him, in argument on the correct version of a traditional story to be taught at a ceremony, and in discussing the performance of the next phase of the ceremony). It has also been observed to be the primary language used in discussions on preparations for and instructions during numerous phases of formal traditional functions relating to death, and in discussions for and instructions and directions during a traditional payback 'fight'.

'Dreamtime' history, the events of creation by the dreamtime beings, is commonly transmitted through Kriol. This is true with regard to formalized traditional stories as well as to impromptu versions or explanations given informally. 'Guided tours', for example, in which Kriol is almost invariably used, are often given to visiting Aborigines at Ngukurr. The stories of the creation of the various geological features of the landscape as well as warnings and instructions relating to dangerous places and expected behaviour are all given in Kriol. Even in communities in which a traditional language is dominant, the presence of visitors may require the use of Kriol. At Oenpelli, for example, Kriol⁷¹ is used instead of Gunwinggu when the group is too mixed to allow the use of a traditional language (Jernudd 1971:19).

Oral history of recent times is also transmitted through Kriol. Stories of events from the last century which have been passed on from the deceased generations are now related in Kriol. At Ngukurr great-grandmothers share events from their own and their parents' generation with their great-grandchildren in Kriol. The past and present experiences of the old and young alike are related to others through Kriol.

Contemporary items of a non-traditional nature, as will be discussed in detail in chapter four, are also transmitted through Kriol. Matters relating to health, education, administration, finances, technology and religion, for example, are typically discussed among Kriol speakers in Kriol. In these contemporary but non-traditional domains, Kriol shows heavy borrowing from English much the same as it shows heavy borrowing from traditional languages in the traditional domains.

Kriol is not the only language through which all of the above can be transmitted. As has been pointed out, they are still transmitted through traditional language by some people. In addition, some people transmit them through Aboriginal English. Theoretically, all of them could be transmitted through English. Kriol is unique, however, in that it is the only language which can be used for all functions (except the transmission of traditional songs) by virtually all Kriol speakers in contemporary society.

World View of Humanity

Being the primary language of a dynamic Aboriginal society, Kriol reflects the contemporary nature of Aboriginal community life. In spite of the general destructiveness of Europeanization, Aborigines have not

permitted themselves to be "swallowed wholly by the vortex of acculturation" (Kolig n.d.:4-5). Instead, they have developed their own blend of the traditional and the modern in a distinctively Aboriginal framework. They have been able to do this because they have maintained an "ideational continuity" with their past through the retention of traditional conceptual elements (Kolig n.d.:5).

Although not a traditional language, Kriol has become an essential vehicle of tradition.⁷² The tradition it transmits is one in transition, being molded by today's contemporary world view into what will be tomorrow's world view. It goes without saying that this social 're-analysis' is taking place under great tension.

The tension of the social re-analysis of the Aboriginal world view is reflected in attitudes toward Kriol, as will be discussed later in this chapter. It is also reflected, although to a lesser degree, in the linguistic re-analysis slowly taking place within Kriol. This reflection can be exemplified from the Kriol lexicon.⁷³

The Kriol term blekbala, in spite of its derivation from the English 'blackfellow' does not in its deepest sense simply refer exclusively to Aborigines. In one sense it denotes (any) 'human being' and thus its reference includes non-Aboriginal people as well. It is not the case that the Aboriginal concept of 'humanity' is imprecise, as has been claimed by some writers (e.g. Kolig n.d.:11). It is simply at odds with the European concept. The English term is based on the criterion of race, whereas the Kriol term is based on the criterion of language. Basically, any being who possesses the ability to communicate through language is considered to be blekbala.

Language has traditionally been seen by Aborigines as of pre-eminent importance as a determinant of full humanity (Kolig n.d.:8). For example, a person who is pathologically deaf (i.e. a debala) is considered to be, at least partially, insane (med) and thus, in a sense, not fully human.⁷⁴

Language competence is not limited to human beings, but is an attribute of certain spirit and animal beings as well. For example, the wallaby who according to the mythology split open Napurr Gorge on the lower Roper River is considered to be a blekbala. From a European perspective this is generally regarded as simply mythology relating to geological events in the distant past. From a traditional Aboriginal perspective, however, that wallaby was and still is a blekbala just as much as people living today are blekbala.

The term blekbala is also used, however, in a more restricted and seemingly English way. It is used to refer to Aborigines in contrast to non-Aborigines. Before the arrival of the extremely hostile 'aliens', Aborigines did not see themselves as Aborigines, for they had nothing with which to contrast themselves racially. The violent and destructive Europeans, however, were beings of a different order. Although considered to be blekbala because of their linguistic ability, they were given a specific group label. From the Aboriginal ethnocentre, it was the Europeans who behaviourally were not fully blekbala. Thus it is that blekbala are blekbala in all contexts, while Europeans are blekbala in some contexts but munanga⁷⁵ in others.

This dual classification system was further complicated by the arrival of the offspring from the cohabitation of the two classes of blekbala. Such offspring, while being blekbala in the broader sense of being

human, were rejected by both the narrower class of blekbala and the munanga. The result was the formation of a second not-fully-blekbala group, which was labelled yelabala. A third group entered the scene, primarily during the gold rushes of the late-1800s — the Asians or jainaman.

Thus, from an ethnocentric perspective, Aborigines of full descent have no exclusive label. They are the reference point for all humanity. Anyone who differs, differs from them and is thus identified. The criteria of difference is not, however, restricted to racial origin. The central specific reference point is initiated manhood. In some contexts, Aboriginal men are referred to as blekbala, whereas Aboriginal women and children are referred to as olgaman and biginini respectively.

This system, however, appears to be changing. The major change is a shift in the referent of blekbala in its broadest sense from 'humanity' to the narrower 'of Aboriginal descent'. There is now an increasing number of Kriol speakers who claim that blekbala is not synonymous with pipul ('people') and that munanga can in no way be blekbala. Under this emerging system, pipul is 'humanity', and blekbala is one category of pipul, while others are munanga and jainaman.

Conceptually, many Kriol speakers appear to have made this change, but in practice many of them continue to operate under the older world view, and some actually oppose the change. A few, for example, insist that blekbala is 'proper' Kriol while pipul is 'light' Kriol and therefore blekbala should be used in preference to pipul in Kriol books, including the Kriol translation of the Bible.

