

A photograph showing four people, two white and two Indigenous Australian, gathered around a table. They are looking at a large, colorful map or aerial photograph spread out on the table. The setting appears to be outdoors or in a semi-enclosed structure with a green roof. The people are engaged in a collaborative activity, possibly land management planning.

Aboriginal Languages, Land Management and Cross-cultural Dialogue:

What role can language and linguistics play in
Indigenous land management.

Murray Garde, University of Melbourne

Theory and Practice

- What kind of language?
- What are the theoretical underpinnings?
- World view, grammar and the environment.
- What are the practicalities?

Language documentation in the context of land management programs is described here in the tradition of Boas and Sapir, whereby linguistic inquiry is central to an understanding of the cognitive and social practices of a society. Grammatical categories are seen as reflecting unconscious cultural patterns of thought and action, and provide insights into how humans structure perceptions of the world. Understanding how Aboriginal people manage land requires an understanding of how human ecology is encoded in language.

Culturally independent grammar-based view of language

- cognitive sciences
- generative grammar
- generalized and reductionist views of language
- social aspects of language regarded as marginalia or relatively unimportant

‘Language as cultural knowledge’ view of language

- social sciences
- language is a social construct
- language intimately linked to world view
- sub-disciplines of linguistic anthropology, documentary linguistics, ethnography of speaking, conversation analysis, ethnomethodology etc
- detailed cross-linguistic ethnographies of particular semantic domains
- subject-matter grammar (Pawley 2001)

- Vernacular of land owners/managers
- What happens when it's no longer spoken?
- Interactional significance

Talking about the natural world is embedded in social interaction, but it is also a form of social interaction. How do people talk to each other about the natural world in ordinary conversation?

- Registers, language of experts, language endangerment,
- Intergenerational transfer of detail from the oldest generations has largely been halted.

Of supreme significance in relation to linguistic diversity, and to local language in particular, is the simple truth that language— in the general multi-faceted sense— embodies the intellectual wealth of the people who use it. A language and the intellectual productions of its speakers are often inseparable, in fact. Some forms of verbal art— verse, song, or chant— depend crucially on morphological and phonological even syntactic properties of the language in which it is formed... even where the dependency is not so organic as this, an intellectual tradition may be so thoroughly a part of people's linguistic ethnography as to be, in effect, inseparable from the language. (Hale 1992:36)

Ken Hale, 1992. Language endangerment and the human value of linguistic diversity. *Language* 68(1):35-42

The loss of Indigenous knowledge about how humans once interacted with eco-systems in what are now more settled parts of Australia, has arguably left us with an impoverished range of adaptational management strategies.



Early burning ngarri-wurlhke ka-wurlhme kondah this Arnhem Land. Ngarri-wurlhke bu yekke, bangkerreng ka-yakmen.

Kunwern ngarrih-nani bu TV every city runguhrui bedberre. Eli arri-wurlhke man-wurk minj ngarri-djalbawon man-djewk dja man-djewk wardi ka-wurlhme.

Djarre ka-birlire wardi ka-bolkrung, dja Bininj kabirri-rung.

Kamak nganekke ngarri-djare yiman ka-yime ngayi nga-djare. Yawurrinj ba kabirri-durrkmirri kabarri-wokihme kamakNgarrbenbukkan yawurrinj ba bu kabirri-bengkan like ngad maitbi ngarri-danjik ngarri-dowen

Wanjh yawurrinj kabirri-bolknahnan kun-red. Karri-djarrkdurrkmirri Balanda dorreng, ba Balanda kun-wok bedberre dja ngad ngarri-bulerri kun-wok ngarri-wokdi

Dja Balanda ngandi-bidyikarme nawu ka-bengkan kun-wale dja kun-wok ngadberre, birri-wern Balanda minj kabirri-bengkan KunwinjkuBu ngayi nga-djare wanjh kunred Bininj ngarri-marnbun, dja Balanda, Balanda law or Bininj law, ngarduk law.

Here in Arnhem Land, we are burning the country early in the year before the hot season. Fires are lit early here.

