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Series B Volume 3

AN AUSTRALIAN CREOLE IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY: A DESCRIPTION OF NGUKURR-BAMYILI DIALECTS (PART 1)

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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.

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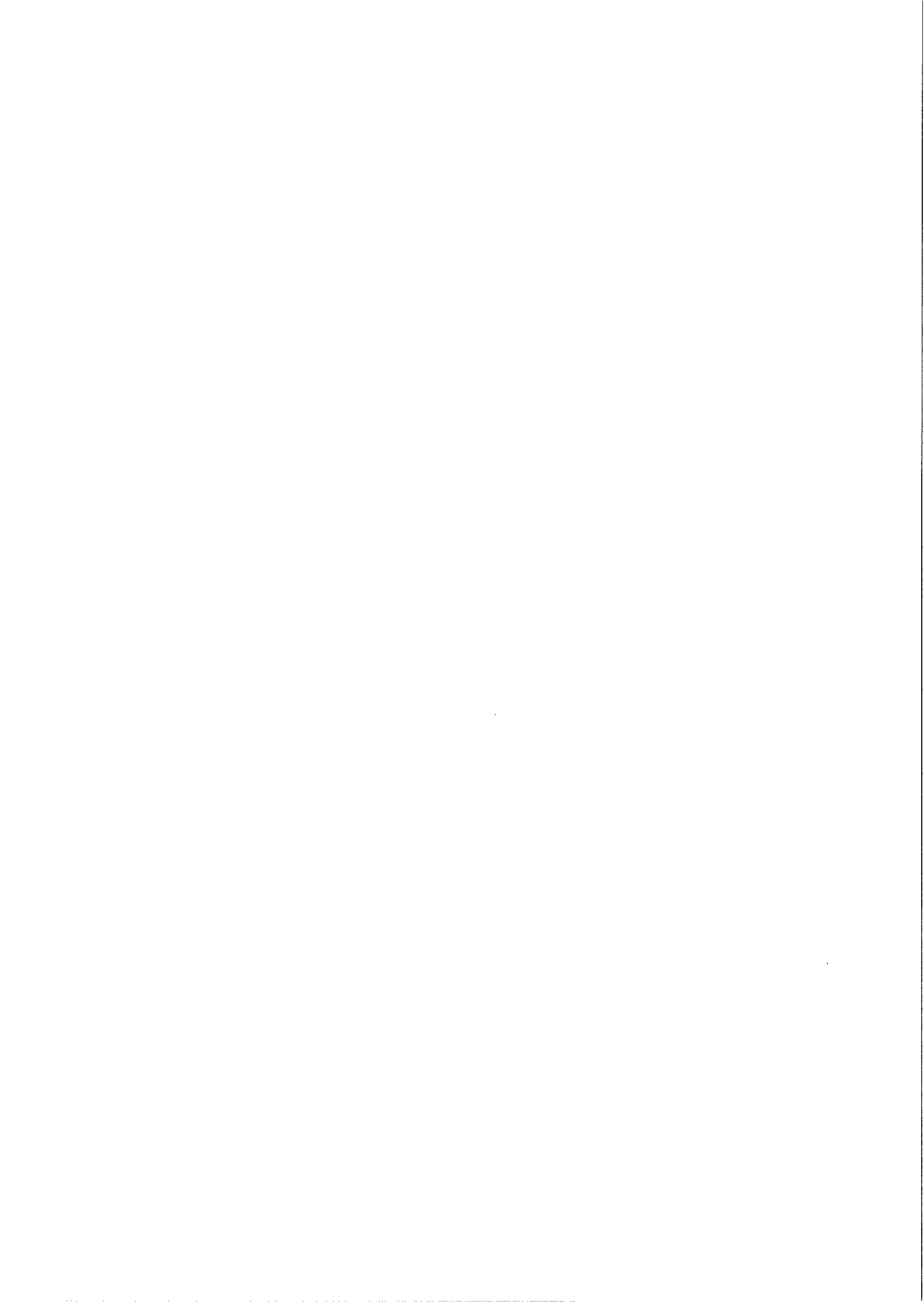
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INTRODUCTION TO
SERIES B VOLUME 3

The purpose of this paper is to make available for the layman a description of the creole language spoken in the Roper River area of the Northern Territory. It is written particularly with Europeans working in the area in mind. It has not been written as a technical paper for linguists, but it is hoped that linguists will find it useful in providing information on the language.

It should be noted that this volume (Part 1) does not contain a complete description of Creole. Intonation and rhythm, word formation, adverbs, conjunctions, questions and commands, complex sentences, and discourse structure are not discussed. It is planned that these sections will be described in a second volume (Part 2) in the future. (In addition, a basic dictionary is being published separately as *Work Papers of SIL-AAB*, Series B, Volume 4.) The sections contained in Part 1 are comprehensively, but not exhaustively, covered.

At several places in this paper the reader is referred to a discussion of a particular item at another location. When the reference is stated as being 'elsewhere', it means that the item will be discussed in Part 2. If the discussion is within Part 1, the chapter or section reference is given.

Examples occur frequently throughout the chapters dealing with Creole grammar. These examples are written in the Creole practical orthography as discussed in Chapter 3. In some situations an example of an unacceptable or ungrammatical construction is given. These examples are marked by a preceding asterisk (*).

This paper is based on some 27 months of fieldwork under the auspices of the Summer Institute of Linguistics since March 1973. Of this time approximately 60% has been spent at Ngukurr, 30% at Bamyili, and the remaining 10% elsewhere.

