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Series A Volume 5

AUSTRALIAN PHONOLOGIES: COLLECTED PAPERS

Editor: Bruce Waters

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PREFACE

These Work Papers are being produced in two series by the Summer Institute of Linguistics, Australian Aborigines Branch, Inc. in order to make results of SIL research in Australia more widely available. Series A includes technical papers on linguistic or anthropological analysis and description, or on literacy research. Series B contains material suitable for a broader audience, including the lay audience for which it is often designed, such as language learning lessons and dictionaries.

Both series include both reports on current research and on past research projects. Some papers by other than SIL members are included, although most are by SIL field workers. The majority of material concerns linguistic matters, although related fields such as anthropology and education are also included.

Because of the preliminary nature of most of the material to appear in the Work Papers, these volumes are being circulated on a limited basis. It is hoped that their contents will prove of interest to those concerned with linguistics in Australia, and that comment on their contents will be forthcoming from the readers. Papers should not be reproduced without the authors' consent, nor cited without due reference to their preliminary status.

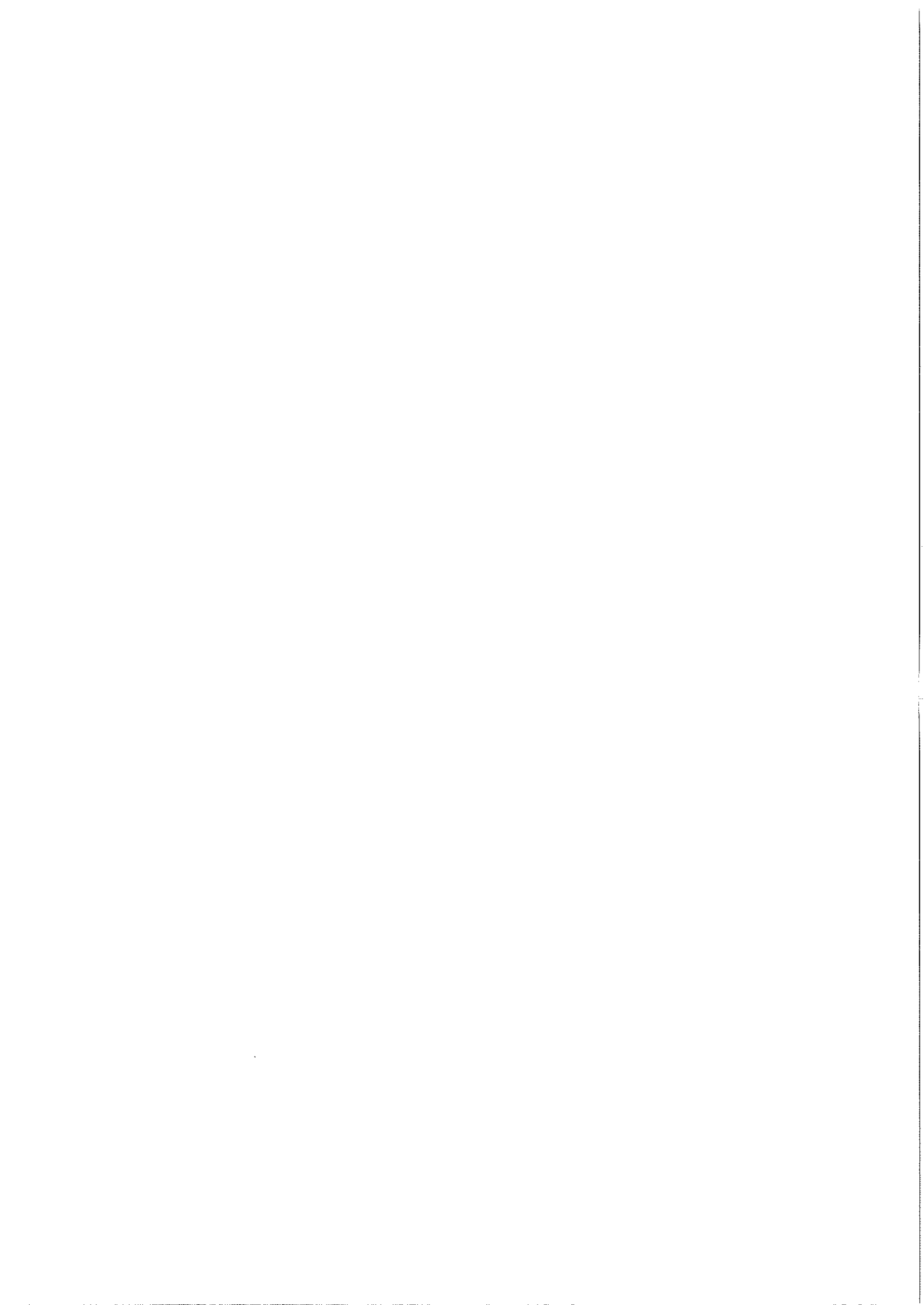
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S. K. Hargrave
Series Editor