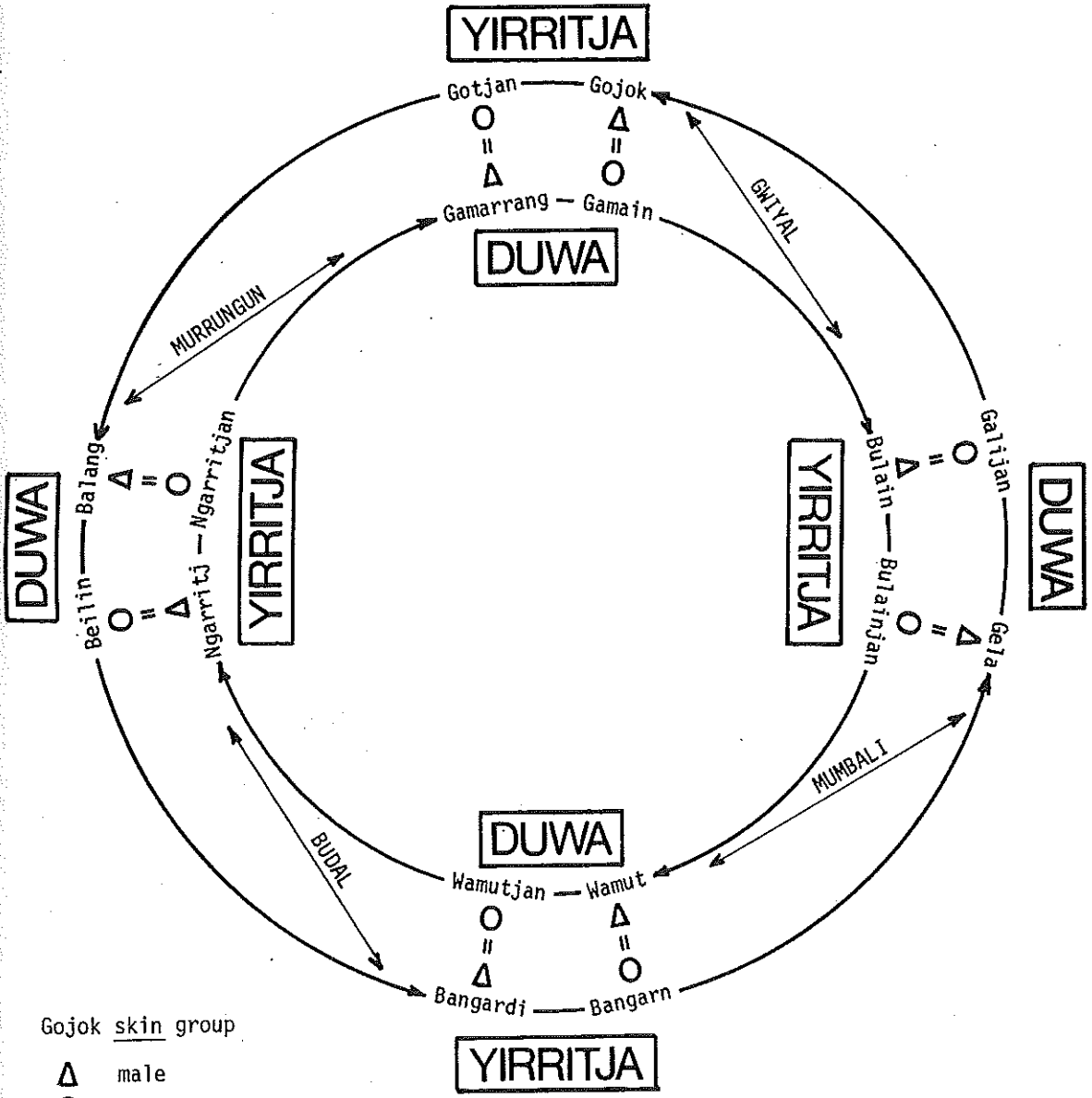
Another way in which the system appears to be changing, hinted at above, is in regard to the category of yelabala. It is well documented that yelabala have long been rejected people, generally acceptable to neither of their progenitors. In the past, many yelabala themselves rejected any identification as blekbala, but the quest for Aboriginal identity during the past decade has reversed this trend. There appears to be growing uncertainty among Kriol speakers in the use of the term yelabala. In particular, it seems that Aborigines of full descent are becoming less inclined to use the term when directly addressing Aborigines of mixed descent. As the distinction between blekbala in opposition to munanga and jainaman is being sharpened, the distinction between blekbala and yelabala is beginning to decline.

As was mentioned in chapter two, the intended direction of social mobility of yelabala in the past was typically towards Europeanization. Today it is generally towards Aboriginalization. Unlike Aborigines of full descent who have and desire to maintain a specific 'tribal' affiliation, however, many yelabala are seeking a 'pan-Aboriginal' affiliation. For tribal affiliation, knowledge of a traditional Aboriginal language is critical, even if only an 'academic' knowledge. For 'pan-Aboriginal' affiliation, a 'super-tribal' language is needed. In the central and western parts of North Australia, Kriol has the potential for fulfilling that need. Whether or not Kriol acquires the status of a 'semi-national' Aboriginal language will depend primarily upon the perceptions and attitudes of Kriol speakers themselves.

Contemporary Kinship

In this and the following section I will discuss the way in which Kriol is used to express two of the most common topics of discussion among

THE SKIN SYSTEM AT NGUKURR



Gojok skin group

- △ male
- female
- || marriage
- ↙ direction of descent traced through mother's skin
- ↕ subsection linking skin groups
- moiety

Kriol speakers in today's contemporary Aboriginal communities — people and food. If good relations are maintained with one's fellows and if food is not in short demand, then one's safety is well in hand. When talking about people, kinship relations are a central concern. Security rests in being intimately acquainted with one's extensive range of relatives.

Aboriginal society is one in which face-to-face interaction among relatives makes up a large part of everyday life. In this society, kinship is the basis of social relations, the indicator of the general range of expected behaviour (Berndt and Berndt 1968:69). It is kinship that regulates most activity among Aboriginal people, even among urban Aborigines of mixed descent (Eckermann 1973:28).

Aboriginal languages have developed elaborate terminological systems to encode and express the complexity of personal relationships of the kinship system. The kinship system is not, however, simply a system of terms. The behaviour associated with the terms is of equal importance.

Kriol, being an Aboriginal language, functions to encode this complex kinship system. Some of the terms used in Kriol have been derived from English, while others have been derived from traditional Aboriginal languages.⁷⁶ Most of the English-derived terms are fairly universally used in all dialects of Kriol, whereas the traditional-language-derived terms tend to be regionalized in their use. In some regions, such as the Roper River area where Kriol has a fairly deep time base, a set of terms has come to be used almost universally throughout the region with a general loss of conscious awareness among Kriol speakers as to their specific traditional-language etymology. In other regions, such as the Fitzroy Valley where the time base is fairly shallow, Kriol speakers tend to use terms derived from their own traditional language group.⁷⁷

Most of the Kriol kinship terms used for specific and classificatory relationships are derived in form from English, but semantically they encode the non-English Aboriginal system. In addition to being used in referring to people, kinship terms are normally also used in addressing people. In the description given below of the kinship system for an extended family in the Roper River area, ego represents a male.⁷⁸ This system is summarized in a kinship chart below.

Ego's mother is called mami and his father is called dedi, or matha and fatha respectively in light Kriol. Ego's brothers and sisters are generally called baba, although they may also be called braja and sista respectively. Upon reaching puberty, however, a taboo or avoidance relationship prevents a boy from speaking directly with his sister and he often refers to her as rabish rather than sista or baba. A female will sometimes refer to her brother with the plural pronoun olabat. In the western dialects baba is usually used only to refer to males.

Ego applies the term dedi not only to his biological father, but also to his father's brothers. This is not just a matter of calling an 'uncle' dedi, but the 'uncle' dedi treats ego the same as his own biological sons. Not only are the terms identical, but the roles are identical as well. Similarly, the term mami applies not only to biological mother, but also to mother's sisters. As was the case with the 'uncle' dedi, ego's 'aunty' mami treats him the same way as she treats her own biological sons. Both the terms and the roles are identical.

In contrast with father's brothers, mother's brothers are not dedi but angkul. Similarly, father's sisters are not mami but anti. Thus the

relationships on ego's mother's side of the family are a 'mirror image' of those on his father's side. A marriage relation that is very common across a wide stretch of the Kriol language area is 'sibling exchange' in which ego's anti marries ego's angkul. Antis would not normally be living in the same household as ego since they marry into another family.