Without the help of many people this paper would not have been possible. I would like to thank the many Creole speakers who have shared their language with me, especially those who patiently worked with me in formal situations: Barnabas Roberts, Mordecai Skewthorpe, Andrew Joshua, Isaac Joshua, Charlie Johnson, Wallace Dennis, David Jentian, and Danny Jentian. Thanks are due to the late Lothar Jagst,

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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Only eight years after the settlement of Port Jackson (Sydney), David Collins (1796), writing about the language used by the settlers to communicate with the Aborigines, commented:

Language indeed, is out of the question for at the time of writing this, nothing but a barbarous mixture of English with the Port Jackson dialect is spoken by either party; and it must be added that even in this the natives have the advantage, comprehending, with much greater aptness than we can pretend to, every thing they hear us say.

This 'barbarous mixture' was the beginning of a number of pidgins and creoles that exist in Australia today. As settlement of Australia spread out from Sydney to Moreton Bay (Brisbane) and beyond, this pidgin was carried along by

the stockmen and sawyers [who supposed it] to be the language of the natives, whilst they suppose[d] it to be ours, and which [was] the ordinary medium of communication between the squatters and the tame black-fellow (Hodgkinson 1845).

Favenc (1904) commented:

the pidgin talk which is considered so essential for carrying on conversation with a blackfellow [and which] is of a very old origin . . . was carried along, mostly by the black boys who accompanied the whites.

Kaberry (1937:90), in describing the language situation in the Halls Creek area of the Kimberleys in 1935, observed that 'the majority of natives in the region are employed on the cattle stations, or else rationed by them, with the result that most of them speak quite idiomatic English'. She (1937:92) went on to say, however, that 'nowadays new tribes are coming into contact with one another, and for these pidgin English as an Esperanto of the north makes communication possible'.

1.1 PIDGINS AND CREOLES IN AUSTRALIA TODAY

Today in Australia the pidgin-creole (and Aboriginal English) situation is a very complex one, and one which until recently has received little serious attention. Indeed, without having been studied with any depth, Australian pidgins and creoles have generally been swept aside with negative generalized statements, such as the following by linguists:

Turner (1966:202) - 'not a structured language that could be described as a linguistic system . . . but a collection of disjointed

elements of corrupt English and native words'.

Strehlow (1966:80) - 'English perverted and mangled . . . ridiculous gibberish . . . childish babbling . . .'

Wurm (1963:4) - 'a broken jargon of corrupt English . . .'

Such attitudes are partially excusable in that the study of pidgins and creoles - creology - has only recently become a respectable academic field, even for linguists, in spite of the fact that the 'father' of creology, Hugo Schuchardt, published his *Kreolische Studien* in the 1880's. During the first part of this century, only a few serious studies of pidgins and creoles were undertaken, notably on the part of John Reinecke, Robert Hall, and Douglas Taylor.

But it was not until the first international conference on creole language studies was held in Jamaica in 1959 that creology as a separate discipline was born, and the discipline did not 'come of age' until the second international conference in 1968. As Hymes (1971:3) noted in the preface to *Pidginization and Creolization of Languages*,

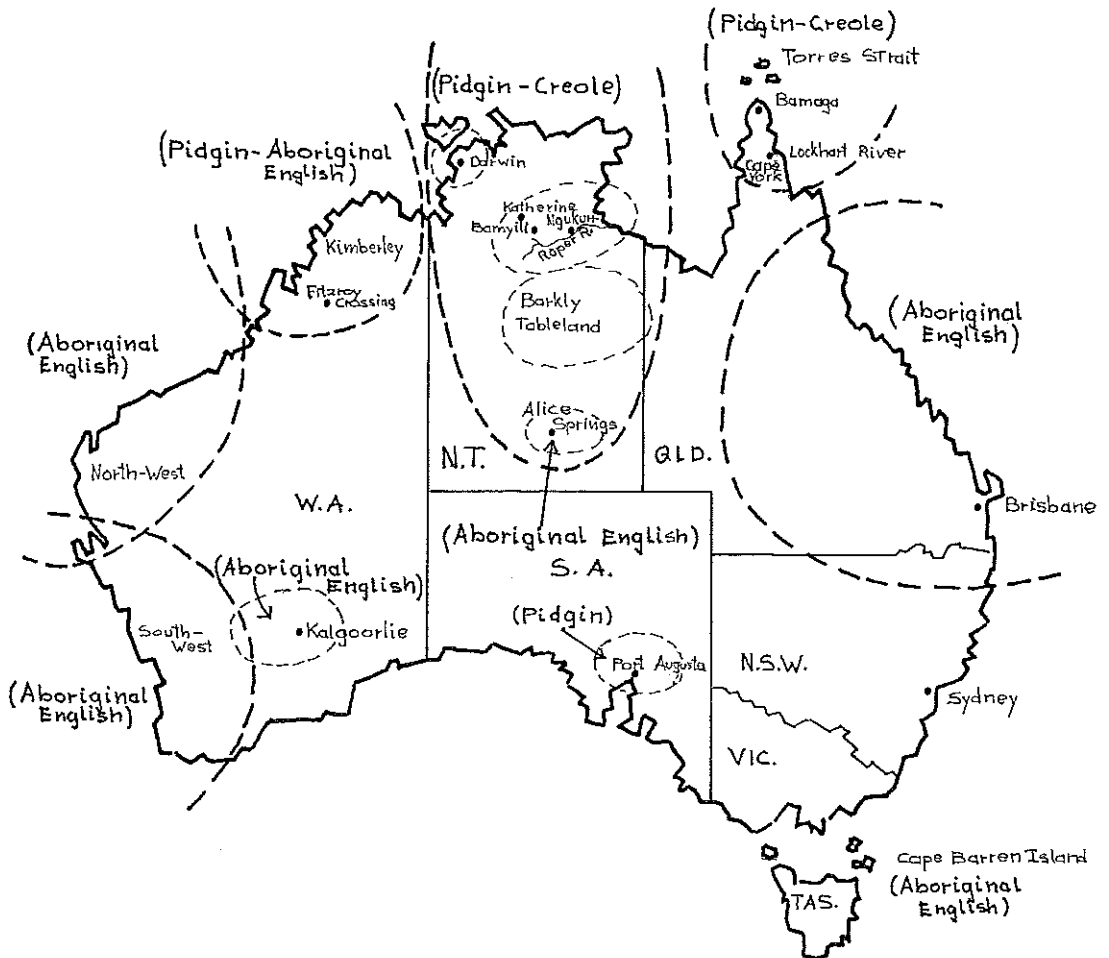
the languages called pidgins and creoles have long been a stepchild, so far as serious attention, either public or scientific, is concerned. The interest and activity reflected in this book suggest that the stepchild may prove a Cinderella.