INTRODUCTION TO SERIES A VOLUME 5

The papers in this volume deal with the phonologies of Nunggubuyu, Burarra, Kala Lagaw Ya, Murinbata, and some aspects of the higher level phonology of Walmatjari. Two papers dealing with orthographic decisions are also included.

Five of the papers in this volume are by SIL authors: Glasgow, Kennedy, Street and Hudson, with the Street paper co-authored by Gregory Panpawa Mollinjin. Their papers are herein being made available in preliminary form, and reader's comments would be appreciated by the authors. These papers normally will be further revised and published more widely elsewhere. The other three papers are by non-SIL authors: M. Hore (Church Missionary Society), J. Stokes (Church Missionary Society), and G. McKay (Northern Territory Education Department). With the exception of Graham McKay, the non-SIL authors have had some interaction with SIL personnel in the writing of their papers - usually of a consulting and/or editing nature. For this reason we are pleased to include their papers in this volume.

Michael Hore's paper primarily deals with rules for stress placement and the interaction of stress and length in Nunggubuyu. He is able to show that stress placement is predictable, given the distribution of long syllables. Interestingly, Michael's analysis hangs partly on the analytical decision that Nunggubuyu has a pre-nasalised series of stops - and he shows how this is motivated by the stress analysis. There is a further point of interest to those concerned with the notion of 'simplicity' as a grammar evaluation criterion; Michael shows that the present synchronic facts motivate two rules at quite different points in the cycle; the two rules are very similar, yet neither can be eliminated.

Kathy Glasgow presents the phonemes and morphophonemics of Burarra. Kathy has given considerable attention over the years to the possibility of a geminate versus non-geminate contrast in the stop series, as well as to other issues such as the interpretation of retroflexed sounds. This paper is the fruit of that research. Kathy's analysis places the Burarra orthography within the main stream of Australian phonologies; she rejects the 'geminate hypothesis' (mainly on the basis of mother-tongue speaker's reactions) and expounds a retroflexed order of sounds. In addition, she has divided what previously was analysed as a flapped apico-alveolar stop into a flapped apico-alveolar rhotic, and an apico-alveolar voiced stop. Interestingly, with these changes the segmental inventory is now the same as that in neighbouring languages.

Kathy's second paper deals with the proposed orthography for Burarra and the factors which influenced the decisions made. It is refreshing to see that Aboriginal people were consulted and felt free to take initiative in expressing their feelings concerning their own orthography. It is SIL policy to encourage and co-operate with the initiatives of Aboriginal people.

Rod Kennedy presents an account of Kala Lagaw Ya phonology (Mabuiag dialect, Torres Strait). Kala Lagaw Ya is a language of Australian descent, but heavily influenced by its proximity to the languages of Papua New Guinea.

Judy Stokes' paper on Anindilyakwa phonology is the fruit of many years of wrestling with what must be one of the most difficult of Australian phonologies. Judy gives a good, well documented account of the segmental phonology of the language. She alludes to the difficulties of finding a simple and transparent analysis of the high vowels. This is an area of interest, for it would appear that Anindilyakwa shares some features of the phonologies of Central Australian languages - which have labialised peripheral stops and a tendency to loss of contrast in the high vowels. Velma Leeding has addressed herself to the problem of the high vowels and labialised stops in Anindilyakwa, and is currently preparing a manuscript to be published elsewhere, dealing with these and other problems. Certainly, from a purely linguistic standpoint, Anindilyakwa is a most interesting language, and Judy's high quality work is a welcome addition to the literature on it.

The phonology paper by Chester Street and Gregory Panpawa Mollinjin is a re-written version of a paper on Murinbata which Chester wrote shortly after beginning study of the language. The morphophonemic changes dealt with would be of interest to anyone concerned with the idea of 'consonantal strength' in Natural generative phonology theory. Also included is a short dictionary of approximately 650 words.