The children of ego's anti and angkul are called barnga, which could be translated 'cousin'. It should be noted, however, that barnga only applies to ego's father's sister's children and to mother's brother's children, i.e. to 'cross-cousin'. The western dialects make a distinction between males and females in this category, referring to male cross cousins as kasinbratha and female cross cousins as kasinsista. Ego's father's brother's children as well as his mother's sister's children, or his 'parallel cousins', are called baba. Thus parallel cousins are classified in the same category as ego's brothers and sisters.

The person whom ego marries is called banji. This term is used not only for ego's wife, but also for her sisters and brothers. Ego's brothers- and sisters-in-law are also called meit. Sibling exchange marriages are also common on ego's generation level. Ego's brother-in-law banji or sister-in-law banji may marry ego's baba or sista or braja respectively. There is a special relation between in-laws of the same generation level. Ego would be required to support his banji group in time of social difficulty, and it is likely that ego's wife's sisters would live as a part of ego's household. Ego's own sister, even though she may be married to ego's wife's brother or his banji, would not live in ego's household because of the brother-sister avoidance taboo. The light Kriol forms asbin and waif are also used to refer to husband and wife respectively, especially in the western dialects where banji refers to a 'playboy' rather than a spouse.

Ego calls his wife's father lambarra and her mother gajin.⁷⁹ All of ego's father-in-law's brothers and sisters can be called lambarra, but more frequently ego's father-in-law's sisters are called anti. Ego's mother-in-law's brothers and sisters are also called gajin, although ego's mother-in-law's brothers can also be called mulari. There is a very strict avoidance taboo between a man and anyone classed as his gajin. He can not speak to them, look at them, or even pass nearby them. There is, however, a special ceremonial relationship between ego's father-in-law and his mother-in-law's brothers.

Ego calls his mother's father abija and his mother's mother gagu or greni. Abija, however, refers not only to mother's father, but also to mother's father's brothers and sisters. Similarly, gagu or greni refers to ego's mother's mother as well as mother's mother's brothers and sisters. Ego's gagu (or greni) takes a particular interest in ego's children, and if a child is orphaned, he/she is likely to be brought up by someone he/she calls gagu or greni.

On ego's father's side, ego's grandfather is called ngamuri, or sometimes amuri, and ego's grandmother is called abuji. In parallel with the terms on ego's mother's side, the term ngamuri refers to ego's father's father as well as his brothers and sisters, and abuji refers to ego's father's mother as well as her brothers and sisters. This usage is consistent with the subsection system in which brothers and sisters are classified into the same groups. Children are often given the same personal name as their ngamuri, with boys being given the name of their father's father and girls being given the name of their grandfather's sister.

Ego's own children are called san and doda. Ego also uses the terms san and doda to refer to his brother's children, and he treats them accordingly. Ego's sister's children are sometimes called san and doda, but more often they are referred to as boi and gel or, without sex distinction, as biginini.

As the system has been presented here in relation to ego, the sets of terms relate to four generation levels. The fifth generation, that is ego's grandchildren, are referred to by the same terms as his grandparents in the first generation.

It should be noted that some of the kinship terms are reciprocal. For example, ego calls his father-in-law lambarra, and his father-in-law also calls him lambarra. Other reciprocal terms include abija, abuji, baba, banji, barnga, gagu, gajin, mulari and ngamuri.

In addition to the system of kin terms, what is known in the literature on Aboriginal societies as the 'subsection' system is also in operation throughout most of the Kriol language area. Everyone within the society, whether by birth or by 'adoption', is divided into two groups or moieties. Each of these moieties is divided into two sections, which are in turn subdivided into two subsections each. All of these are labelled with Kriol terms derived from traditional languages. There are two terms for each of the eight subsections, one referring to the males within a subsection, the other to females within that subsection. The specific Kriol terms for these various divisions are not used universally throughout the Kriol language area, but most Aboriginal people know how the system works in other places and can readily substitute the right term.

Kriol speakers refer to subsection as skin, with each subsection or skin having its own specific label. Each person is born into a given skin group on the basis of the skin of his mother, and each person is obliged to marry someone of a compatible skin. People with skin compatible for marriage are considered to be streit. Streit marriages are important because skin works at a generational level, and marriages which are not streit are essentially considered to be incestuous relationships.

Without skin a person cannot function normally within Aboriginal society. A person must have skin in order for others to know how to relate to him. Without skin, relationships between persons cannot be established. This is so important that a person who is not born into the society (i.e. a non-Aboriginal person) but who is 'adopted' into the society, is 'given' a skin. One of the first things to be discovered upon meeting a stranger is to find out what his skin is and hence know how one is related to him. It is considered impolite, however, to ask a person directly what his skin is, so it is normally asked through a third person. Skin is an important part of an Aboriginal person's identity and often functions as a name for the person. Thus a person may be both addressed and referred to by his skin, as in Gojok! Yu kaman iya! 'Gojok! (skin term) Come here!' and Gojok bin dalimbat mi tharran jejeya. 'Gojok was telling me that.'

There are eight skin groups, each with a separate term for male and female members of the group.⁸⁰ If ego is Gojok, all of his classificatory brothers are Gojok and his sisters Gotjan. Ideally Gojok should marry someone whose skin is Gamain. Her brothers would be Gamarrang. Descent is traced through the female, so the children of Gojok and Gamain would be Bulain if a boy and Bulainjan if a girl. Bulainjan should ideally marry Gela, the brother of Galijan. Their sons

would be Wamut and daughters Wamutjan. Wamutjan should marry Bangardi, the brother of Bangarn. Their sons would be Ngarritj and daughters Ngarritjan. Ngarritjan should marry Balang, the brother of Beilin. Their sons would be Gamarrang and daughters Gamain. Gamain, of course, should ideally marry Gojok, and the cycle begins again, repeating itself every four generations. Ego's grandchildren will have the same skin as his grandmother.

People do not always marry according to the ideal system, and an alternative does exist. Instead of ego marrying his banji, he could marry his barnga. Ego's barnga is a closer relation of the same generational level, but is still outside the bounds of an incestuous relation. Thus it is that Gojok in the example above could have married Wamutjan instead of Gamain. Instead of his grandchildren having the same skin as his grandmother, they would have the same skin his preferred wife would have had.

As was mentioned above, everyone in Kriol-speaking areas is divided into two groups or moieties. While Kriol has a term for 'sub-section' (skin), like other Aboriginal languages, it has no generic term for moiety. Each of the moieties, however, has its own specific name. In some of the eastern dialects these two groups are Yirritja and Duwa. Each of the subsections belongs to one or the other of the moieties. Gojok, Bulain, Bangardi, Ngarritj and their female counterparts all belong to Yirritja, while Wamut, Gela, Gamarrang, Balang and their female counterparts belong to Duwa. This bisecting of society is applicable to more than just people. Among the more traditionally oriented Kriol speakers, the moiety division is also applicable to plant foods, animals and some aspects of natural phenomena. For example, the sand goanna, barramundi, jabiru, native cat, bush turkey and lightning are Yirritja, while the king brown snake, python, white eagle, crow, catfish and rock wallaby are Duwa. The most important application of the moiety division, however, is in relation to ceremonies or bisnis. Ceremonies 'belong' to a moiety. For example, the Yabadurruwa belongs to Yirritja and the Kunapipi to Duwa.⁸¹ The people who belong to the Yirritja moiety are the performers or owners or minggirringgi of the Yabadurruwa while the Duwa people are the stewards or bos or junggayi of the Yabadurruwa. The roles are reversed with the Kunapipi.