What might be considered the 'classic' article on Australian pidgin was published by Hall in 1943. He based his description on pidgin excerpts in Phyllis Kaberry's *Aboriginal Woman: Sacred and Profane* (London 1939), for which most of the field work was done in the Halls Creek area of the Kimberleys. As late as 1971, Kaberry's excerpts (via Hall) were being used in linguistic literature to describe 'the' Australian pidgin.

Fortunately, knowledge about Australian pidgins, creoles, and Aboriginal English dialects is increasing. The present situation, as far as it is known in linguistic literature, is sketched on Map 1.1 and summarized below.

A team from the English Department of the University of Queensland, headed by E. H. Flint, has surveyed the speech situation of Queensland (Flint 1964, 1965, 1972 and Ramson 1969). Generally, pidgin or creole is spoken in the northern part of Cape York Peninsula and Aboriginal English is spoken elsewhere. Some aspects of Aboriginal English have been described with some depth by Alexander (1965, 1968), Dutton (1964, 1965), and Readdy (1961), and briefly by Dutton (1969), Flint (1968, 1970, 1971), Sommer (1974), and Sommer and Marsh (1970).

Map 1.1 Pidgins, Creoles, and Aboriginal English in Australia today as known from linguistic literature



Cape York Creole, which is spoken mainly in the northern and northeastern portions of Cape York Peninsula and in the Torres Strait Islands as described in some depth by Crowley and Rigsby (n.d.). That spoken specifically at Bamaga is briefly described by Rigsby (1973); that spoken in the Torres Strait, by Ray (1907), Dutton (1970), and Laade (1967); and that spoken at Lockhart River, very briefly discussed by Thompson (1976).

In the Northern Territory, an Aboriginal English spoken in Alice Springs is described briefly by Sharpe (1977). Pidgin or creole is spoken throughout most of the Northern Territory, especially in the pastoral districts northwards from the Barkly Tableland. That spoken at Bagot Aboriginal community in Darwin has been briefly discussed by Jernudd (1969). The creole spoken in the Katherine-Bamyili-Roper River area has been briefly described by Sharpe (1975), Sharpe and Sandefur (1976, 1977), Steffenson (1975, 1976), and Thompson (1976).

A team from the University of Western Australia, headed by Susan Kaldor, is currently conducting research into the language problems of Aboriginal children in Western Australia. This involves a description of the dialectal forms of English spoken by Aboriginal primary school children (Gardiner 1977:168).

Douglas (1968:14) makes mention of several Aboriginal contact languages in Western Australia:

the so-called Pidgin English of the Kimberleys;

the "Wangkayi English" of the detribalized people of the Eastern Goldfields [around Kalgoorlie];

the "*lingua franca* English" of the multi-lingual group of the North-West; and

[Neo-Nyungar] the present everyday speech of the South-West people . . . [which] is a combination of elements from the native dialects and English. [Douglas (1968:8) gives a brief description of Neo-Nyungar.]

Gardiner (1977:168) also mentions these languages, though not by name, as being Aboriginal English. In the south-west area some people speak only Aboriginal English while others speak standard English. Outside the south-west area

a sizable number of Aborigines are monolingual in Aboriginal English, although many are also bilingual or multilingual in several Aboriginal languages or dialects and Aboriginal English.

Vaszolyi (1976:52-53) claims:

in the Kimberleys there is a very interesting distribution of Pidgin-speaking Aborigines. Normally, Pidgin would be spoken by Aborigines (and mainly men) who spent some time in coastal ports . . . Inland-bound people who spent most of their time on stations with cattle as stockmen or farmhands would not normally speak much Pidgin . . .

Hudson and Richards (1976:3), commenting on the Fitzroy Crossing area of the Kimberleys, say that 'the English spoken by many older people is rather an Aboriginal English, but the children's speech (except in school and when talking to non-Aborigines) is becoming a well-developed pidgin'. This children's pidgin is briefly described by Fraser (1974, 1977) and Hudson (1977).

Not much is known about the situation in South Australia, though Rowley (1971:31) mentions that in the Port Augusta area

among the Aborigines of the full descent, [there are] people from eight different tribal groups at all levels of sophistication, including some who [are] able to speak, in addition to their own languages, only the pidgin of the cattle runs.

Elsewhere in Australia, Sutton (1975) has described briefly an Aboriginal English spoken by the part-Aboriginal people of Cape Barren Island, Tasmania.

1.2 DEVELOPMENT OF CREOLE IN THE ROPER RIVER AREA

The specific creole language described in this paper goes by a number of different names. Speakers of the language most commonly refer to it as *pijin* 'pidgin', *pijin ingglij* 'pidgin English', or *Ropa pijin* 'Roper pidgin'. Some speakers also refer to the language as *linggo* or *linggu* 'lingo' or *pijinlinggu* 'pidgin lingo' (used especially by children) and *Kriol* 'creole' (used particularly with speakers associated with the Ngukurr and Bamyili Schools).

The language is sometimes referred to by speakers as *blekbala ingglij* 'blackfellow English' in contrast to *munonga ingglij* 'European English' or *prapa ingglij* 'proper English'. It is often contrasted with *langwis* or *langus* 'language', which usually refers to traditional Aboriginal language.