A lot of times we have seen on the TV, homes in the southern cities have been destroyed by fire. That's why it's important to burn early (after the wet season) and not to let fuel build up year after year and that is what we do. If this is not done, the fires will travel all over the country for long distances and people will be injured.

This (fire management project) is a good thing and is something we have all wanted. I have really wanted to see this. Proper jobs! Our young people are finding work as rangers. This is a good thing!

We elders need to teach these young people, because when we have died then it's up to young people to look after the country

And we need to work together with non-Aboriginal people but using both languages. and working with people who are bi-cultural because many non-Aboriginal people do not know our language.

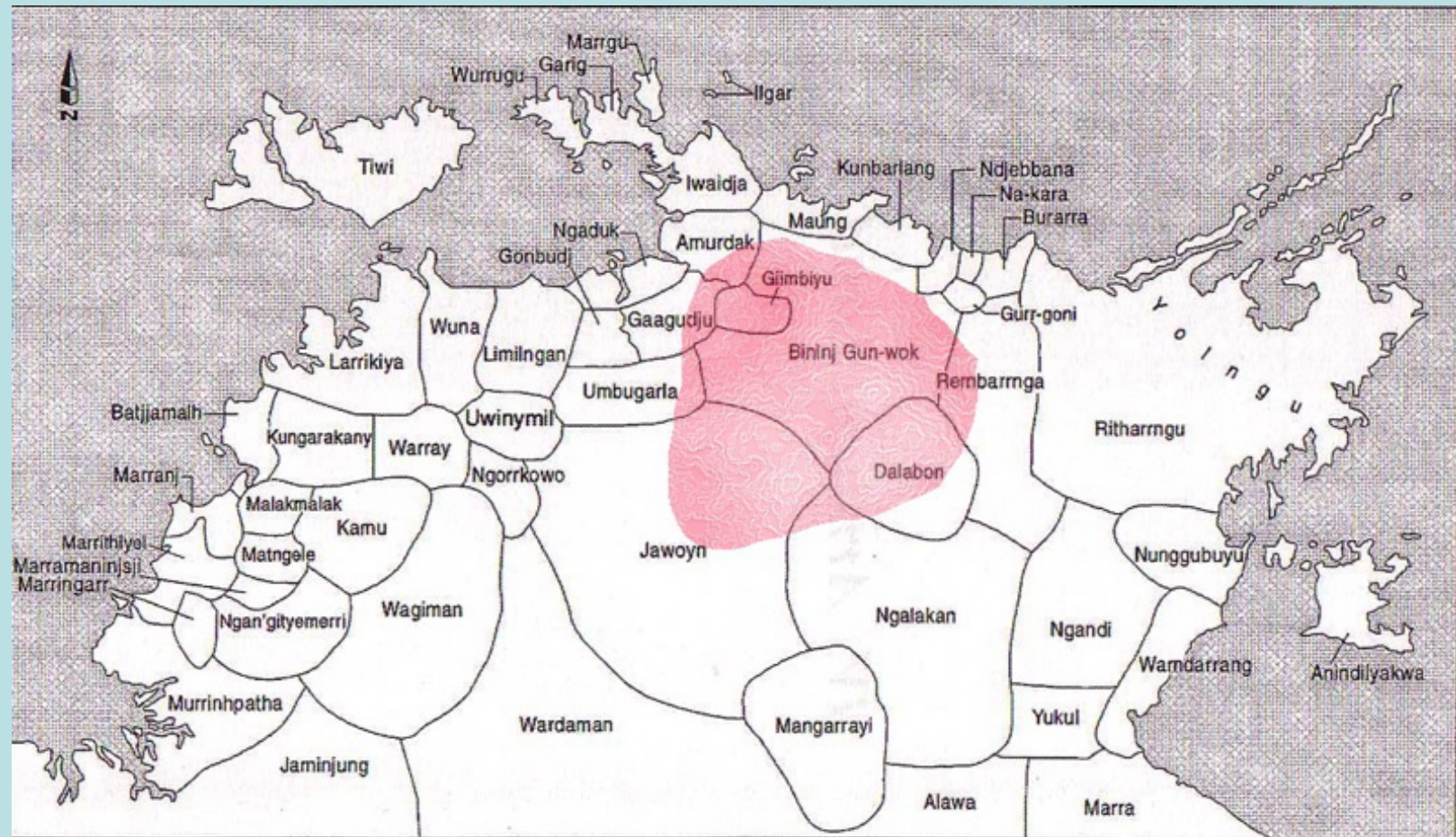
I want it that way. I wanted a place where both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are together — a combination of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal laws/culture.

