WORK PAPERS OF SIL–AAB

Series B Volume 8

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Editor: S. Hargrave

PREFACE

These Work Papers are being produced in two series by the Summer
Institute of Linguistics, Australian Aborigines Branch, Inc. in
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anthropological analysis and description, or on literacy research.
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Both series include both reports on current research and on past
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Because of the preliminary nature of most of the material to appear
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SIL is primarily an applied-linguistics organisation, with goals in translation and literacy. As such, it cannot ignore the cultural context of language, particularly since SIL fieldworkers carry out their research and goals in an ongoing language-culture situation. For these reasons it is appropriate that SIL-AAB personnel share some ideas and insights in a 'language-culture' work papers volume. We are also pleased to include two papers by non-SIL contributors, Judith Stokes and John Harris, both of whom have had much experience in the Aboriginal language-culture context.

In the first paper Jean Kirton shares insights she has gained during the dual process of learning Yanyuwa language and culture at Borroloola. Though not claiming that she is expressing an emic (insider's) viewpoint, Jean has been careful to check out her obser-vations and tentative conclusions with a Yanyuwa speaker, Nero Timothy. In exploring the interrelationships between language and culture, there are always the dangers of stating the obvious and/or making unwarranted statements of causation. Jean has aimed to underscore the importance of relating language study to the local culture, demonstrating that linguistic data can be better understood when its cultural context is known.

Long before the use of such interdisciplinary labels as 'cognitive anthropology', 'sociolinguistics' and 'anthropological linguistics', both linguists and anthropologists were interested in kinship terminology as an interface of language and culture. Helen Geytenbeek's paper on Nyangumarta kinship has grown out of her need as a field linguist to speak and act correctly in the Nyangumarta community. Helen shares the view of Nyangumarta kinship which she has had to learn—that of a female member of the group.

Cross-cultural education in mathematics has often been a frustrating experience for both teachers and students. Part of the problem has been the lack of knowledge of, or appreciation for, non-Western approaches to mathematics. Judith Stokes' paper is an extensive de-scription of Anindilyakwa mathematical language and its cultural context which refutes popular generalisations about the limited counting ability of Aboriginal people. Judith is to be commended for the amount of data she has collected and for her efforts to gain due recognition for Anindilyakwa mathematical language and concepts.

John Harris believes that Judith's paper is 'the first substantial discussion of the mathematical concepts of an Aboriginal group which has ever been published', and he finds fault with linguists and anthro-

pologists who have had access to such data for other Aboriginal groups but for various reasons have not made it known. Their neglect has allowed prejudiced views of Aboriginal mathematics as 'primitive' to continue unchecked, often with the accompanying view that 'primitive mathematics' is primary evidence of cultural inferiority. John's paper outlines how biased statements about Aboriginal mathematical abilities have developed and continued to the present day, and he cites data from several Aboriginal languages to correct such biases.

However, a deeper understanding of Aboriginal mathematics does not mean that differences between Western and Aboriginal approaches to mathematics are henceforth discounted. As Barbara Sayers' paper recognises, there are still frustrations and problems for many Aboriginal children learning mathematics in school. Barbara believes that the 'problems' are primarily cultural rather than linguistic: a hunting and gathering people have no need for highly developed and precise mathematical calculations and therefore should not be expected to have developed them. The perceptual and cognitive skills will be in different areas more appropriate to a hunting and gathering way of life. Barbara offers several suggestions to those teaching mathematics to Aboriginal children, suggestions which take into account the concepts and teaching styles of Aboriginal culture. Though their approaches are quite different, both John and Barbara are concerned that Western educators know more about Aboriginal culture and that they accept Aboriginal mathematical concepts and language on their own merit rather than judging them from a Western ethnocentric viewpoint.

As this introduction has indicated, the first five work papers in this volume illustrate the interdependence of language and culture. The reader will have to judge how much the final paper illustrates that same interdependence. It is a partial report of a research project undertaken to find out to what extent the development of colour terminology is culturally determined. The data gathered from five Aboriginal languages by SIL fieldworkers are inconclusive as to the relationship between culture and colour vocabulary, but they certainly illustrate the complexity of language-culture research.