It should be noted that the moieties are exogamous and that a father and his sons belong to the same moiety. This is very important in the Roper River area, for while skin is determined according to matrilineal descent, bisnis is determined according to patrilineal descent. In this respect, an important grouping is the section or semi-moiety. Each moiety has two semi-moieties, each of which is composed of the two subsections to which the father and son belong. Thus it is that the Gojok and Bulain skin belong to the Gwiyal section, which, along with the Budal section consisting of the Bangardi and Ngarritj skin, belong to the Yirritja moiety; while the Wamut and Gela skin belong to the Mumbali section, which, along with the Murrungun section consisting of the Gamarrang and Balang skin, belong to the Duwa moiety.

Classification of Food and Animals

In traditional nomadic Aboriginal society a major portion of time and energy was spent on the acquisition of food. Today, food still maintains a central place of importance in Aboriginal society, even though the means of obtaining food has changed drastically. This importance is indicated by the fact that food is one of the most common topics of conversation in Kriol.⁸²

Food is classified in Kriol in a number of ways, along principles similar to those found in traditional languages. There are five types of foods that Kriol speakers generally consider to be essential. If any one of these five is not available (e.g. the local store is out of stock), Kriol speakers often loudly complain about the matter: Olabat bin binijimap ola daga. 'They have eaten all the food.' Nomo daga la shop. 'There is no food in the store.' Shop bin ranat bla daga. 'The store has run out of food.' or Melabat perrish bla daga. 'We are starving.' Such complaints are commonly heard if one of the five types is not available, even though the store may be well stocked with other foods. The five items are:⁸³

1. bif (mit in the western dialects): This is a generic term that refers to all edible meats, not just 'beef'. This includes wild game such as kangaroo, brolga, goanna and some fish; meat on the hoof such as bullock, buffalo, donkey (although not everyone eats all of these); and store-bought meat such as beef, ham, and chicken, tinned or otherwise. With some Kriol speakers bif also includes eggs. Bif is in contrast to daga, which refers primarily to vegetable foods, although there is a generic use in which it refers to any food. Bif is also used in general contrast with non-edible meat, such as certain birds. This distinction, however, is partially dependent on context. Some items are edible for animals but not for humans. They are bif for the animals but not for the humans. In other contexts, bif or bifpat is used to refer to the 'flesh' of humans and animals without reference to edibility.

2. damba: This refers to damper, the heavy quick bread which is normally cooked in the ashes of a fire. It is in contrast to bred ('yeast bread'). Damba satisfies a person's hunger all day, whereas bred fills the stomach for only a very short time and cannot satisfy a person's hunger. The two essential ingredients of damba are flawa ('flour') and raisin or beikinpauda ('baking powder'), although it can be made without the raisin. Therefore, if flawa is not available, damba is not available, and the people claim to be starving. The term daga (or taka in the western dialects), as mentioned above, is used primarily to refer to vegetable food in contrast to bif or mit foods. In the eastern dialects daga is also used generically to refer to any food. In contrast to this generic use, daga is sometimes used with a very specific reference to damba, possibly because damba is considered to be the real substance or main staple of Aboriginal food.⁸⁴ Damba, in essence, functions as the type species of daga.

3. ti or tilif: This refers to tea or tea leaf, tea bags being relatively unknown. Although kofi ('coffee') is also enjoyed and even preferred by many Kriol speakers today, ti is the staple hot drink. Breakfast often consists only of ti. When there is no tilif available, people are starving. There are a number of varieties of ti, including swit ti ('tea with sugar'), balgin ti or jaina ti ('tea without sugar') and milgi ti ('tea with milk').

4. shuga: This refers to sugar, almost without exception white refined sugar. It is considered essential for ti. Apart from diabetics, very few Kriol speakers drink their ti without shuga. Normally, shuga is in contrast to shugabeig, the traditionally available wild honey. When shuga is in short supply, shugabeig may be substituted, but the complaint of starvation is not thereby eliminated.

5. tabega: This refers to tobacco, either plug tobacco or rolling tobacco. Tabega is not a food in the European sense, but tends to be classed with foods by Kriol speakers, presumably because it is being

chewed. When chewing tabega is in short supply, the complaint of having run out of daga is often made. Tabega is also smoked, and when in a smokable form is referred to as smok. When tabega is in short supply, dried tilif is often used as an unsatisfactory substitute for smoking.

It was mentioned above that food is classified as bif or mit if it is edible meat products and daga or taka if it is edible vegetable food. Another major division is blekbala daga and munanga daga. Blekbala daga refers to traditional or indigineous foods, whereas munanga daga refers to the introduced or store-bought foods. The division is not, however, absolute. Damba is considered blekbala daga even though it is normally made these days out of store-bought ingredients (white flour and baking powder) instead of traditional ingredients (e.g. ground water lily seeds).

There are a number of other minor ways in which foods are classified by Kriol speakers. As mentioned earlier, some Kriol speakers, mainly those who still maintain contact with a fairly traditional lifestyle, apply moiety classifications to foods. Some Kriol speakers also classify foods according to the environment in which they grow. For example, foods such as yams that grow in the ground and require digging to harvest, are referred to as 'digging foods'; foods such as water lilies and mussels that grow in water, are referred to as 'water foods'.

The parts of vegetable foods are divided by some Kriol speakers into those which grow below the ground and those which grow above the ground. The underground or insaid parts are referred to as gurnda, literally 'buttocks'. They are sometimes referred to as guna, literally 'faeces', but this term is much more vulgar and less acceptable in public. The above-ground part of vegetable foods, which is applicable to plants in general, is referred to as gabarra or hedpat, the 'head' of the plant.

There are a number of restrictions or taboos on the consumption of certain foods. Many of these relate back to the application of the kinship subsection classifications to foods, especially to traditional edible animals. For example, the black-nose python is classified as Gojok. A man who is also Gojok may hunt the black nose python, but because the snake is the man's drimin or ancestral relation he cannot eat it.

If a person is offered food which he cannot eat because of food taboos, he can refuse the food with the explanation Ai nomo gan dagat. 'I cannot eat it.' If a person wishes to refuse food because he does not like the particular food, he can politely refuse with the explanation Ai nomo sabi diskainbala daga. 'I am not familiar with this food.' On the other hand, a person who does not want to share some food with another person can attempt to excuse his selfishness with the explanation Yu nomo sabi diskainbala daga. 'You are not familiar with this food.' A counter response would be for the person to say that he is familiar with the food: Ai sabi. 'I am familiar (with it).' in which case the person would be obliged to share it with him.

With regard to the taxonomy of animals, in traditional languages each species has its own specific term, usually with different terms for male and female of each species. Kriol, in contrast, has borrowed generic terms from English without lexicalizing species distinctions, such distinctions being made by the use of descriptive words or phrases. Although Kriol has borrowed the English generic terms, these are not always used as hyponyms but are sometimes used as subcategory labels. These changes of reference are in part determined by edibility. The

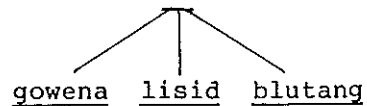
following examples illustrate the variety of ways in which English generic terms are placed in Kriol classificatory systems:

Lizards which are too small to be edible are referred to as lisid, whereas all lizards which are edible are referred to as gowena (in the western dialects, sometimes kakaji as well). The bluetongue lizard, which is edible, is in a class by itself and is referred to as blutang.