Joyce Hudson's paper is a short account of some features of higher level phonology in Walmatjari. It deals with variations of intonational contours, and the grammatico-semantic parameters which correlate with such variations. The paper is partly based on text data which is included in some unpublished manuscripts on paragraph structure which Joyce wrote several years ago. The references to these texts have been left in the present paper, in the eventuality that the paragraph analysis will be published at a later date.

Finally, Graham McKay's paper gives the results of some testing of the acceptability of the digraph 'ny' as used in many Australian orthographies.

Bruce Waters
Volume Editor

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THE USE OF THE SYMBOL ny IN AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL ORTHOGRAPHIES

G. R. McKay

1. SURVEY

In assessing the viability of ny as a symbol for the laminal nasal in Ndjébbana (Kunibidji) and perhaps other Aboriginal languages of western Arnhem Land, there was a need to check the validity of the view that ny can cause problems in transfer to English. These problems are predicted to arise specifically in syllable and word final position, because in analogous positions in English ny is taken to be a new syllable as in many or anyhow, or even deny.

A total of 32 people involved with Aboriginal literacy in a variety of languages were sent copies of a questionnaire on this topic (Appendix A) and 25 replies were received, dealing with 17 different languages (Appendix B). Two of these proved to have no data relevant to the problem either because the symbol ny was not used (Murrinh-Patha), or because no syllable final occurrences of the symbol were found in the language (Tiwi). In general, syllable initial occurrences of ny were reported to cause no problems.

Table 1 summarises the incidence of the various types of problems reported in the 23 relevant replies.

TABLE 1

PROBLEMS IN THE USE OF THE SYMBOL ny

CATEGORIES OF USERS

Problem Type		Aboriginal language speakers		English speakers		Unspecified	TOTAL
		1	2	3	4		
i)	No	13	10	10	4	3	40
	Yes	-	1	1	9	-	11
ii)	Yes	3	6	-	-	3	12
iii)	Yes	-	3	6	1	-	10
TOTAL PROBLEMS		3	10	7	10	3	33

The problem types reported in the table are as follows:

- i) Problems specifically and explicitly related to ny or not explicitly qualified as (ii) or (iii) below.
- ii) Problems which the respondent's comments related to the general problem of teaching any digraph (vis-a-vis single letters). That is, the problems were seen as shared with other digraphs (e.g. ng, rn etc.) and were seen as being overcome easily by more adequate teaching and more practice.
- iii) Problems which the respondent's comments related to the general problem of orthographic and phonological differences between languages (comparable, for instance, to the values of the vowel symbols in Aboriginal orthographies compared with those same symbols in English). That is, the problems were seen as shared with many other graphemes (not just digraphs and not just laminals) and were seen as due to incomplete mastery of the phonological system of the language (particularly articulatory aspects) or a general incomplete appreciation of the different specific phoneme-grapheme correspondences for each language.

The four categories of users are as follows:

1. Native speakers of an Aboriginal language who became literate in the vernacular first.
2. Native speakers of an Aboriginal language who became literate in English first.
3. Native speakers of English who have a serious interest in learning the Aboriginal language.
4. Native speakers of English who have little interest in the Aboriginal language itself and who make minimal use of the language and the orthography, restricted to things such as personal and place names.

2. DISCUSSION

The first thing which becomes apparent is that of the 33 cases of problems reported, only 11 (or 33.3%) were seen as specific to the symbol ny. The remainder were seen as more general problems related to the use of digraphs or to differences in phonology between languages. While, of course, the problems specific to ny are just particular cases of the other two types of problems, the more general types are kept separate because it is felt by the respondents that

the problems observed would, or did, apply equally to other symbols and to other alternative digraphs.

Most cases (10/11 or 91%) of problems related specifically to *ny* occurred with English speakers, and of these the vast majority (9/10 or 90%) were in category 4 — English speakers with very little interest in the Aboriginal language and minimal cause to use it. A number of respondents to the questionnaire expressed the view that, whether in jest or in earnest, people in this category tend to have problems whatever symbol is used for any un-English feature.