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Susanne K. Hargrave
Volume Editor

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NYANGUMARTA KINSHIP

A WOMAN'S VIEWPOINT

Helen Geytenbeek

0.   INTRODUCTION

The Nyangumarta language is spoken by about 700 Aborigines along
the northwest coast of Australia, between Port Hedland and Broome
and inland around Marble Bar. Of this number about 500 claim it
as their own language.

The majority of the Nyangumarta claim to speak the southern or
inland dialect while the others speak the coastal dialect (called
Ngulibardu and Wanyarli respectively in O'Grady and Mooney 1973:1).
The terms 'inland' and 'coastal' refer to their original terri-
tories and do not necessarily reflect the current situation. Many
of the coastal people now live at La Grange, but the inland
Nyangumarta mostly live at Strelley Station and outcamps, Yandeyarra
Station, and Port Hedland.

There are some differences in kinship terminology and section
organisation between the two dialects. As far as I can ascertain
the northern Nyangumarta use the same section organisation as the
Garadjari who are the traditional owners of the country around
La Grange. The southern or inland Nyangumarta follow the same
basic system as some of the desert groups with whom they have close
ties. Most of my knowledge of the kinship system has been gleaned
from speakers of the inland dialect.

It is customary to describe kinship systems from the viewpoint of a
male ego. However, this description of Nyangumarta kinship and
section organisation is written from a woman's point of view. A
man has different names for a few of his relatives. Brief reference
is made to differing kinship terms used by male speakers.

This paper was originally written in 1978 and was updated in 1982.
The material on which it is based was gathered at Marble Bar and
Port Hedland between 1972 and 1978 during an effective field time
of 44 months. It may be misleading to talk of the material being
'gathered'. Much of it was learned informally as I struggled to
understand my relationship to others as an 'adopted' member of the
Nyangumarta family.

It would be impossible to name everyone who has had a hand in my
education in matters of Nyangumarta kinship. But the person who has
spent the most time answering questions and trying to make the
system clear is Mrs. Lily Darby. My special thanks to her.

1.   SECTION ORGANISATION

The Nyangumarta are divided into four social groups or <u>sections</u>, and
each person in the society belongs to one of them. A person's place
in the society is determined by where his or her parents fit into
the system. The diagram below shows the marriageable sections and
the directions in which descent is traced when correct marriages are
made. Marriageable sections are connected by an = sign. Arrows
show lines of descent from the mother.

```
 ┌──→ PANAKA         =         KARIMARRA ←─┐
 │                                          │
 └──→ PURUNGU        =         MILANGKA ←──┘
```

Thus a Karimarra man marries a Panaka woman and their children are
Purungu. A Purungu man marries a Milangka woman and their children
are Karimarra. A Panaka man marries a Karimarra woman and their
children are Milangka. A Milangka man marries a Purungu woman and
their children are Panaka.

Among the coastal or northern Nyangumarta the pattern is a little
different. A person who is reckoned as Karimarra among the southern
Nyangumarta is reckoned as Purungu in the north. A person who is
Purungu among the southern Nyangumarta is known as Karimarra in the
north. The diagram below shows correct marriages and lines of
descent for the northern Nyangumarta.

```
 ┌──→ PANAKA         =         PURUNGU ←─┐
 │                                        │
 └──→ KARIMARRA      =         MILANGKA ←┘
```

Thus in the north a Purungu man marries a Panaka woman and their
children are Karimarra. A Karimarra man marries a Milangka woman
and their children are Purungu. A Panaka man marries a Purungu
woman and their children are Milangka. A Milangka man marries a

Karimarra woman and their children are Panaka.