English:



Kriol:



The various species of gowena do not have specific names but are referred to by a descriptive phrase that reflects its habitat, such as wada gowena (lives near water), riba gowena (lives near running water), sen gowena (lives in sandy country) and tap gowena (lives in timbered country).

Snakes are referred to in Kriol as sneik. While some sneik are edible, edibility is not lexicalized as it is with gowena and lisid. Edible sneik, like other edible animals, are categorized as bif or mit. Sneik are also classified as being either jikiwan or poisinwan ('poisonous') or kwayitwan ('non-poisonous'). Unlike gowena, some sneik, in general the poisonous ones, are referred to by a specific name rather than a descriptive phrase, such as debeda, bandiyan and taipen. Most non-poisonous sneik, however, are referred to by a descriptive phrase, such as wip sneik, mun sneik, fail sneik, kwayit sneik and imiyu sneik.

Frogs provide a further example of unique Kriol classificatory systems. There are many edible species of frog, especially in the Kimberleys. Other species of frog are used for fishing bait or simply avoided, as is the common green frog. All of these frogs are referred to in Kriol generically as frog. Like sneik, the distinctions of edibility have not been lexicalized in Kriol. Also, like gowena, the different species do not have specific terms but are referred to by a descriptive phrase. In some cases the descriptive phrase reflects the habitat (e.g. sen frog (one that lives in sand banks around creeks and waterholes)). In most cases, however, the descriptive phrase reflects a physical characteristic of the frog. Usually the phrase reflects the colour of the frog (e.g. grinwan frog ('green' frogs, one species of which lives around houses, another in pandanus), yelawan frog or greiwan frog ('yellow' and 'grey' frogs, both of which live in pandanus)). In other cases, the phrase reflects another physical characteristic (e.g. bigwan frog (the 'largest' species)). Frogs are also referred to by descriptive phrases that reflect the utilitarian characteristics of specific frogs. This 'system' overlaps or supplements the previous one. For example, a sen frog is a beitwan frog (i.e. it is useful for fishing bait), or a particular frog may be a beit lilwan frog (a small frog useful for bait) or a bigwan frog bla itim (a large edible frog).

I have tried to show that while the forms of most lexical items in Kriol have been borrowed from English, in some cases with the denotation of the Kriol word remaining essentially the same as that of its English

etymon, in many cases the denotation has shifted. Such shifting often results in miscommunication on the part of Anglo-Australians. Two dramatic examples are provided by Sandefur and Sandefur (1981:xi) and Hudson (1983a:127) respectively. In the one case, a woman whose arm had been 'broken' was later discovered in fact to have had her arm completely severed. In the other case, a report of someone 'drowning' brought a rush of medics and police who found the 'drowned' person happily sitting in the shade of a tree on the riverbank. The Kriol lexicon is thus far more than simply an English lexicon with pronunciation adjustments and slight denotation shifts. The semantic system of which the Kriol lexical items are a part is not an Anglo-Australian system. The world view reflected is clearly that of a contemporary Aboriginal-Australian system. Semantically, Kriol is a modern Aboriginal language, not an Anglo-Australian one.

SOCIOLINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF THE USE OF KRIOL

In this section, we will look at how Aborigines' perception of and attitudes toward Kriol⁸⁵ affect the use of the language. Davidson⁸⁶ (1977) provides an unpublished study of the attitudes of adults at Barunga [formerly Bamyili] toward the use of Kriol as part of the school's bilingual program. He interviewed fifty adults, twenty-eight of whom were of the first generation to have contact with Europeans and twenty-two of the second generation. Those of the first generation were born and reared in a traditional Aboriginal setting and moved into an Aboriginal compound before or during World War Two, whereas those of the second generation were born or reared in an Aboriginal compound or a town during or since World War Two.

The division between first and second generation contact basically corresponds to a division between those who learnt a traditional Aboriginal language as their first language and those who learnt Kriol as their first language. It should be noted that the division between the generations of contact is not necessarily synonymous with the divisions of age generations. In some families children who were born after the establishment of the Barunga community speak Kriol as their mother tongue, whereas their elder siblings who were born before the establishment of the community speak a traditional language as their mother tongue and Kriol as a second language (Sandefur 1981f).

All the second generation contact respondents in Davidson's study considered Kriol to have been created by Aboriginal people many years ago, whereas ninety percent of the first generation considered it to have been created by Europeans. Eighty percent of the second generation respondents considered Kriol to be an Aboriginal phenomenon, which implies Aboriginal ownership. Twenty percent considered it to be jointly owned by Aborigines and Europeans. Only one of the first generation respondents considered Kriol to be an Aboriginal phenomenon, while seventy percent considered it to be a European phenomenon. The other first generation respondents considered it to be jointly owned by Aborigines and Europeans.

Davidson noted, however, that throughout a number of interviews Kriol was confused with English. Among the first generation respondents, Kriol and English were seen as being similar. Second generation respondents, in contrast, generally distinguished between the two. There was general agreement among all respondents that Kriol should be a national Aboriginal language.

Davidson also noted a discrepancy between the generations in their perceptions of the relationship between light Kriol, heavy Kriol and English. Fifty percent of the second generation respondents said that light Kriol and English were similar, whereas only twenty five percent said that heavy Kriol and English were the same. With first generation respondents, seventy eight percent said light Kriol and English were similar, whereas fifty percent said heavy Kriol and English were the same. Both generations to a similar extent (seventy percent for first generation and seventy five for second) regarded light and heavy Kriol as interchangeable.

Davidson also noted that throughout the interviews various responses suggested that in talking to a person or initiating conversation with a stranger, especially a non-Aboriginal person, mutual understanding was the deciding factor in the choice of a language for communication. This also applied to outcomes for the use of Kriol in front of teachers and bosses. He concluded (1977:13) that language choice appeared to be a conscious one of convenience rather than a covert one implying deep structure or psychological involvement with the situation.

Two Sociolinguistic Rules

In a survey of the Kimberleys, Sandefur and Sandefur (1980:31) noted the main sociolinguistic rule for the use of Kriol: if one can speak English then one does not use Kriol with Europeans, and preferably not even in the presence of Europeans. This rule is in operation throughout the Kriol language area. At Banka Banka on the Barkly Tableland, for example, Glasgow (1984:129) observed children using Kriol⁸⁷ between each other and a more standard form of English in responding to Europeans.

There are, however, certain situations in which Kriol is used with Europeans: Kriol speakers who do not speak English, when 'forced' to speak, will use Kriol with Europeans. Most such people are either older people who do not control English, young adults who were unable to complete their English schooling, or young children who have not yet learnt to distinguish Kriol from English. Most of these people adjust their speech as close to English as they are able when talking to Europeans, and back to Kriol when speaking to fellow Aborigines (Sandefur and Sandefur 1980, Hudson 1983a). It appears that this bilingual code-switching and English interlanguage situation is directly related to the degree of English education of individuals (Hudson 1983a:19).

It could be argued, therefore, that the main sociolinguistic rule would be more accurate for actual speech situations if it were stated in the opposite form: English, or as much English as one knows, is to be used with and in the presence of Europeans. Stated thus, the rule covers those situations in which Kriol or a mixture of Kriol and English is used. When speaking to Europeans, a Kriol speaker will shift as far up his Kriol-to-English interlanguage continuum as he is able. With some speakers, as was discussed in chapter two, this means switching to Standard Australian English or a variety of English very close to it. With others, however, their best English performance may be a mesolang 'mixed' variety of speech. In other cases it may even be an essentially basiling Kriol variety of speech.