We have in Table 1 two related indications of the relative frequency of problems specifically attributable to *ny*. The first is the number of denials that such problems exist in particular cases, the second is the number of replies stating that such problems have been found. For most categories of users the former (No) greatly outnumber the latter (Yes). Only for the fourth category of users was this trend found to be reversed. That is, far fewer respondents found no *ny* problems with these users than found specific significant problems. To look at it another way, the fourth category of users accounts for only 10% (4/40) of the total number of cases where no significant problems were reported. This same category of users, however, accounts for 81% (9/11) of the total number of cases where specific problems were reported. According to both indicators, then, the fourth category of users fared a lot worse than other users in handling the specific symbol *ny*.

Not one of those responding to the questionnaire gave the answer yes to the question whether problems with *ny* had ever been serious enough to make them consider any change. This indicates that problems for the major users of the orthographies (categories 1 to 3) are not seen as very significant and that the fourth category of users is considered relatively unimportant by those involved in helping to establish Aboriginal vernacular literacy.

For speakers of Aboriginal languages, the predominant problems are the more general ones rather than those specifically related to *ny*. These specific problems, in fact, accounted for only 7% (1/13) of the problems encountered by all Aboriginal users of orthographies. Most (10/13 or 77%) of the problems met by Aboriginal users arose for those who became literate in English first and transferred their literacy skills to their own language later. The area of greatest difficulty for Aboriginal orthography users was in the use of digraphs as opposed to single symbols (type ii problem).

Of the difficulties encountered by Aboriginal users, 69% (9/13) were of this type. This was the only area of difficulty reported for Aborigines who became literate in their own language first.

English speakers, however, show a different pattern of problems. For them there were no general problems with the use of digraphs reported. The only problems were those specific to ny (59% or 10/17) and a general problem of adjusting to the phonological system of another language and the new language-specific values of various graphemes (41% or 7/17). We might suggest that these figures indicate that English speakers have firmly established literacy skills in their own language, thus finding it difficult, at least initially, to cope with new applications of the familiar skills. This view is borne out by the fact that Aboriginal language speakers who became literate in English first are the only Aboriginal users reported to have problems of types (i) and (ii). On the other hand, we might predict in the light of this that Aborigines who become literate in their own language first may well have problems of these types in transferring these literacy skills to English.¹ Note that it is not only those English speakers with low motivation who have problems (category 4) but that 41% (7/17) of the problems reported for English speakers were among those who had a serious interest in the Aboriginal language.

The aim of the questionnaire was to assess the viability of ny as a symbol for the laminal nasal and in the course of their replies some respondents commented briefly on alternatives. W. Douglas, for instance, noted that for Pitjantjatjara 'Dr Laubach recommended that Ernabella change from the symbolisation ... tj, nj, lj .. to tj, ny, ly because (he suggested) it would be easier for the children when they came to learn English. This has not proved a very good argument ...' though he also notes that consistent use of the new symbols has meant that Aboriginal readers have no problem with these new symbols in their own language. This all tallies with our finding above that for Aboriginal writers and readers the problem is more likely to be a general one with digraphs than one specific to a particular digraph. Douglas expressed a preference

¹ Here we must remember that the far more crucial and far more difficult basic underlying skills are acquired only once and are transferred quite readily from language to language. These include the function of writing and of an orthography, the alphabetic principle, the relationship between spoken and written language etc. See for instance Venezky 1970:48-9 and Berry 1977:7. Note, on the other hand, the finding of Lukatela and Turvey (1980: 241-7) that experienced bi-alphabetic readers of Serbo-Croatian showed asymmetry in processing the two familiar alphabets determined by which of the two was learned first.

for nj in Pitjantjatjara, as did M. Christie for Gupapuyngu, based on consistency with the symbols tj and dj for stops. Note, however, D. Zorc's comment, based on experience in a different area: 'I have a strong prejudice (based on experience with Indonesian languages) against the use of "nj"; Indonesia has now adopted the Malay system "ny"'. He goes on to comment that '... "ny" is one of the few symbols used in most orthographies throughout Australia. One must therefore think of transfer to other orthographies, and possibly to a pan-Aboriginal orthographic system in the future'. The symbol nj is currently in use in Kunwinjku and several related orthographies in western Arnhem Land and its use there should be monitored to assess its viability as a more widespread alternative.

H. Hewett notes that in Maung the symbol yn was tried as an alternative to overcome the problems faced by English speakers using the orthography but she notes that '... it was not well accepted'. C. Street reported no problems with using another alternative, nh, in Murrinh-patha.