Europeans most often refer to the language as 'pidgin' or '(blank) English', the (blank) being filled by a variety of mostly derogative words. The language has been referred to in technical literature as 'Pidgin', 'Pidgin English', 'Roper Pidgin', '"Pidgin English" Creole', 'Roper Creole', and 'Bamyili Creole'.

Throughout this paper the language will be referred to as 'Creole', with a capital 'C' to distinguish it from the general word 'creole'. It should be stressed that the language described in this paper is that spoken by Aborigines to Aborigines. It is not a description of the so called 'pidgin' often spoken by Europeans to Aborigines.

In particular, this paper describes the Creole spoken in the Roper River area, particularly at Ngukurr and Bamyili (see Map 1.3). Creole is the primary language of Aboriginal to Aboriginal communication, not only at both these Aboriginal communities, but also among the Aboriginal populations of the dozen or so pastoral properties in the Roper River catchment area from Nutwood Downs to the south, Mataranka to the west, Eva Valley to the north-west, and Bulman to the north. Creole is also spoken by many Aborigines in Katherine.

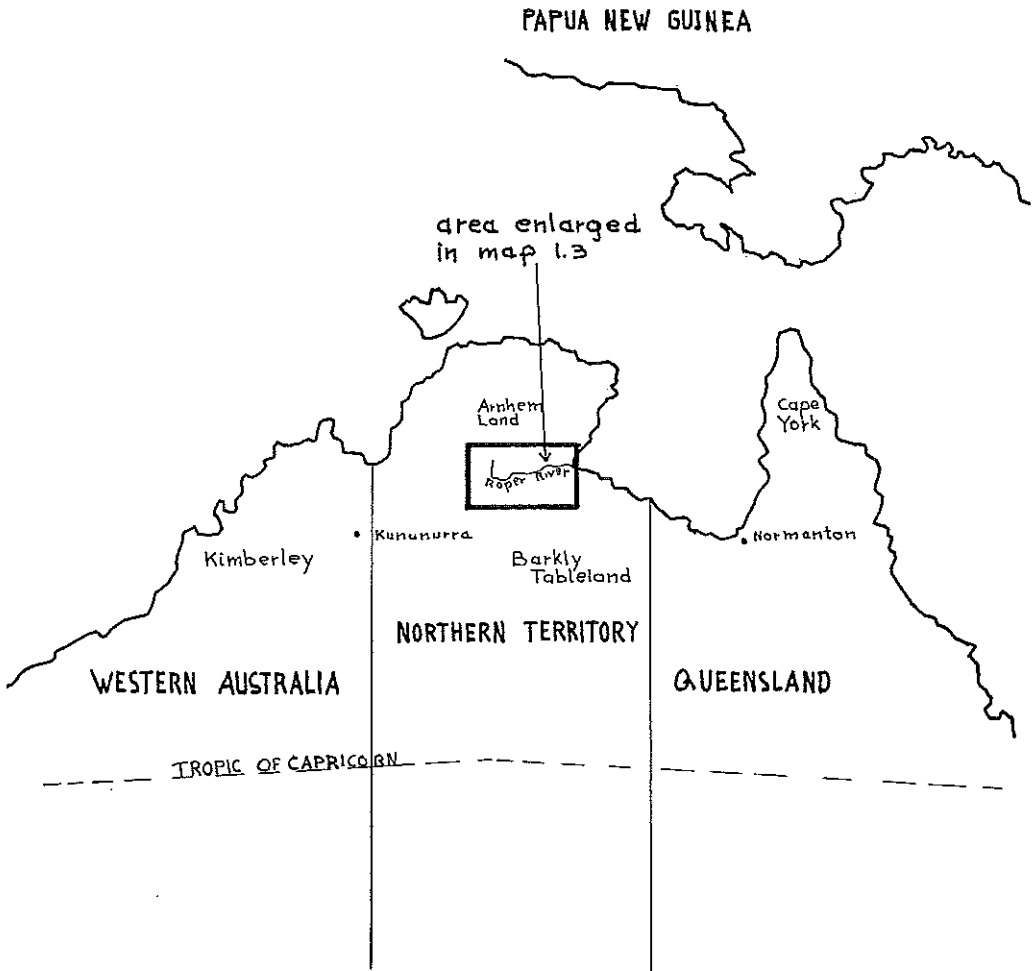
The same language appears to be spoken throughout most of the Northern Territory, though the exact boundaries and dialects and the extent of its use have yet to be studied. Some Aborigines outside the Roper River area speak Creole as their mother tongue, others have full control of it as a second language, while still others have only a partial control of it as a second language. In a sense, the first group speaks Creole as a creole, the second group speaks it as an extended pidgin, and the last group speaks it as a restricted pidgin (see Section 1.3 for definitions). There are many Aborigines in the Territory, however, who do not speak any Creole, particularly in north-east Arnhem Land.

On the basis of the scant information available¹ it appears that Creole is spoken (see Map 1.2) south of the Roper River throughout the Barkly Tableland, possibly extending east into Queensland as far as Normanton. It is spoken to varying degrees by some people north of the Roper River throughout Arnhem Land. North-west and west of the Roper River, Creole appears to be spoken more than in north-east Arnhem Land, though probably less than in the Barkly Tableland area. Westward, it extends across the border to Kununurra.