When a 'wrong' marriage is contracted there can be confusion as
to where the children belong in the system. Elkin (1979:128-9),
in discussing the section system of the north-west of Western
Australia, states that 'in the minds of the natives its principle
of descent is always based on the mother-child relationship...in
any case of alternate or irregular marriage, the father is "thrown
away"; that is, he is not considered...the child goes into the
section to which it would belong, if the mother had married
according to the normal rule.' Tonkinson (1978:49) has also found
that this is the case among the Mardudjara (Marta Wangka). But
according to my data, descent may be reckoned from the mother or
the father. While it may be true that most people use the mother's
section in reckoning the child's section, some use the father's.
A certain ambivalence of outlook seems evident in remarks like the
following concerning a man whose parents were married wrongly:
'He should be half a *nyupa* ('spouse') and half a *pujamu* ('son')'.
In fact the man referred to has chosen to follow his father's
section which makes him a *nyupa* to the speaker. It may be that the
Nyangumarta view descent, in terms of the section system, as neither
patrilineal nor matrilineal, but from both parents joined in a
correct relationship.

2.   KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY

Chart 1 gives the names of a woman's relatives and illustrates
the lines of descent. Chart 2 shows how her relatives are
distributed among the four sections. Taking A as the section to
which Ego belongs, B will be her husband's section and C the
section of her children. Comparing Charts 1 and 2, it is apparent
that many of Ego's kin are related to her in more than one way. For
example, if correct marriages have been made, Ego's MM is also her
classificatory FFZ and Ego's husband is also classified as her MBS
and FZS (see section 3).

A man calls his son-in-law *pujamu* (the same term he uses for
'son'). His terms for his grandchildren are different from a
woman's terms. She calls her daughter's children *kamiji* and her
son's children *kaparli*. But he calls his daughter's children
jamuji and those of his son *karluji*.

Nyangumarta kinship terms refer not only to the immediate family,
but also to classificatory relatives. The term that is used for
'mother' is used also for mother's sisters and for all females of
the mother's generation level who belong to the same section as
the mother. The term for 'father' is likewise extended to include
all the males of one's father's generation level who belong to the

same section as father. The terms used for one's siblings are also applied to the children of anyone whom Ego calls 'mother' or 'father'. This extension of kin terms applies throughout the system. The only exceptions are for special terms applied to a limited number of people when men and women from marriageable sections are considered too close to marry.

From Chart 1 it can be seen that there are names for relatives on only four generation levels. The terms for relatives two genera- ations above and two generations below Ego are the same. Children of one's grandchildren are called by the same terms as parents, uncles and aunts. In other words they are in the same sections as child- ren of one's grandparents. Parents of grandparents are in the same sections as parents of grandchildren and are called by the same terms as children, nieces and nephews. In this way it is possible to have classificatory parents, uncles and aunts who are much younger than oneself. Conversely it is common to have classificatory children, nieces and nephews who are much older than oneself.

There are three terms listed by O'Grady and Mooney (1973:8) as Nyangumarta kin terms of unclear meaning. They are *murrkangunya, malyurta* and *nyirtingunya*. (The term *kartapal* which is listed as an alternant for *malyurta* I have been told is a Nyamal term.) The use of these terms is certainly not confined to Nyangumarta. Tonkinson (1978:46) cites their use among the Mardudjara (Martu Wangka). They are not kinship terms in the normal sense: they do not show a person's relationship to another, but rather his or her place in the family. *Murrkangunya* is a term for the first- born, *nyirtingunya* (usually shortened to *nyirti*) is a term for the youngest member of a family, and *malyurta* is used for all the offspring in the middle. These terms can be used for address or reference. They are frequently used instead of the appropriate kin term to address another.