In reporting on a survey in Queensland (Sandefur et al 1982:38), Daniels, one of the Kriol speakers on the survey team, explained what might be called the 'go slow' rule for the use of Kriol when initiating conversation with a stranger:

Well, like if I go and I see this person always talking English, you know, he's not speaking pidgin English [i.e. Kriol] even though he's an Aborigine, I must talk to him with English to sort of make him know who I am and I will know who he is, and then I find out about him and then if he uses a bit of pidgin English words, well I go back to pidgin English to sort of contact him with that pidgin English, and then we find out that he speaks pidgin English and then I can talk to him with pidgin English. That's how it works... if he uses some sort of words, like pidgin English words, and he's talking a little bit to you with pidgin English, well, you just let go at him with pidgin English and automatically you'll find he just changes that English and goes back to pidgin English. You have him and you two talk together then with pidgin English.

When asked about using Kriol with Europeans and why Gumbuli, another Kriol speaker on the survey team, had not used Kriol when speaking to a mixed crowd of Europeans and Aborigines, Daniels (1982:38) commented:

I can't talk pidgin English [i.e. Kriol] to a white. I have to talk to him with English. Yes, I have to talk to him with English... [Gumbuli's] not allowed to speak Kriol to a mixed group. He uses Kriol with Aborigines, but he has to use English with whites. When he speaks to a mixed group, he has to use English so everyone can understand, because if he used Kriol with a mixed group, then the whites couldn't understand.

It is interesting to note in Daniels' comment that the reason a person does not use Kriol with a mixed group is to avoid miscommunication on the part of the Europeans. In spite of his observations, it is not the case that the use of English in a mixed group of standard English speakers and Kriol speakers guarantees an unimpeded flow of communication. Miscommunication often takes place because of the use of English (Sandefur 1982c). Most Kriol speakers, indeed, readily recognize Kriol's role in communication, saying that Aboriginal people understand it much better than English (Glasgow 1984:132).

Changing Value Judgements

An important factor which has a bearing on language use is the issue of value judgements. Kriol has long been a despised language, despised by Europeans as well as Kriol speakers. In a survey of the Barkly Tableland, for example, Glasgow (1984:117) reports that a number of people referred to Kriol as "rubbish English" or "bastard English". This terminology was more often used by Europeans encountered on the survey than by Aborigines, with Aborigines closely connected with schools using such terminology more often than others. It appeared to Glasgow that the Aborigines taking this attitude were copying it from Europeans, possibly expecting him to be more approving of that attitude and wanting to be seen as speaking only 'proper' English. He also notes, however, that in spite of such negative attitudes, the vast majority of the Aboriginal people were very interested in the Kriol literature he read to them.

In a study of Kriol in the Fitzroy Valley area of the Kimberleys, Hudson (1983a:15) states that until recently the almost universal attitude was that Kriol is a form of English to be despised. Aborigines who speak Kriol as their primary language shared this view. As a result, as soon as they mastered English in school they quickly learnt to code-switch, using English with Europeans and Kriol among themselves. This meant that

Europeans generally only heard natural Kriol from the children who were still too young to know the difference between it and English.

In recent years, negative attitudes toward Kriol and the use of Kriol have been noticeably changing. In a report on the Roper River area, for example, Sharpe (1974a:21) comments that Aboriginal pride in Kriol as their own language has been increasing since her first visit in the mid-1960s. She notes that Aborigines are less ashamed of using Kriol to Europeans, that city Aborigines will now use Kriol when speaking to Europeans who know it, and that the attitude of Europeans to Kriol is more sympathetic. Sharpe offers no explanation as to what may have been bringing about these positive changes. Formal Kriol language planning by the Summer Institute of Linguistics [SIL] and the Barunga school was just beginning and thus would have had little influence initially on these speakers. As will be discussed in the next section as well as chapter four, changes in government policy towards Aborigines and the rise in emphasis on 'Aboriginality' in the late 1960s and early 1970s were most likely the main catalysts in beginning to bring about a change in attitudes toward Kriol. The establishment and operation of the Barunga Kriol bilingual school program and the work of SIL as well as the School of Australian Linguistics [SAL] with Kriol speakers, as mentioned in chapter two, have helped increase the momentum for positive attitude changes and the resultant rise in the social standing of Kriol.

The attitudes of Kriol speakers in the Kimberleys are also becoming more positive. In 1979 they were made aware of the fact that Kriol was not only spoken in the Kimberleys but also in distant places (i.e. in the Northern Territory) and further, that it was being formally recognized by the N.T. Department of Education as an Aboriginal language. The news that Kriol had attained high status in the Northern Territory and that not only were books being published in it but that it was also being used as one of the languages in a bilingual program in the school at Barunga, had a strong influence on Aborigines in the Kimberleys and led to greater acceptance of Kriol in that region (Hudson 1983a:18-19).⁸⁸ In the Fitzroy Valley, for example, Aborigines will now freely speak Kriol to 'accepted' Europeans (Hudson 1983a:16).

The criterion of 'acceptance' in such situations is crucial. It involves a personal knowledge of the European by the Aboriginal person. A non-Aboriginal person must abide by the 'go slow' rule of initiating a conversation with a stranger. Some Aborigines get very upset by Europeans who ignore this rule, considering the European to be 'speaking down' at them. In general, Kriol speakers know whether a non-Aboriginal person is speaking down at them or sincerely attempting to communicate in a positive way with them by using Kriol (Sandefur and Sandefur 1980).

The degree to which Kriol has risen in status in the Kimberleys during the last five years can be seen by the place afforded the language in the Kimberley Language Resource Centre⁸⁹ Pilot Study. The report of the study recognized Kriol as "a prominent language in the Kimberley" and noted that some Aboriginal people "say they speak Kriol and they are not ashamed" of it, and that some of the Aboriginal workers who helped carry out the study were "keen to have it used in school" (Hudson and McConvell 1984:61, 33 and 33 respectively). The study group went on to point out that it was "very important for Aboriginal organisations to support the idea of using Kriol, and traditional languages and interpreters in their meetings" (Hudson and McConvell 1984:67).

Kriol, however, still continues to be rejected by many Aborigines, particularly those for whom it is not a first or primary language. This

rejection of Kriol stems in part from the attribution by some Aborigines of the loss of traditional language to the influence of Kriol (e.g. Glasgow 1984:133). In the Barkly Tableland area, for example, Glasgow (1984:117) reports that there is indication that some traditional language speakers, mainly older people, resent Kriol taking over from their traditional language among the younger people.

However, as was discussed in chapter two, the loss of traditional language is not brought about by Kriol itself. The loss of traditional languages came about independently and simultaneously with the rise of Kriol, both under the impact of social changes. The problem of losing one's traditional language is only part, albeit an easily identifiable part, of the wider frustration that Aborigines have of losing control of their whole social environment. Richards (1982a:44) points out, for example, that a feeling of the loss of control over their own children was a contributing factor in the development of an independent community school at Noonkanbah, and that "the children's rejection of Walmajarri in favour of Kriol also contributed to the parents' feeling that they had lost the control that they needed".