(Lofty) Bardayal Nadjamerrek AO & Jimmy Kalarriya

Extract from ABC television Catalyst program interview, May 2006, Kabulwarnamyo.

Languages of the Top End of the Northern Territory

(Arnhem Land plateau shaded red)



Languages of the Top End

Current state of language diversity in Western Arnhem Land, Australia

Region: Coburg Peninsula

Summary: Majority of children are speaking an Australian language, but not one traditionally associated with the Coburg Peninsula. Bininj Gunwok (just to the south) is becoming the regional lingua franca.

Language & status:

Iwaidja- 150 speakers, some deeply knowledgeable. Major VW Foundation funded recording project just finished. Significant TEK recorded.

Marrku- **Extinct**. last full speaker died 2005, two people have limited knowledge. Grammatical sketch and some texts available, a few sound recordings.

Ilgar- **Extinct**. no longer spoken, a combined lexicon with Garig language contains about 800 entries, some limited grammatical documentation.

Garig- **Extinct**. no speakers survive, some recordings from 1960s and 1991.

Manangkardi- **Extinct**. no speakers survive. Almost no documentation exists.

Amurdak- one full speaker, one part speaker, one Honours thesis, some recorded texts, post doc. Research in progress.

Mawng- 150 speakers, grammar available, dictionary in progress, TEK recording planned in near future.



Region: Alligator Rivers & Kakadu National Park

Summary: Drastic reduction in linguistic diversity.
Kunwinjku, English or local variety of English are now lingua franca.

Language & status:

Limilngan Extinct. Descriptive grammar , small number of people still have some knowledge about the language but no speech community.

Umbugarla- Extinct. An honours thesis in linguistics. No other material.

Ngaduk- Extinct. Nothing recorded.

Bugunidja- Extinct. Nothing recorded.

Ngombur- Extinct. Nothing recorded.

Gaagadju Extinct. Last full speaker died about 10 years ago. Grammar, texts and lexicon recorded.

Erre- Extinct. Small number of audio recordings.
Salvage word list recently published.

Urningangk- **Extinct.** Some words remembered by one or two individuals. A few audio recordings from 1960s. Salvage word list recently published.

Mengerr- **Extinct.** Small number of audio recordings. Salvage word list recently published.

Gundjeihmi- **moribund**, maybe 15 speakers but no children are presently learning the language (instead learning North Australian Kriol, Aboriginal English or Standard Australian English). Dictionary in progress, good grammar and texts available, significant TEK recorded.



Region: Arnhem Land plateau

Summary: Varieties of Bininj Kunwok still viable but all other languages approaching extinction. All children are speaking an Indigenous language as mother tongue.

Languages & status:

Bininj Kunwok Viable. 2500 speakers (6 dialects), children learning. Grammar available, major dictionary project in progress, significant TEK recorded and TEK revival programs underway. However, some dialects are moribund and will disappear in the next generation or so.

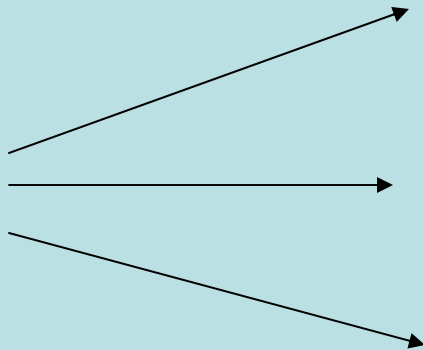
Dalabon- Moribund. About 15 speakers, grammar, dictionary and texts available, various academic papers, PhD thesis in progress.