Finally several respondents noted that another alternative, the special symbol η , was not really viable because it was not available on regular typewriters.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in spite of the suspect reliability of our results in purely statistical terms, we can say that ny appears to be a satisfactory symbol and that the only group of users for whom it causes any significant specific problem are those whose use of the orthography is peripheral, whose interest is at a low level, and who are likely to find a problem with any symbol for an un-English feature.

For other users the problems were of a more general nature and would apply to any digraph and any area of phonological disparity between languages.

In the light of this it seems that the most important factors to be considered are:

- (a) the widespread use of ny in established orthographies; and
- (b) whether the phonological system of a given language renders any given alternative intolerably ambiguous. For instance if we proposed the use of ny would there be widespread ambiguity between ny and n + y? Similarly if yn is proposed would there be widespread confusion between y + n (where y symbolises the second element of a diphthong) and yn? Some ambiguity may

well be tolerable in either case provided it is restricted to a well defined morphological environment and is not too common.

The reported incidence of general problems with digraphs for Aboriginal speakers suggests that the number of digraphs should be minimised. The logical way to do this for the laminals would be to use a simple j for the stop. This would then militate against the use of nj for the nasal, but would favour some of the other alternatives, including ny.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank all those listed in Appendix B for their replies to my questionnaire, thus providing the data on which this study was based. In addition my thanks go to Wendy Baarda and Bruce Sommer for comments on a preliminary version of the paper.

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire: THE SYMBOL ny IN ABORIGINAL ORTHOGRAPHIES

In connection with the development of an orthography for Gunibidji (Arnhem Land) and other related languages I would like to gather some information about experience and observations of those involved with other Aboriginal languages whose orthographies use the symbol ny for a laminal nasal.

It is sometimes suggested that the symbol ny could present problems for Aboriginal people in transfer from vernacular to English literacy and to English speakers (and Aborigines literate in English) in reading Aboriginal language words. The problem seems most likely to arise in word final position, or more generally after a vowel, where the ny could be pronounced as a separate syllable as in English words such as

many

anyhow

Compare Rembarrnga /maŋ/ 'he went' which, using this symbol, would be spelt many.

I would like to ascertain to what extent these expected patterns of interference actually occur and would be grateful for any comments you may have based upon your experience with a language/ languages which use ny to symbolise a laminal nasal. If you have observed problems arising please indicate roughly how frequent, persistent or significant these have proved to be.

Languages discussed:

Locations of literacy programmes:

Adult or Child literacy programmes:

(If some of each please differentiate where necessary in comments below)

Your name:

Address:

Four different groups of orthography users may be relevant here for separate comment on problems with the symbol ny:

1. ABORIGINAL language speakers who became literate in the VERNACULAR FIRST.
2. ABORIGINAL language speakers who became literate in ENGLISH FIRST.
3. NON-ABORIGINAL (English) speakers who have a SERIOUS INTEREST in learning the Aboriginal language.

4. NON-ABORIGINAL (English) speakers whose only use of the Aboriginal orthography is for things such as personal and place names and who have LITTLE INTEREST in the language itself.

Have the problems you have mentioned previously (if any) ever been significant enough to make you consider orthography change to avoid the use of ny? If so can you suggest alternatives to ny (whether or not you have actually seen these alternatives put to use)?

If you have had experience of the use of any of these alternatives have you any comments on how they have fared with the four categories of users?

Have you any other comments of relevance to the symbolisation of laminals (nasals or stops)?