Some Aboriginal people do not reject Kriol as such, but are opposed to having Kriol put into print. The Kimberley Language Resource Centre Pilot Study, for example, found that "everyone says the old languages should be written... Talking about Kriol they said two different things. Some thought it was a good idea to write it because it's a language all Aborigines understand. But others said it should be used for talking and not for reading and writing" (Hudson and McConvell 1984:33-34). The strongest vocal opposition to written Kriol tends to come from Aboriginal people of mixed descent who are not Kriol speakers. The Moree Champion, for example, carried a report of one such person wanting the published Kriol Christian scriptures burnt while agreeing that tape recordings of the scriptures "would be a better thing".⁹⁰

In spite of the rejection⁹¹ of Kriol for whatever reasons by some Aborigines, knowledge of Kriol is a definite sign of Aboriginal identity in the Aboriginal communities in the Kriol language area. Kriol-speaking Aborigines expect Aborigines to speak Kriol with each other and English with Europeans if they can. Hudson (1983a:16), for example, reports being told by one young woman, "It's not okay for blacks to speak English to each other." Hudson also notes that women from the south of Western Australia where Kriol is not spoken who have married men from Fitzroy Crossing, have learnt Kriol since moving north. The husband of one of them commented: "When my wife first came she used to make me really ashamed. She could only talk like a 'whitefella'. Now she's learning to talk like a 'blackfella'."

KRIOL AND ABORIGINAL IDENTITY

In the previous section I have tried to show that the attitudes of Kriol speakers toward their language have been increasingly positive during the last decade. One of the important factors involved in the change from the despising of Kriol to the accepting of Kriol has been, as Berndt (1970b:5) refers to it, the "upsurge of emphasis on Aboriginality" of the 1970s.

Before the late 1960s there was very little acceptance of Aboriginal identity. Novelist Xavier Herbert had captured the attitude of many Aborigines up to that time in Norman, the tragic character in his 1937 novel Capricornia. Norman was an Aboriginal of mixed descent who tried to pass for a Malayan prince.

There are a number of factors as to why Aboriginal identity was spurned (Wentworth 1973:7-9): There were masses of legal discriminations against Aborigines, who were regarded as almost subhuman and incapable of sustaining normal human rights. There were also a number of 'quasi-legal' penalties, such as law enforcement being generally more rigorous against Aborigines than against Europeans. In addition, there were social penalties, manifest in the commonly held view that Aborigines belonged to an inferior and ineducable race which was condemned to live in squalor. All of these were in a sense external factors which militated against a willingness to accept an Aboriginal identity. There were also internal psychological factors. Aboriginal systems of morals and values had been treated with contempt and hostility by the newcomers who so quickly destroyed their existing structures.

Beginning in the late 1960s there was a massive change towards Aboriginal acceptance of identity, with Aborigines becoming proud of their origin and anxious to assert it. This was brought about largely by the reversal of the factors which had previously militated against the acceptance of such identity (Wentworth 1973:10-11): Changes in government policy eliminated legal discrimination, and introduced what, in the view of many non-Aboriginal people, seemed discriminatory legislation in favour of Aborigines. Socially, the general Australian attitude towards Aborigines as a whole has undergone considerable amelioration, with Aborigines being much more accepted as members of the community. More importantly, and arising to a large degree out of the change in the attitudes and understanding of non-Aboriginal Australians for Aboriginal culture, is the pride which Aborigines recovered in their own heritage. They increased in standing in their own eyes and there was no longer any need to attach a sense of shame to identification with one's Aboriginal heritage. All of these changes are partly a result of the government's change from a policy of assimilation, which was directed towards the stamping out of all vestiges of Aboriginal culture, to a policy which placed emphasis on Aboriginal identity. This change in government policy will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

The change in government policy in the late 1960s made a provision for people to choose to stress their Aboriginality if they so desired, although it did not — and indeed, could not — spell out just what Aboriginality meant. As von Sturmer (1973:16) expresses it,

those not choosing to follow the path to assimilation may now, it seems, decide to rediscover their Aboriginal identity. In what this identity might consist it is hard to say. Either it is the concept people have of themselves or it is a symbol of something that never was and must now be supposed to be.

The concept of Aboriginality, as von Sturmer (1973:16) sees it, is "a fiction which takes on meaning only in terms of white ethnocentrism", resting on the belief that there are obvious cultural generalities which operate over the whole of Aboriginal Australia. In a sense he is right, for, as was pointed out earlier, originally Aborigines never saw themselves as being Aborigines because they were not conscious of the existence of any non-Aboriginal people. In a sense, then, the creation of an 'Aboriginal identity' is a very un-Aboriginal process for which there is no historical substructure (Wentworth 1973:9).

Aborigines, however, are not simply victims who have an identity thrust upon them by some external alien forces. Rather, they are people who develop new forms of self-identity which "reflect continuity with

tradition and purposeful adaptation in new socio-environmental conditions" (Kolig n.d.:4). Aborigines are able to control their identity through the familiar usage of traditional concepts which they adapt because of their intellectual continuity with their past despite their ecological discontinuity (i.e. drastic socio-environmental changes, geographical dislocation, and rearrangement of material and economic lifestyle) (Kolig n.d.:21).

The debate concerning the substance of Aboriginal identity will, no doubt, continue for some time. One point, however, seems certain: language has always been, and continues to be, an important aspect of Aboriginal identity. Traditional identity in terms of 'tribal' affiliation, for example, was based to a large degree on a combination of language and locality (Berndt 1961:17). In contemporary Aboriginal society, a language-group label continues to be used to identify a person long after the language is no longer spoken (Brandl and Walsh 1982:78). Indeed, most Kriol speakers 'tribally' identify with the traditional language or languages to which their parents or grandparents laid claim. For example, as will be discussed in the next chapter, although a feeling of 'Ngukurrness' has developed among the Kriol-speaking residents of Ngukurr, they all retain their 'tribal' affiliation, with the name of their 'tribe' being homophonous with their traditional language in spite of the fact that many of them have no speaking knowledge of it. Language is thus a critical dimension of ethnic identity (Taylor et al 1973), although language alone does not determine identity.

Boundary Marking

Language in Aboriginal Australia, as elsewhere, has two simultaneous but contrasting functions (Lieberson 1970, Brandl and Walsh 1982:73): (a) it functions as a medium of communication, linking individuals and groups to each other, and (b) it functions as a boundary marker, separating individuals and groups from each other.

Of the two functions, it would appear that the latter one is of deeper significance. Aborigines are typically reluctant to relinquish their linguistic boundary markers. In northeast Arnhem Land, for example, some of the differences between the many varieties of the Yolngu language family appear so minimal that they seem trivial and almost artificial to linguists, and yet they are "fiercely defended" by their speakers (Brandl and Walsh 1982:75).

It was noted in chapter two as well as in an earlier section of this chapter, that Aborigines with few exceptions speak English to non-Aborigines in Aboriginal communities. There are two reasons as to why this happens (Brandl and Walsh 1982:74): Firstly, in circumstances where one group feels and acts politically or culturally superior, the other group sets about learning the alien language essentially out of a need for survival. Secondly, Anglo-Australians rarely see the need to speak some other group's language. In the Aboriginal response to this situation, their felt need of maintaining boundary marking towards the politically dominant Europeans is illustrated by the emergence of Aboriginal creoles and dialects of Aboriginal English rather than an acquisition of only standard English (Brandl and Walsh 1982:74).