Chart 1: NYANGUMARTA KINSHIP

FFZ kamiji

FF karluji

FM kaparli

FMB jamuji

MFZ kaparli

MF jamuji

MM kamiji

MMB karluji

MBW jinartu

FZ jinartu

FZH kakaji

FB japartu

F japartu

M pipi

MZ pipi

MB kakaji

FZS jaluwal

FZD yapuyu

BS walka-walka

BW yapuyu

OB YB mamaji/marrka

BD ngarraya

SW ngarraya

H nyupa

EGO

OZ kangkuji/marrka

YZ

ZH nyupa

ZS pujamu

ZD kurntal

MBS jaluwal

MBD yapuyu

SS kaparli

S pujamu

SD kaparli

D kurntal

DH marruku

DS kamiji

DD kamiji

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CHART 2

Distribution of Ego's Kin (Chart 1) in the Section System

A   B

Ego   *nyupa*   H, ZH, MBS, FZS

mamaji   OB   *yapuyu*   MBD, FZD, BW

kangkuji   OZ   *kaparli*   FM, MFZ, SS, SD

marrka   YB, YZ   *jamuji*   MF, FMB

kamiji   MM, FFZ, DD, DS *jaluwal*   unmarriageable MBS, FZS

karluji   FF, MMB

C   D

pipi   M, MZ   *japartu*   F, FB

kaka(ji)   MB, FZH   *jinartu*   FZ, MBW

kurntal   D, ZD   *ngarraya*   BD, SW

pujamu   S, ZS   *marruku*   BS, DH

                            walka-walka BS, HZS (too close for
                                           D to marry)

ABBREVIATIONS:

B   brother   S   son

Z   sister   D   daughter

F   father   H   husband

M   mother   W   wife

O   older   Y   younger

COMBINATIONS: (example)

MBD = mother's brother's daughter

2.1   TERMS OF REFERENCE

Most of the terms used in Charts 1 and 2 are terms of both address and of reference. As a woman is not supposed to directly address her son-in-law, her term for him—*marruku*—is only a term of reference.

Some of the other terms listed are inappropriate as terms of reference in certain situations, particularly when referring to one's own or another's spouse. The term *nyupa* 'spouse' is used in conversation between Ego and her mother-in-law or father-in-law to refer to Ego's spouse (their son). But when a woman's parents talk to her about her spouse they refer to him as *yinini*. O'Grady and Mooney (1973:8) call these terms 'shared' reference terms, because they take into account the relationship of the hearer (the addressee) as well as the relationship of the speaker to the person referred to.

There are other examples of shared reference terms in Nyangumarta. People of the same generation level (except for women who are sisters-in-law or men who are brothers-in-law) refer to their own spouse or the spouse of the other person as *pinaji*. Women who are in sister-in-law relationship or men who are brothers-in-law refer to their own or the other's spouse as *nyukunu*. The term of reference for spouse between people who are two generations apart is *yakan*.

The term *yarruwa* is used by a woman when speaking to her un-marriageable *jaluwal* about his wife. As *jaluwal* is a reciprocal term, I expect that *yarruwa* is also used by a man when speaking to his *jaluwal* about her husband, but I do not recall hearing a man using it that way. Note that my understanding of *yarruwa* differs from that of O'Grady and Mooney. (O'Grady and Mooney 1973:9 list *yarruwa* as used by a man when addressing his B in reference to BW, when B and BW are of alternate generations.) This has proved an elusive term to investigate and I am far from satisfied that I know all there is to be known about it. Perhaps part of the reason for seemingly conflicting evidence concerning its meaning is that it is used with a different meaning in at least one neighbouring language. In Martu Wangka *yarruwa* is used as the equivalent of Nyangumarta *pinaji*. It is not unusual for terms to be borrowed from other languages.

The term *punarri* 'father' is used between a woman and her brother's children to refer to their father (her brother).

O'Grady and Mooney list one other shared term of reference— *nyarrumpaji*—which is supposed to be rare and 'not La Grange

Nyangumarda'. I have been told that the word is Nyamal and the
corresponding Nyangumarta term is *partanguji*. I am not familiar with
either term. If I understand the explanation correctly, *partanguji*
is used between Ego and someone in her marriageable section to refer
to a brother or sister of the addressee.

This list of terms of reference is probably not exhaustive. In the
future more could come to light.

2.2 , RECIPROCAL TERMS

People of the same sex who are two generations removed from each other
use identical reciprocal terms for each other. A woman and her MM
(or her DD) address each other as *kamiji*. A woman and her FM (or SD)
address each other as *kaparli*. A man and his MF (or DS) address each
other as *jamuji*. A man and his FF (or SS) address each other as
karluji.