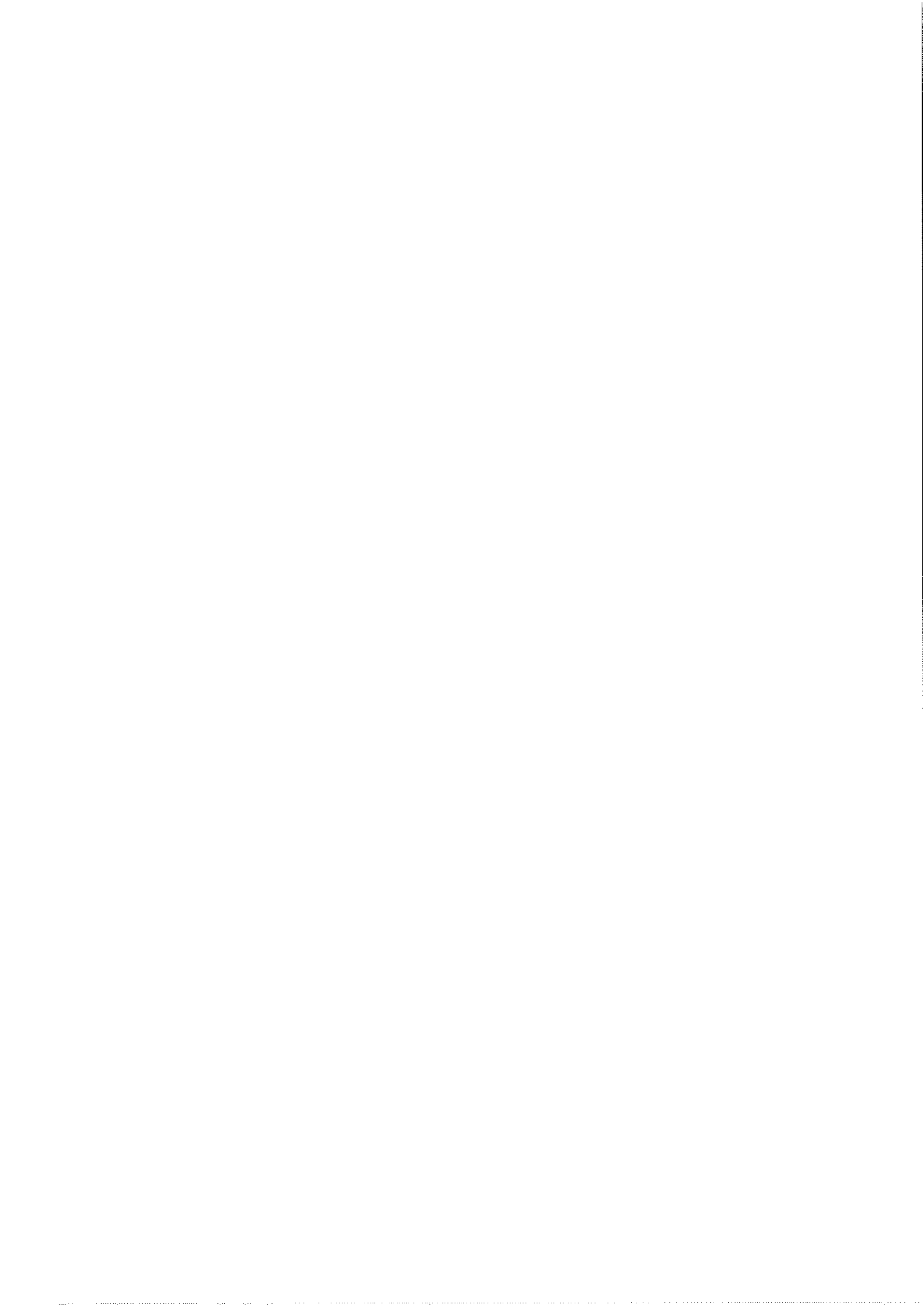
Are there any other linguists/teachers/missionaries I should write to on this?

(Note: Space for replies has been removed.)

APPENDIX B

Replies to the questionnaire were received from those listed below. Also given are the Aboriginal languages they listed as forming the basis of their orthography experience.

W. Baarda	Warlpiri
G. Breen	Aranda, Yolngu
P. Buschenhofen	Warlpiri
G. Bucknall	Nyangumarta
R. Capp	Pitjantjatjara
M. Christie	Gupapuyngu
N. Chadwick	Various
W. Douglas	Pitjantjatjara, Nyungar
F. Field	Gumatj and related languages
M. Fletcher	Gumatj and related languages
A. Glass	Ngaanyatjarra
M. Godfrey	Tiwi
B. Graham	Gumatj
A. Hall	Kuuk Thaayorre
H. and R. Hershberger	Gugu-Yalanji
H. Hewett	Maung
M. Laughren	Warlpiri
V. Leeding	Anindilyakwa
E. Richards/J. Hudson	Walmatjari
J. Ross	Gumatj
J. Sandefur	Kriol
J. Stokes	Anindilyakwa
C. Street	Murrinh-patha
J. Wafer	Warlpiri, Aranda, Pintupi, Pitjantjatjara
D. Zorc	Yolngu



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