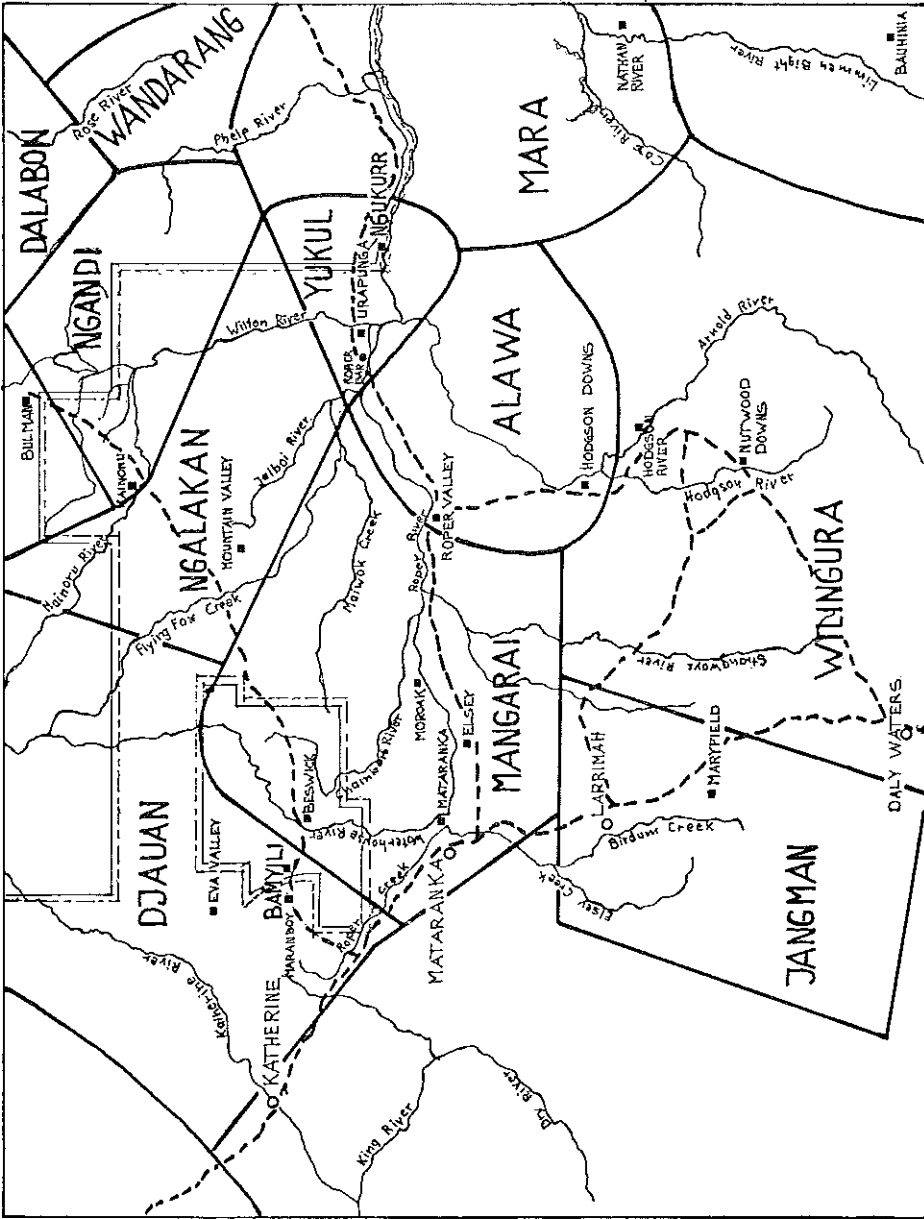
The Creole spoken in the Northern Territory is distinct from Cape York Creole and New Guinea Pidgin. It also appears to be distinct from Kimberley Children's Pidgin.

Most of the Aborigines in the Roper River area come from some two dozen different traditional Aboriginal language backgrounds. Some of these languages are shown on Map 1.3, which gives the locations or 'countries' of the language groups before European contact shifted the Aboriginal populations (Tindale 1974).

Map 1.2 Northern Australia



Map 1.3 The Roper River Area



- key: MARA**
- Traditional Aboriginal languages and boundaries
 - ELSEY
 - KATHERINE
 - Aboriginal reserve boundaries
 - - - Main roads
 - Roper River Rivers and creeks

European contact in the Roper River area began in 1845 when Leichhardt's exploration party crossed the Roper River at Roper Bar and followed Flying Fox Creek. In 1856 Gregory's party passed through the area along Elsey Creek, and in 1862 Stuart followed the Strangways and Chambers Rivers. 'The country around the Roper' was examined by Cadell in a paddle-steamer in 1867.

Extensive contact did not begin until 1871-72 when the Overland Telegraph Line was being put through the area. A supply depot was set up at Roper Bar while the line itself followed along Roper Creek with a telegraph station established at Katherine.

In 1872 Uhr drove 400 head of cattle from Queensland to Darwin following Leichhardt's track. He was followed a few years later by Buchanan driving 12,000 head to stock the Northern Territory's first pastoral property on the Adelaide River. While camped on the Limmen River the cook of Buchanan's party was killed by Aborigines and a punitive party was sent to revenge his death. Shortly afterwards Springvale Station (Katherine) and Elsey Station were stocked.

The 1880's saw the peak of early contact. At the end of the 1870's there were less than 500 non-Aboriginals in the Northern Territory, 300 of whom were Chinese. By the end of the 1880's the population had grown to over seven and a half thousand, seventy-five percent of it being Chinese. Some of the Chinese came from the China Coast Pidgin area of China.

The 1880's was the decade of the overlanders with large cattle drives passing through the Roper River area. In 1883 Lindsay surveyed the area north of the Roper River; crossing the Beswick and Waterhouse Creeks and following the Chambers, Roper, and Wilton Rivers. Following his report, the same year auction blocks on the Roper River were offered for sale. During the decade pastoral stations were established at Maranboy and Beswick, on the upper Limmen Bight and Wilton Rivers, on Costello and Flying Fox Creeks, and an attempt was made on the Waterhouse River. Before 1890 most of the Roper River area had been stocked, though all large stations north of the Roper River were abandoned shortly after.