Deliberate exploitation of boundary marking is sometimes undertaken by Kriol speakers as a display of superiority. One such case, for example, took place at Barunga where an Aboriginal teacher was talking with the

school principal and another European, the latter of whom could speak Kriol.⁹² The conversation was being carried on in English according to normal protocol when the Aboriginal teacher unexpectedly switched into Kriol. The conversation was carried on for a few minutes in Kriol between the teacher and the second European, with the principal being unable to participate. Just as suddenly as the first switch, the teacher switched back into English with a chuckle and pointedly commented to the principal, "You couldn't understand a word we said!"

Boundary marking in Kriol, however, usually occurs as a result of certain expectations and is not often seen as an exploitable resource. The basic expectation is that Europeans do not speak Kriol. The following three examples⁹³ illustrate the confusion which can occur when the expected norm is unexpectedly violated. At a take-away food shop in Halls Creek, an amusing incident prompted a European, who was behind the Aboriginal man involved in the incident, to speak to him in Kriol. The man began replying back in Kriol as he turned around to see who had spoken to him. When he saw it was a European, he was so surprised that he stopped speaking in mid-sentence, and with his mouth agape, said not another word until he had received his order and gone outside. On another occasion, the same European went into a third year classroom at Barunga School to speak with the teacher. The European was fairly familiar with the children, but the teacher later reported that after he had left the classroom, an argument had broken out between two of the boys. One boy had declared that the European was a blekbala because of his tongue (i.e. he spoke Kriol), but the other made the counter claim that he was a munanga because of his skin (i.e. white colour), and both felt obliged to defend their positions! Several years later, at the same school, another European who had been speaking Kriol to several children was asked by one of them, "What are you, a munanga or a blekbala?"

Boundary marking in Kriol, as in Aboriginal English, is not restricted to marking off non-Aborigines from Aborigines, but is also used in much the same way as in the Yolngu language family mentioned above. With Aboriginal English a variety of dialects have emerged partly in response to the need Aboriginal groups feel to mark themselves off from other Aboriginal groups with whom they have contact (Brandl and Walsh 1982:75). These dialectal differences can be defended by their speakers in very deliberate ways (Sansom 1980:38).

As was briefly discussed in the previous chapter, the same 'defensive' attitude is often displayed by Kriol speakers of the different dialects. The linguistic features pointed out by Kriol speakers are often seemingly minor ones, such as alternate pronunciation or the use of slightly different forms. Kriol speakers also seem to generally consider differences between their dialect and other dialects to be greater the closer the other dialect geographically is to their own. This probably stems from greater familiarity with the contiguous dialects than the distant ones and a consequently sharper perception of differences.

The boundary marking function of Kriol, as will be discussed in chapter five, is the cause of great consternation for people involved in the development of a 'standardized literary' dialect of Kriol.⁹⁴ The emotional attachment of most Kriol literacy workers and teachers to their own dialects is fierce. Seemingly contradictory, however, is the tendency of many Kriol speakers when visiting another Kriol-speaking community to shift their own speech in the direction of that of their host community.

Boundary marking arises in part from a person's emotional attachment to his own speech variety. Emotional attachment to Kriol as a whole has increased significantly during the 1970s and is now often expressed spontaneously. A second-generation mother tongue speaker from Ngukurr, for example, expressed it while visiting her seven year old daughter in the hospital in Darwin. Her daughter had been away from home for a month having heart surgery in Adelaide. Within a few minutes of seeing her for the first time since she had left home, the mother said with an expression of relief, "She can still speak Kriol!".⁹⁵

Identifying with Kriol

It is very common for Kriol speakers to verbally disclaim Kriol around Europeans, particularly around those whom they do not know, or who are known to dislike Kriol. At the same time, the number of Kriol speakers who publicly identify with Kriol as their language is increasing.⁹⁶ Sharpe (1983:4), for example, reports that Kriol speakers living at Bagot community in Darwin who did not know her responded to her use of Kriol with them with the reply, "Where did you learn our language?"

The increasingly positive attitudes toward and identification with Kriol at Bagot (as well as many other Aboriginal communities) are not directly due to any particular planned program of action, for as far as I am aware no effort has been made by anyone to promote Kriol or Kriol materials in the community. Indirectly, however, changes in communities such as Bagot could be attributed to the spread of information of the Barunga school Kriol bilingual program and to the work of SIL and SAL, for there is much travel by Kriol speakers between the communities in which Kriol work is being carried out and communities such as Bagot.

With some communities, however, it is difficult to specifically attribute changes in attitudes, even indirectly, to the effects of the planned programs of the Barunga school, SIL or SAL. This is because many Aboriginal communities, such as those in the Barkly Tableland area, have had very little if any contact with the communities, or Kriol speakers from the communities, in which Kriol work is being undertaken. Changes in such communities can be attributed mainly to the effects of changes in government policy towards Aborigines, the rise of Aboriginal identity, and a growing 'linguistic enlightenment' on the part of Europeans in general, especially teachers.⁹⁷ All three of these factors are working together to reduce the social pressure placed upon Aborigines to conform to the standard English expectations of many Europeans. The effect of changes in government policy will be discussed in detail in chapter four and the linguistic enlightenment of Europeans in chapter five.

When the pressure to conform to the standard English expectations of most non-Aboriginal interlocutors is removed, the growing response of Aborigines is spontaneously towards positive identification with Kriol. Glasgow (1984:117), for example, reports an interesting incident which happened to him while on the first survey in the Barkly Tableland area that takes Kriol into account. While at Brunette Downs he read from a Kriol book to a group of people. As far as can be ascertained, this was the first Kriol book that these people had ever seen or heard of. A few days later when in Tennant Creek, a man who had seen Glasgow at Brunette Downs but whom Glasgow had not met, greeted him in the street with, "You saw me at Brunette, didn't you? You speak our language, don't you? You looked at book there and spoke our language real good!"

The identification of Kriol by Aborigines as their language is a relatively new phenomenon. There are some indications that at Ngukurr, where Kriol is spoken as a mother tongue by four generations, its identity as a language in its own right has been slowly forming for several decades. As will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, however, the lack of a distinctive name in part prevented it from acquiring such status. Until the mid-1970s, "pidgin English" was all it was known as, with Aborigines focusing on the 'English' aspect and Europeans on the 'pidgin' aspect. In many respects, the language situation was analogous to the social situation.

As the next chapter will attempt to show, when government policy in the mid-1960s sifted towards the acceptance of the expression of Aboriginal identity, the door was opened for Kriol to come of age. However, until the language was given the name 'Kriol' a decade later, none of its speakers 'knew' what their language was.

At first it might seem strange that an alien has given the language its name.⁹⁸ However, this is the same process by which languages were given names in the past. 'Tribal' labels are often not self-given labels (Kolig n.d.:14). The major difference between the giving of a name or label in the contemporary setting as opposed to the traditional one, is that the name 'Kriol' was given by non-Aborigines and originally mostly used in print.

Just as there is still diversity in interpreting the concept of Aboriginality, so there is diversity in interpreting the concept of Kriol as an Aboriginal language with which its speakers can identify and through which they can express their identity. It would be inaccurate to claim that all aspects of linguistic identity are manifest exclusively in Kriol.

Many Kriol speakers are struggling with the dilemma of sorting out a double identity, recognizing that they speak Kriol as their first language but feeling that a traditional language is their real language. Some of them may have satisfactorily settled the question of their linguistic identities. For others, Kriol is still too young to serve as a symbol of identity. Nevertheless, one may safely conclude that Kriol is well and truly out of the womb and has proved to be Aboriginal, even if its social maturation is still in progress. It is obvious that Kriol is coming of age, but it is probably too soon to claim that it has come of age.