Rembarrnga- Moribund. 30 speakers? No children learning. Grammar, dictionary, texts and sound recordings available.

Jawoyn- 2 speakers, approaching extinction. No children learning. Descriptive grammar, dictionary, pedagogic grammar, texts and some TEK recorded.



Some aspects of the
relationships between
world view, semantic
categories and linguistic
structure



Interpenetration of language
and one's experience
of the natural world

Ethno-biological classification

Sign metonymy

Aboriginal world views intimately link together land, natural species and human beings.

Individuals have rights and responsibilities in land management. These are expressed in language by social categories particular to Aboriginal languages.

Managing a sentient landscape means speaking not only about it but to it.

e.g. Kundangwok in Bininj Kunwok

This is the use of language to effect cosmological control e.g. safety from danger, maintaining abundance.

MK:(to the ancestor spirits)And ngudberre dabbarrabbolk korroko kondanj kun-red Ngayi kakkak ngayime ka-worhnan ngale kun-red an ngarrih-yo kondanj birri-kerrnge nga-benkan and yime 'yo' kun-red konda bu djawahdjawan ngudberre, dabbarrabbolk and ngadberre and kun-dedjwarreni kun-dedjwarreni namakwarrangelk namayhkurdihwarr and kun-red ngadberre kondanj ngayi wanjh djawahdjawan ngudberre dabbarrabbolk 'Aboriginal'. And maneh korroko bu ngurrih-di kun-red la nga-benbukkabukkan kabirrih-mang and kabirri-nan kabirri-nan kabirri-bengkan ba. But 'no 'law' nga-bengkan kondanj ngurrih-yimeng korroko dabbarrabbolk nga-bengkan kun-red mak marrek kandi-bolkwoyi ngadberre wolewole bu bim kandi-woyi ngadberre ngarri-bimbuyi konda kun-red la ngudman ngudberre dabbarrabbolk. Manekke djawan ngudberre dabbarrabbolk kondanj bu ngurrih-di kun-red kadberre ngad bonj. Nane birlmu, nakka kare dunbuhman.

[Addressing ancestors] You ancestors lived here long ago, here in my MM country where we sleep. Please say yes as I ask you so to show these new people this place. This place is all of ours, so I'm now using *Kundedjwarre* clan lect [to prove it to you], *namakwarrangelk* and *namayhkurdihwarr*. I'm asking you ancestors about this our country here, you old Aboriginal people. This place where you lived long ago, I ask you permission to show these new people who will photograph and look so that they will understand. But I know those things that are forbidden which you have said when on previous occasions when you gave these paintings to us and we also then painted here, here at your place, it belongs to you. That's what I want to ask you about ancestors, that concerning this country here which belongs to all of us. OK [now addressing the visitor].....That's a Barramundi and that might be a Black Bream.

Language about social categories and relationships to land and the inherent responsibilities certain social groups have to manage land is full of richly metaphoric terminology.

Bininj Kunwok

A traditional owner of a clan estate is known as *na-redweleng* (if a male), *ngal-redweleng* (if a female) and *birri-redweleng* (plural). Such a person would call an estate their 'father's country' and they collectively exercise the ultimate authority over such an estate. However, people also have certain rights in relation to their mother's country and both a person who calls an estate their mother's country and the country itself are referred to by the noun *karrardwarreken*. An alternative way of referring to one's mother's country is the verb [pronoun.prefix]+*bolkkuykme*. This latter verbal form of reference literally means '+to spray [from the mouth] on the country', the etymology of which refers to the ritual of a new visitor to a site being introduced to the ancestral spirits of that place by being sprayed with water by a person whose mother is a member of the land owning clan.

e.g. *nga-bolkkuykme*: literally, 'I spray [from my mouth] onto the country' > my mother's land

yi-bolkkuykme: literally, 'you [singular] spray [from your mouth] onto the country >
'your mother's land'