In 1908 the Church Missionary Society of Australia established a mission on the Roper River that has grown into the present-day Aboriginal community of Ngukurr. CMS extended their work in 1921 to Groote Eylandt, in 1925 to Oenpelli, and in 1952 to Rose River.

In the 1910's and 20's agricultural blocks were offered on Waterhouse River and peanut farms started at Katherine. At Maranboy a crushing battery was erected for tin mines in the area and an Australian Inland Mission hospital established. The railway line was

extended from Pine Creek to Mataranka, and pastoral stations were established at Bamyili, Mainoru, Urapunga, Roper Valley, Beswick, and Maranboy.

During the Second World War compounds or camps were set up at Maranboy and Katherine for Aborigines. After the war the Maranboy Camp was closed down and Aborigines re-settled several times until a settlement was permanently located on Beswick Creek in 1951, the name of the community being changed in 1965 from Beswick Creek to Bamyili.

Early contact, as in most of Australia, was violent. In writing about his experiences at Roper, Joynt (1918:7) commented:

In years gone by the natives have been shot down like game, and hundreds killed in a spirit of revenge. I have met men that boast of shooting the poor, unprotected black "just for fun".

Hart (1970:150), in visiting Ngukurr in 1965, said that 'older people there remembered these [atrocities] and described them very vividly'.

Even though contact was violent, like elsewhere in Australia, some Aborigines became closely associated with Europeans, especially in the pastoral industry. It was most likely in these early associations that Creole had its inception as a pidgin, probably in two ways.

As pastoralists moved into new territory they often brought with them a pidgin they had thought useful in communicating with Aborigines in previous localities; they also usually brought Aboriginal stockmen, who often spoke a pidgin, with them. As contact with new Aborigines took place, this pidgin was introduced as the language of communication.

Not all pastoralists, however, utilized pidgin; many used English. In these situations the 'target language' that Aborigines began to learn was English rather than pidgin. But as in all second language learning, one gradually builds up accurate and full control of the language; the early stages of learning result in a pidgin.

Older people at Ngukurr and Bamyili generally attribute the origin of Creole to Europeans; either 'stockmen brought it from Queensland' or 'we learned English [i.e. Creole] from Europeans at such-and-such a place or school'.²

By the turn of the century a marginal pidgin was well established in the Roper River area as exemplified by Gunn (1905, 1908) at Elsey Station. A marginal pidgin, however,

is inadequate for more than the most rudimentary forms of communication. Since it is largely supplemented by gesture discussion is limited to tangible objects, especially those in the immediate vicinity. Such a mode of communication is of limited value only. If the contact is prolonged and intimate a fuller form of communication must develop . . . The only two options open to a marginal pidgin is to disappear or to become more useful by the expansion of its resources . . . (Todd 1974:53-54).

In the 'life cycle' of a pidgin, if the one language group remains in contact with the second or target language such that the first group's own language will not satisfy the communication need, then they will eventually learn the target language and abandon the pidgin. In 1907 White (1918:148) met an Aborigine who had worked as a river pilot on the Roper River for the supply depot at Roper Bar and wrote that he 'speaks fairly good English'. Kaberry (1937:90), as noted at the beginning of this chapter, observed that cattle station Aborigines in the Kimberleys tended to speak 'idiomatic English'.

Pidgin, however, did not disappear in the Roper River area. Rather, it underwent expansion. This expansion was facilitated by two main factors (Todd 1974:54):

its developing in a multilingual area and its use not so much in non-native to native contact as in contacts between native inhabitants speaking mutually unintelligible languages.

The mission established at Ngukurr in 1908 provided a haven of safety for Aborigines in the midst of violent times. Barnabas Roberts, an Alawa tribesman who was a young boy when the mission was started, once said,³ 'If the missionaries hadn't come, my tribe would have been all shot down.' In the early years of the mission up to 200 Aborigines from several different language groups lived there, with 50 to 70 children attending school (Hart 1970:154).

This new environment of a multilingual community resulted in the need for a *lingua franca* between Aborigines of the different language groups. Children from these different language groups found themselves being peers attending an English school in an area where a pidgin was already established. It may also be significant to note that three Aborigines from Yarrabah Mission in North Queensland where a pidgin was spoken came with the missionaries to help establish Roper Mission.

This new environment was fertile for the 'nativization' of the pidgin. The pidgin began being used of necessity by Aborigines in speaking to Aborigines. Over a period of time its vocabulary was

increased and its grammatical structures expanded. As its use was extended, children had fewer opportunities to grow up in the environment of 'their' traditional language. The presence of English in the life of people was mostly restricted to school and a little social intercourse with the few Europeans in the area.

Somewhere along the way a generation of children emerged speaking the pidgin as their mother tongue. The pidgin was beginning to be creolized, resulting in the creole spoken today.

Creolization most likely began at Ngukurr before Bamyili because of its earlier establishment as a multilingual community. This is indicated by the fact that Creole speakers outside the area often refer to the language as 'Roper pidgin', Roper commonly being used as the name of Ngukurr. Creolization at Bamyili would not have taken place to a significant degree until after the establishment of the war compounds.

The population of Bamyili at present is just over 600. The residents represent some ten tribal groups, the majority groups being Djauan, Maiali, Ngalkbun (Dalabon), Rembarrnga, and Mara, with others being Gunwinggu, Wagaman, Dagaman, Jangman, and Mangarai. Most social intercourse is directed north-east to Bulman, north to Oenpelli, west to Katherine, south to Elsey, and some to Ngukurr.

The population of Ngukurr at present is just over 500. The residents represent about a dozen tribal groups including Alawa, Mara, Nunggubuyu, Ritharrngu, Ngandi, Wandarang, Nalagan, Yukul, and Rembarrnga. Most social intercourse is directed north-east to Numbulwar and Groote Eylandt, north to Elcho Island and its out-stations, south to Borroloola, south-west to cattle stations as far as Nutwood Downs, west to Elsey and Mataranka, and north-west to Darwin, Katherine, and some to Bamyili.