However, people of the opposite sex do not always use identical
reciprocal terms for each other. When children are young they do use
identical reciprocal terms with their grandparents. Thus a woman
calls all her daughter's children *kamiji* and all her son's children
kaparli regardless of their sex, and they reciprocate with the same
terms. Likewise a man has only two terms for his young grandchildren:
jamuji for his daughter's children and *karluji* for his son's children.

When the children reach adolescence, however, it is usual for terms
for them to be adjusted to show sex distinctions. A woman will
continue to call DD *kamiji,* but will call DS *karluji*, while both will
call her *kamiji*. She will still call her SD *kaparli* but her SS
jamuji, and both will call her *kaparli*. In the same way a man will
call his adolescent or adult DD *kaparli* while she calls him *jamuji*.
He will call his SD *kamiji* while she calls him *karluji*.

This may be the reason why O'Grady and Mooney (1973:4) show (for
northern Nyangumarta) Ego using all four terms for grandchildren.
But among the southern Nyangumarta each person has only two terms
for small grandchildren.

The mother-in-law to son-in-law relationship uses identical
reciprocal terminology. A woman refers to a man who is an actual
or potential spouse for her daughter as *marruku,* and he refers to
her as *marruku*. If he is too close to marry her daughter they refer
to each other as *walka-walka*.

Between a woman and her spouse or potential spouse the reciprocal
term *nyupa* is used. But if a man and woman are in marriageable sections
but are considered unmarriageable, they address each other as
jaluwal.

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2.3　　　DUAL AND PLURAL TERMINOLOGY

Nyangumarta has an extensive system of dual and plural terminology.
There are at least three different kinds of dual terms:

1. Duals and plurals may be formed by adding the ordinary dual and
   plural suffixes, *-jirri* and *-rrangu*, to singular kin terms, e.g.:

   pipijirri　　　　　'two mothers'

   pipirrangu　　　　'more than two mothers'

2. There are terms of reference for married couples which are
   derived from singular forms, e.g.:

   yakankarra　　　　'a married couple, one of whom is *yakan* to Ego'

   pinarra　　　　　'Ego's *pinaji* and spouse'

   yarruwarra　　　　'Ego's *yarruwa* and spouse'

3. There are paired terms for two related individuals, e.g.:

   rampanu　　　　'a man and his nephew'

   yalyjalirra　　　'two siblings'

The first two categories above are terms which are seen from Ego's
viewpoint, i.e. the terms are based on Ego's relationship to one or
more of the individuals referred to.　Examples I have of forms from
the third category show that these terms are not necessarily used
from Ego's viewpoint, as the examples given indicate.　Category
3 is a very large one and a thorough study of the subject is beyond
the scope of this paper.　The reader is referred to a long section
on dual and plural terminology in O'Grady and Mooney 1973: 9-21.

3.　　　　MARRIAGE

There are two possible correct choices for a marriage partner for
a woman.　One is the son of her classificatory mother's brother and
father's sister.　She may not marry the son of her mother's actual
brother or the son of her father's actual sister.　But she may marry
the son of a 'close' mother's brother.　The precise meaning of
walyja 'close' is not understood.　The other choice is a man who is
a classificatory *jamuji* — MF or FMB.　A man who is *jamuji* is still
in the same section as one who is MBS or FZS.

Sackett (1976:44-54) says that prior to contact the Aborigines of
the Western Desert had a prescribed marriage with MBD/FZD who was
genealogically and geographically distant, but now among the Wiluna

group the practice of getting a partner who is geographically
distant is less common. There is some evidence to suggest that among
the Nyangumarta the ideal marriage is still with a partner from
another community, but I have not had the opportunity to observe how
rigorously the practice is carried out.

3.1   WRONG MARRIAGES

Wrong marriages are tolerated, though not approved. No statistics
are available, but the proportion of wrong marriages is considerably
higher than Tonkinson observed among the Jigalong community (1974:51).

There is one way that a wrong union (not marriage) can be sanctioned.
If a woman's husband gives permission for his wife to have a boyfriend
she may have one who is not 'straight' for her, even while she con-
tinues living with her husband.

3.2   ARRANGEMENT OF MARRIAGES

The practice of promising a girl to a man while she is still an
infant is widespread even today. The promised girl is called his
pilyurr. What proportion of men actually marry their *pilyurr* I do
not know.