An alternative expression is: *nga-bolk-nunj-yo*: literally 'I-place-saliva-lie' > my mother's land.

kun-bolk 'land (generic)'

kun-red 'named site where humans camp'

kun-redkuken

'a named site known as a traditional or ancestral place of visitation/habitation'

ka-reddi (intransitive verb) 'a named site is located [there]'

reddorreng

'shifting of camp with all one's possessions, to move with the intention of camping at another place'

redweleng

'responsible for a place/tract of land, ie a traditional owner of a place'

Totemism- an intimate link between humans and natural species reflected in language:

Jawoyn:

Kayn- a prefix on plants and animals that designates a group or clan of people who are associated with the natural species marked.

Kayn-jalarr the people who have centipede as their totemic emblem

Kayn-pemang the people who have the frilled-neck lizard as their totemic emblem

Kayn-kurri the people who have the blue-tongued lizard as their totemic emblem

Kayn-wortngong'mi the people who have the *Cyclorana sp.* frog as their totemic emblem

Encouraging land managers to continue to learn the vernacular technical language of their 'trade'.



Landscape Terms

man-berrk 'open forest, savanna'

- openness and traversability
- opposition to *kuwarddewardde* 'rock country'
- opposition to riverine environments, such that to retriplicate the stem of the word (*m*)*an-behberrk* denotes a great expanse of woodland with no water.

Bininj Kunwok speakers talk about movement across the plateau in terms of walking from one creek, traversing a stretch of *man-berrk* and arriving at the next creek.

These semantic features can be deduced by seeing how the root *-berrk* is used in everyday speech and in compounds as in the following examples:

kanjdji 'inside' vs *ku-berrk* 'outside'

When you place the locative prefix *ku-* on the stem, the sense becomes 'outside' in opposition to 'inside', but even with the noun class prefix remaining, the word can still be glossed as 'outside':

Ku-berrk *karri-yo wardi karri-ladmen.*

Let's sleep outside otherwise we'll get hot.

Ngarrih-nang ***man-berrk*** *bidbom kinga.*

We saw that the crocodile had climbed up and out in the open (ie. out of the water).

Interpenetration of language and one's experience
of the natural world

The openness of these forests is in opposition to the dominating hindrance of *kuwarddewardde* 'the rock country' or *ka-ngarredubbe* 'impenetrable thickets' and Bininj believe that they have a role to play in keeping these forests 'open and accessible' by undertaking the annual landscape burning as they moved from *kun-redkuken* to *kun-redkuken* 'important camping location to important camping location'.



Human Affordances and Hindrances

Encoded in some terms are what might be called 'human affordances', that is, certain terms which index some kind of human interaction with the landscape or facilitate a cultural practice. The term *man-berrk* includes a sense of accessibility. It is a landscape you can walk through with ease (because you keep it that way by burning it regularly) as opposed to the notion of 'hindrance' encoded in *ku-warddewardde* 'rock country' or *ka-ngarredubbe* 'impenetrable thickets'. Other terms which encode human affordances, hindrances or human interaction with the landscape are the following:

bambarr n.

dead end valley, narrow gullies or slopes/screes leading to a cliff which are the sites chosen for fire drives to trap kangaroos which become injured by fire and can be easily speared.

Makka ngarri-di manekke kunj yiman ba kah-re man-bambarr ka-bidbun, yah ngarri-yame.

We stand there in them (the valleys), and if the kangaroos go up the narrow gully then we spear them.

kurrangmaye n.

the area just outside of the entrance to a rock shelter, an area just beyond the overhang of a rock shelter (typically a domestic space associated with a rock shelter)

Interpenetration of language and one's experience
of the natural world

-djulngbongun v.t.

prefix=kandi-, ngarrben-/ngarrban-

expression [literally 'drink dust'] signifying relative residence/land ownership on a watercourse i.e. upstream or downstream of the other community

Kandi-djulngbongun.

They drink our dust i.e. their land is downstream from ours.

Ngarrben-djulngbongun.