1.3 PIDGIN,⁴ CREOLE,⁵ OR CORRUPT ENGLISH

Many have asked the question: Is the so-called pidgin spoken in the Roper River area really a language or is it only a corrupt form of English?

Pidgin, says the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Hall 1973:1058),

is a term applied to a number of varieties of speech which have grown out of English and other languages, and which have been used in various parts of the world since the 17th century. These languages are often termed 'bastard jargons', 'mongrel lingos' or the like; but in fact they are languages like any others, and can be accurately delimited and described . . .

The use of pidgin has been opposed by some, partly on puristic grounds . . . In answer, it is pointed out that pidgin and creole languages are not 'corruptions', but normal linguistic developments; it has even been suggested that the Germanic languages (and hence English) may have arisen from a creolized variety of Indo-European.

DeCamp (1971:15) states that pidgins and creoles are 'genuine languages in their own right, not just macaronic blends or interlingual corruptions of standard languages'.

A pidgin is a contact language, a language that arises out of contact of two or more languages. It is normally not the native language or mother tongue of any of its speakers.

Todd (1974:5) has subdivided pidgins into restricted and extended pidgins.

A restricted pidgin is one which arises as a result of marginal contact such as for minimal trading, which serves only this limited purpose and which tends to die out as soon as the contact which gave rise to it is withdrawn.'

Restricted pidgins are characterized by sharply reduced grammatical structures and limited vocabularies. They function only as auxiliary languages and are relatively short lived. DeCamp (1971:16) states:

If the interlingual contact ends, the pidgin usually also ends; there is no longer a need for it, and there are no sentimental attachments or nationalistic motivations for preserving a dead pidgin. If the interlingual contact is maintained for a long time, usually one group learns the standard language of the other.

An extended pidgin is one which, although it may not become a mother tongue, proves vitally important in a multilingual area, and which, because of its usefulness, is extended and used beyond the original limited function which caused it to come into being (Todd 1971:5).

The only way in which a pidgin may escape extinction is by developing into a creole; that is, its grammatical structure and vocabulary are extended, its uses in the community expanded, and it becomes the native language of a speech community. The language undergoes nativization; it is taken over by a group of speakers who previously used some other language, so that the new language becomes the mother tongue of the group (Hall 1966:xiii). When a pidgin has developed into a creole through nativization or creolization, it is

capable of meeting all the communication needs of its speakers. DeCamp (1971:16) states: 'A creole is inferior to its corresponding standard language only in social status.'

Weinreich (1970:69) states:

New hybrid languages, such as the creoles and pidgins, have been formed as a result of modifications in languages that have been in contact. Their status as new languages may be said to be due to the fact that they have attained some or all of the following: (1) a form palpably different from either stock language; (2) a certain stability of form after initial fluctuations; (3) functions other than those of a workaday vernacular (e.g. use in the family, in formalized communication, etc.); (4) a rating among the speakers themselves as a separate language.

The linguistic and socio-linguistic criteria, then, for determining whether or not the Aboriginal speech variety of the Roper River area is in fact a language in its own right are fourfold:

1. the Degree of Difference;
2. the Stability of Form;
3. the Breadth of Function; and
4. the Rating by the Speakers.

1. The Degree of Differance

To the English speaker Creole certainly seems to have been derived from English. The form or surface structure, to a large degree, has been; but with the function or deep structure, this is not necessarily the case. Sharpe (1972:9), in making a comparison of tense-aspect-mood between Alawa and Creole, says,

the contrasts distinguished are found to be in nearly all respects identical. In surface structure the languages are very different; in deep structure and semantically they are almost identical . . .

Throughout this paper contrasts between Creole and English and comparisons with Aboriginal language structures have been made in an attempt to show that Creole is significantly different from the languages it grew out of.

2. The Stability of Form

Sharpe (1974:3) tells of a nursing sister at Ngukurr who, having done a short course in linguistics, attempted to study Creole but

abandoned the attempt because 'it varied so much from speaker to speaker'. This is a common 'complaint' from English speakers, and at first glance Creole would appear to not meet the criterion of stability of form.

All languages have variation or alternate ways of saying things. Linguists, states Flint (1965:1), use the terms language, dialect, idiolect, and style to describe the nature and interrelationship of phenomena of linguistic variation.

In English, for example, variation can be due to a difference in dialect: 'I came immediately after he left.' versus 'I came immediately he left.' Alternate expressions may simply be different choices of vocabulary: one can 'build a house', 'put up a house', or 'construct a house'. Or alternate expressions may be variations along a stylistic continuum with formal expressions at one end and informal ones at the other: one would speak formally of 'my father' but informally of 'my old man'; formally one would say 'I'll see you this afternoon.' while informally it could be 'See ya this arvo.'

Creole likewise has alternate ways of expressing things: *olabat* and *alabat* 'they' are dialect differences; *baba*, *sista*, *rabish* 'sister' are alternate vocabulary possibilities; *garnda* and *bambam* 'buttocks' could be used in formal speech but not *guna*. Creole, however, has a much greater range of variation than does English in the particular area of pronunciation. It is most often this feature of Creole that provokes statements such as the one quoted above.

Chapter 2 'The Sound System of Creole' attempts to show that this variation is not ad hoc nor a sign of instability on the part of the language. Rather, the variation is not only regular and desirable but also logical.

Throughout the chapters dealing with the grammar of Creole, an attempt is made to show that there is stability in the grammar of the language. There is variation in grammatical structures, but this variation is well-defined in terms of what is grammatically acceptable and what is ungrammatical. Creole is not just a 'collection of disjointed elements'.