Marriages are arranged by the girl's parents in consultation with
others. An eligible man may be approached by the girl's parents.
But if he does not want the girl he can say so and the parents must
look elsewhere for a husband for their daughter.

In the past it has been the practice for a girl to be promised to an
older man who might have one or more wives at the time he married
the girl. An older wife was supposed to help the young wife not to
feel nervous and to teach her wifely duties. Young girls are still
sometimes given to older men. A few years ago an old man who al-
ready had two aged and feeble wives had a third young wife promised
to him. When her school days were over she moved in with the old
folk to care for them.

Another teen-aged girl was given to a middle-aged man of standing
in the group. He had been married previously and his children
were grown up. The girl was unhappy about the situation and ran
away more than once. The older man decided he would renounce his
right to the girl and he now has a middle-aged wife. The girl then
married a young man who was not straight for her.

3.3   POLYGAMY

Polygamy is not uncommon. A man may have two wives, and in one

case I have heard of three. These are recognised among the
Aboriginal community as valid unions.

There is no polyandry as such. But, as has already been stated, a
man may give permission for his wife to have a boyfriend. On the
other hand a woman may have a *yarungu* 'secret lover'. These secret
alliances cause disapproval. People who engage in such alliances
are regarded as trouble makers.

4.   KINSHIP BEHAVIOUR

A person's interaction with others may be marked by varying degrees
of restraint or familiarity. The relationship where the greatest
restraint is observed is between a woman and her son-in-law, the
marruku relationship. They are expected to avoid being in close
proximity with each other. A man avoids not only his actual
mother-in-law but any woman who is classified as such. The reason
for this avoidance is that a woman who is *marruku* has the potential
of producing a wife for him.

In the past if a woman and her son-in-law saw each other they would
pass at a distance and not address each other. These days not
everyone takes the matter seriously. Occasionally a woman and her
actual son-in-law will live in the same family group. But this is
not the usual practice and most men are still cautious about going
near a *marruku*. However a woman will not bother to avoid a *marruku*
if he is only a small child, and indeed will often play with him.

If a man from the section into which a woman's daughter should marry
is too close for marriage there is no need for such strict avoidance.
Instead of calling each other *marruku* they use the term *walka-walka*.

A man and his wife are expected to behave in a restrained fashion
towards one another in public, without any joking. The same applies
to any two persons who are in correct relationship for marriage.

In some cases where a man and woman would normally be expected to be
in right relationship for marriage, for some reason imperfectly
understood they choose to regard themselves as more like brother and
sister and not free to marry. I think the reason for this choice
may be that it gives greater freedom. In this relationship the two
may freely talk and joke together. Their term for each other is
jaluwal.

A woman is supposed to be stern with her daughter. On the other hand,
grandparents and grandchildren can be relaxed in each other's company.

5.   CONCLUSION

It seems probable that in the years since European settlement of the Pilbara there has been relaxation with regard to avoidance relation-ships and correct marriages. However, it is hard to make objective judgments on how much attitudes have changed, especially toward marriage, since we do not know the frequency of wrong marriages before settlement. It is evident that not everyone views wrong marriages lightly these days.

Not all the Nyangumarta live in the same sort of environment. Some live in a mission station situation at La Grange. At the other end of the scale, a large proportion live in a much more traditional society at Strelley. Then there are other groups whose relationships with Europeans are more relaxed than those of the Strelley Community. A few Nyangumarta people have even ventured to live in Housing Commission dwellings in Port Hedland or South Hedland. But I have not been able to discern that these different environments have made a great deal of difference in attitudes toward kinship ties. Even those who have moved out into the wider community keep in close contact with other Aboriginal groups and regard kinship ties as important.

Kinship ties go far beyond the bounds of those who regard themselves as Nyangumarta. There is a great deal of inter-marriage between language groups. People seem to adjust with very little mental effort to the differences in section organisation of the Yindjibarndi to the west and the Garadjari to the north-east.

It seems to me that social organisation as described in this paper still has a very pervasive influence in the life of the Nyangumarta people.

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