We drink their dust i.e. Our land is downstream from theirs.

ngalkmak prefix= ka-

n. [literally: 'it-cliff.good']

a cliff face which can be negotiated by foot without difficulty

Ka-ngalkwarre karri-kurduhme, ka-ngalkmak karri-kolung.

You have to walk around a sheer cliff face [to get down], but on a broken cliff face/accessible cliff, we can walk down.

antonym= *ka-ngalkwarre* [literally: 'it-cliff.bad']

Ethnoclassification

Baker, Brett. 2007. "11. Ethnobiological classification and the environment in Northern Australia". In *Mental States*, Schalley, Andrea C. and Drew Khlentzos (eds.), 239–265. John Benjamins.

- the great majority of botanical names refer to species, while genera remain unnamed
- this fact follows from the unique structure of the Australian flora, which is dominated by species from just a few very large genera
- taxonomic names are simple “monomial” names
- the binomial names characteristic of folk generics elsewhere (e.g. ‘red gum’) are not permitted in most Australian languages
- these characteristics are difficult to reconcile with the universals of folk taxonomy proposed by Berlin and associates (Berlin, Breedlove & Raven 1973; Berlin 1992)

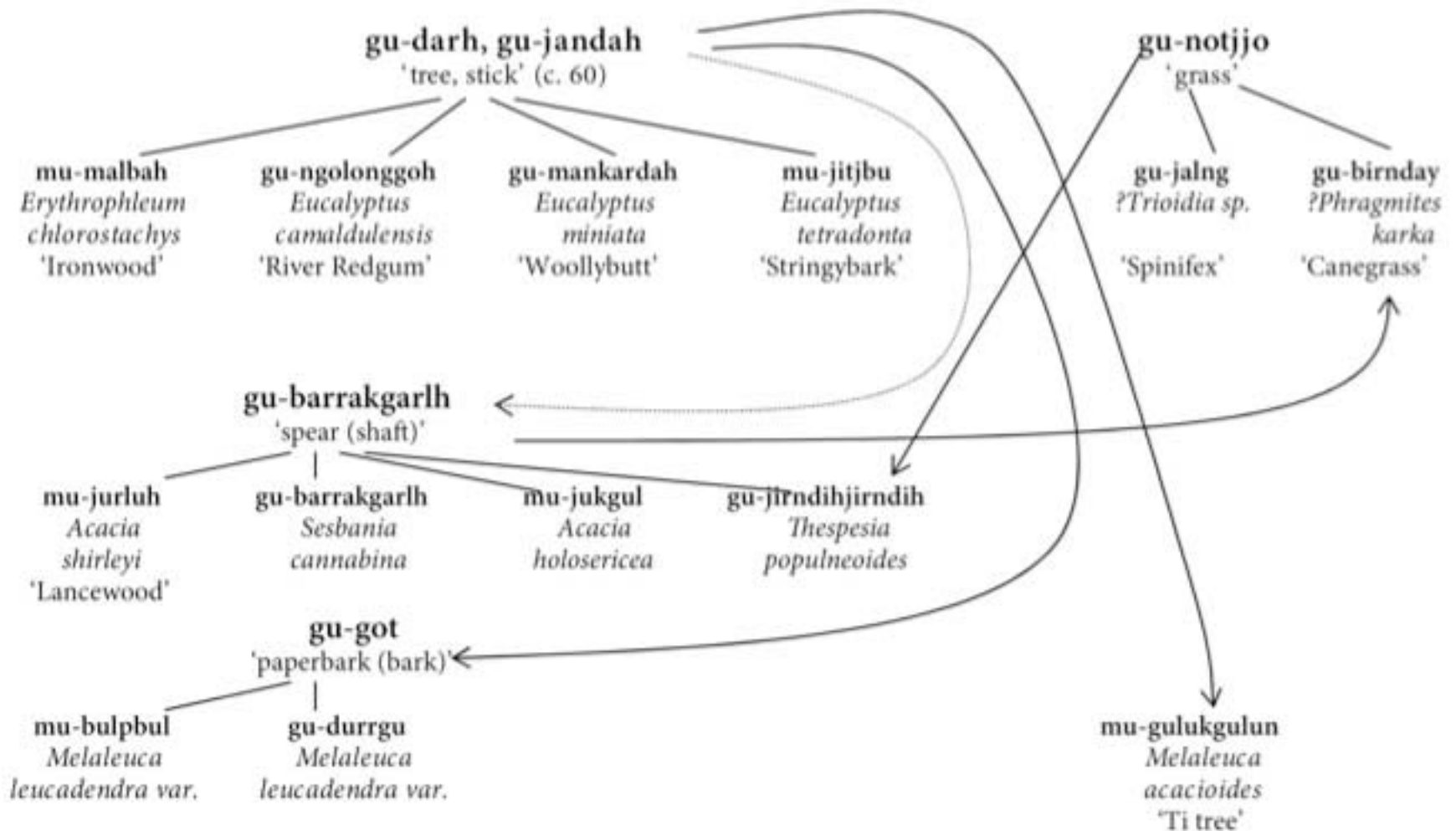


Figure 1. A fragment of the Ngalakgan folk taxonomy of plants

Sign metonymies

Metonymy:

word or expression normally used for one referent is also used of something associated with it.

Selection from Evans 1997:137-138 Sign metonymies and the problem of flora-fauna polysemy.

Rembarrnga:

Dawulukku 'spangled grunter fish'

Ki-dawulukku 'white apple tree *Syzygium eucalyptoides* spp. *eucalyptoides*

Anindilyakwa:

Yi-mundungwa 'cypress pine'

W-arningu-mindungwa-kba 'grey crowned babbler'

M-embirrkwa 'Cooktown ironwood tree'

Y-embirrkwa 'Venus tusk fish'

[m- and y- are different noun class markers]

Ritharngu:

Walpurrungu? 'plains turkey'

Walpurrungu?-ninin 'a tree, *Clerodendrum cunninghamii*'

Bininj Gunwok:

Kordow 'cottonwood tree, *Bombax ceiba*'

Ngal-kordow 'brolga *Grus rubicundus*'

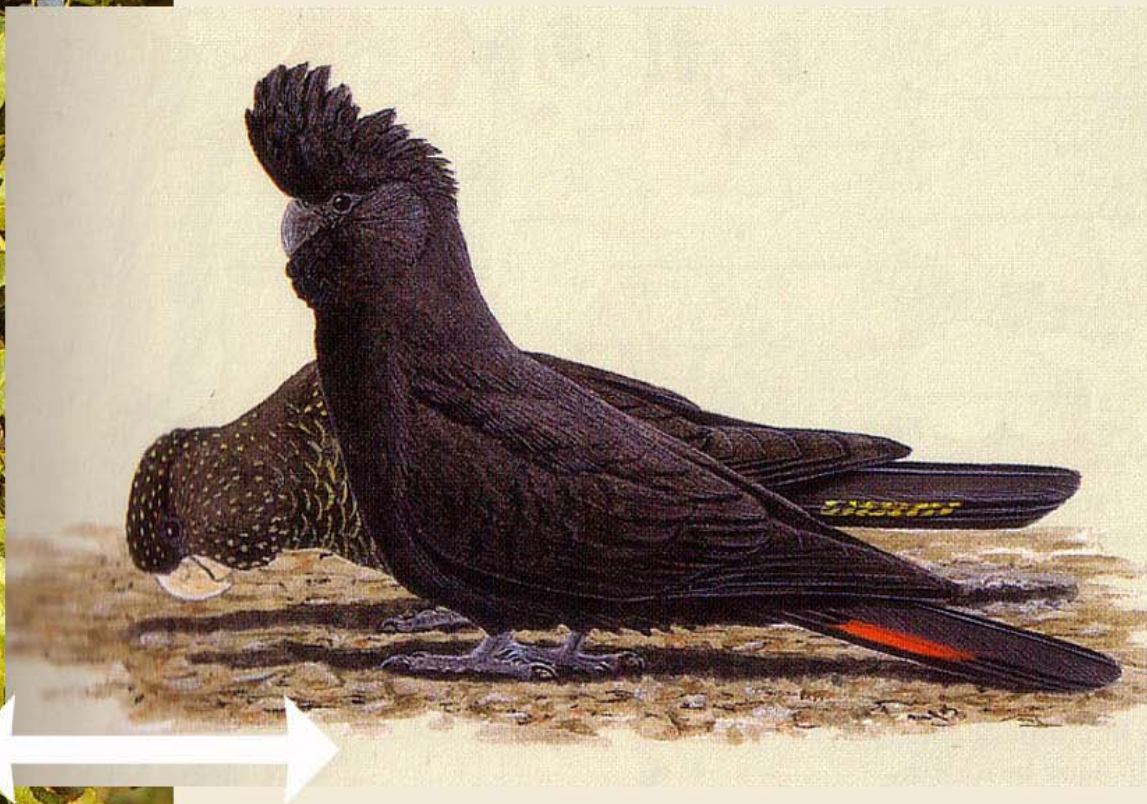
Yir Yoront:

Yo-pullpall 'cottonwood tree, *Bombax ceiba*'

Minh pulpal 'sarus crane, *Grus antigone*'



ngarnarrh



Sign metonymies



Sign metonymies



man-yawok

Cheeky yams

(*Dioscorea bulbifera*) were planted in the creation era by an ancestral being who is now in the form of the katydid or 'long-horn grasshopper' (also known as man-yawok) who walked across the country making holes with a digging stick and placing the yams into the holes.

practicalities

Cross disciplinary collaboration:

Indigenous experts, linguists, specialists from natural sciences, younger generations of land managers



Possible subjects.

- Botany, classification, plant uses, ecological change.
- Zoology, habitats, animal behaviour, diet, food processing, hunting techniques, totemic and religious significance
- Geomorphology, ecological zones, plant communities, 'ethnophysiography'
- Seasonal resources
- Toponymy
- Cultural mapping
- Fire management

Limitations

Ever dwindling number of Indigenous people with fine-grained ecological knowledge.

Role of the linguist:

- the linguist's understanding of how wide to cast the disciplinary net
- the politics of knowing things that younger generations don't
- culture of secrecy
- language often viewed (by non-Aboriginal land managers) as impenetrable and either not relevant or in the too hard basket

View of funding agencies.

Small speech communities.

Lack of school curriculum materials, compartmentalisation and lack of prestige.

Social dysfunction, disconnection between younger people and their traditional estates.

From Iwaidja:

rukburduka inyman inyman rukburduka
language DEM DEM language

karlu_maruka ri-ldari-ny inyman wularrud wularrud arru-larrikun kirrk bad kindi kud-ban-alakbin
nobody 3sgA>3O- put in-PAST language long time long time 1pl.incl-forget all but however 2pl-FUT-understand

kud-ban-alakbin ruka arraw-artama akud balanda inyman balanda inyman balanda inyman
2pl-FUT-understand DEM 1pl.incl>3sgO-follow always balanda language balanda language balanda language

Bartuwa kindi ngarrurri inyman bann-ayan balanda bana-min "aa!"
COMPL but 1pl.incl.poss language 3sgA>3sgO.FUT-see balanda 3sg.FUT-say "ah!"

"ng-alakbin ruka"
1sg-understand DEM

This language, the language I'm speaking now, nobody is recording this language. It has been spoken for a very long time, and now we're forgetting it all. But you need to know it, you really do. It is your language. We are always using Balanda language, balanda language, balanda language and nothing else. But if the Europeans were to read our language, they would say, "Ah!" They would understand.' (2002:11)

Big Bill Neidjie, *Riwudbarrki*.

Thoughts on traditional Iwaidja culture and park management, as told by Big Bill Neidjie, transcribed and translated by Bruce Birch in collaboration with Nicholas Evans. Consultancy Report to Kakadu National Park Board of Management. University of Melbourne.