3. The Breadth of Function

Weinreich (1970:106) elaborates this criterion by saying that 'the crucial function which a regularly interfered with type of speech must acquire in order to develop into full-fledged languages is, it seems, use in the family'. Hall (1966:xii) says that 'a creole language arises when a pidgin becomes the native language of a speech-community'. Hymes (1971:79) contends:

what counts is what may be said to be status as a *primary* language (functionally) in a community. Autobiographical priority, as first language learned, is a possible route to primary status, but neither necessary nor sufficient.

Creole is not the mother tongue of everyone in the Roper River area. Many people, though mostly older people, speak their traditional Aboriginal language as their mother tongue. A third generation of Creole mother tongue speakers, however, is currently emerging.

In speaking of the Alawa language, Sharpe (1972:vii) says:

it is not spoken extensively, the younger people hardly use the language except when speaking with their elders, and even the latter now use a creole which they call Pidgin English for many conversations . . . The Alawa tribe has about a hundred members . . . Most of these understand a little Alawa and use some Alawa words in their creole. The estimated number who know the language well is thirty. The others only know simple expressions.

Similarly, Hughes (1971:46) speaks of the Nunggubuyu tribesmen: 'Most of those at Roper River have lost the ability to use their own mother tongue, especially the younger generation . . .' Likewise, Heath (n.d.:11) says of Ritharngu 'speakers' in the Roper area: 'I have personally had contact with about sixty, some of whom had limited grasp of the language due to "Pidginisation" at Ngukurr . . .'

Chadwick (1975:ix), in speaking of the Aborigines in the Newcastle Waters, Elliott and Beetaloo area, says:

they call themselves Djingili-Mudbura and are mostly trilingual speaking Mudbura, Djingili and English of varying degrees from Pidgin to standard . . . Older speakers, including all those fluent in Djingili, use a kind of Pidgin which is well known in North Australia.

Though not everyone speaks Creole as their mother tongue, virtually all residents in the Roper River area use Creole in virtually all aspects of life. Creole is used in the home, at work, in recreation, at Town Council meetings, at church in preaching and praying, on the school grounds and (at Ngukurr and Bamyili where there are bilingual programmes) in the classrooms, and at ceremonies. Creole is not, however, necessarily the only language used in these situations.

Until recently, Creole was normally not used with Europeans, but some speakers are now saying that Europeans working in an Aboriginal community should learn Creole. Prior to 1973 (at Ngukurr)

Creole was not used in school because, as one school teacher put it, 'Pidgin in school gets the rod.' Notably lacking is the use of Creole in music, though a few Creole songs are in existence.

4. The Rating by the Speakers

In a report to the Bilingual Education Consultative Committee (Northern Territory Department of Education) in 1974, Sharpe (1974: 21) stated:

it is clear . . . that Aboriginal pride in the Creole as their language has been increasing over the years, [and] that Aborigines are less ashamed of using the creole to whites (clear to me over the gap of 6-7 years since my last visit - and city Aborigines will [now] use Creole when speaking to whites who know it) . . .

Preliminary analysis of data from a study by Davidson⁶ at Bamyili indicates that the majority of older people view Creole as having been created by Europeans and being a European language, while younger adults consider it to have been created by Aborigines and being an Aboriginal language. Some people of both groups, however, consider Creole to be the 'property' of both Aborigines and Europeans.

Expressed attitudes to Creole by speakers have certainly changed in the last few years. In early 1973 at a meeting on bilingual education at Ngukurr, not only was Creole publicly berated by a number of speakers, but some even denied that it was 'really' used in the area. This attitude, however, was to be expected from people who have a long history of having their language (and culture) berated, both officially and unofficially, by Europeans. Some of the early missionaries at Ngukurr did not look favourably upon Creole and disciplined those who used it.⁷ The government school at Ngukurr as late as 1972 physically punished children for speaking Creole in school.⁸

Expressed attitudes towards Creole by Creole speakers, however, have changed as official government policy towards the language has changed and been implemented. These attitude changes began shortly after the government announced its bilingual education policy in December 1972. Today, many, though not all, speakers openly recognize Creole as their language without shame. Many are interested in seeing a Creole literature develop. Several speakers have even expressed the idea that Creole should be a 'national Aboriginal language' because of the ease with which Aborigines can communicate with one another when using it.⁹

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 1

- ¹Personal communication from the following linguists: Neil Chadwick on the Barkly Tableland and recording from Kununurra, W.A.; David Glasgow at Maningrida; Lothar Jagst at Hooker Creek; Velma Leeding at Groote Eylandt; Margaret Sharpe at Elliot, Borroloola, and Papunya; and Ray Wood at Elcho Island; as well as several non-linguist Europeans and numerous Creole speakers themselves.
- ²Sharpe (1975:1), Davidson (see note 6), and personal communication from several Aborigines.
- ³Personal communication from Barnabas Roberts.
- ⁴The traditional etymology (which has been challenged) derives 'pidgin' from the Chinese pronunciation of the English word 'business', with pidgin first being applied to Chinese pidgin English.
- ⁵The term 'creole' (from the Portuguese *crioulo*, via Spanish and French) originally meant a white man of European descent born and raised in a tropical or semi-tropical colony. The meaning was later extended to include indigenous natives and others. The term was then applied to certain languages spoken by creoles, and is now used to refer to certain types of contact languages.
- ⁶From notes taken from a seminar given by Graham Davidson to Bamyili School teachers in June 1977.
- ⁷Personal communication from Keith Cole, November 1974.
- ⁸Personal communication from a Ngukurr School teacher, March 1973.
- ⁹This idea was expressed by a Bathurst Island Aborigine to Faith Hill; a Bamyili Aborigine to Graham Davidson; and several Aborigines from Bamyili and Ngukurr to John Sandefur.

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