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EULOGIZING A LANGUAGE: THE NGARNKA EXPERIENCE*

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Abstract

In 1996, I worked with what appear to have been the last fluent speakers of Ngarnka, a language of central northern Australia. To the best of my knowledge, the last fluent speaker passed away in 1997 or 1998. In 2000, I began to collect all available information on the language. This article describes some of the challenges that have arisen in working with a language during and after the final stages of its death, and examines some of the possible reasons for, and impact of, this kind of work.

1. Territorial, genetic, cultural and typological affiliations

Ngarnka, also called *Ngarnku* or *Ngarnji* (and sometimes *Ngewin*), was traditionally spoken in the Barkly Tableland, just east of where the Stuart Highway runs through the modern township of Elliott, in Australia's Northern Territory, half-way between Alice Springs and Darwin (see Figure 1).

Many aboriginal people in the area identify Ngarnka as an alternate name for Wambaya, but Neil Chadwick's work (1971, 1978, 1979) makes it clear that Ngarnka, as it was spoken at least until the 1970s, was a language related to but distinct from both Wambaya and Jingulu, though more similar to Wambaya. These three languages form the Barkly language group, the southernmost of the non-Pama-Nyungan (non-PN) languages. Chadwick (1997) argued on the basis of several morphological similarities that these language form a discontinuous family with the Yirram languages to the northwest (Jaminjung, Nungali, and Ngaliwurru), and named this the *Mindi* family, after the first person dual inclusive stem /mi(r)ndi/ which is unique to the languages in this putative family. If Chadwick is right, then the Mindi family is one of only two geographically discontinuous families in Australia (the Pama-Nyungan (PN) family

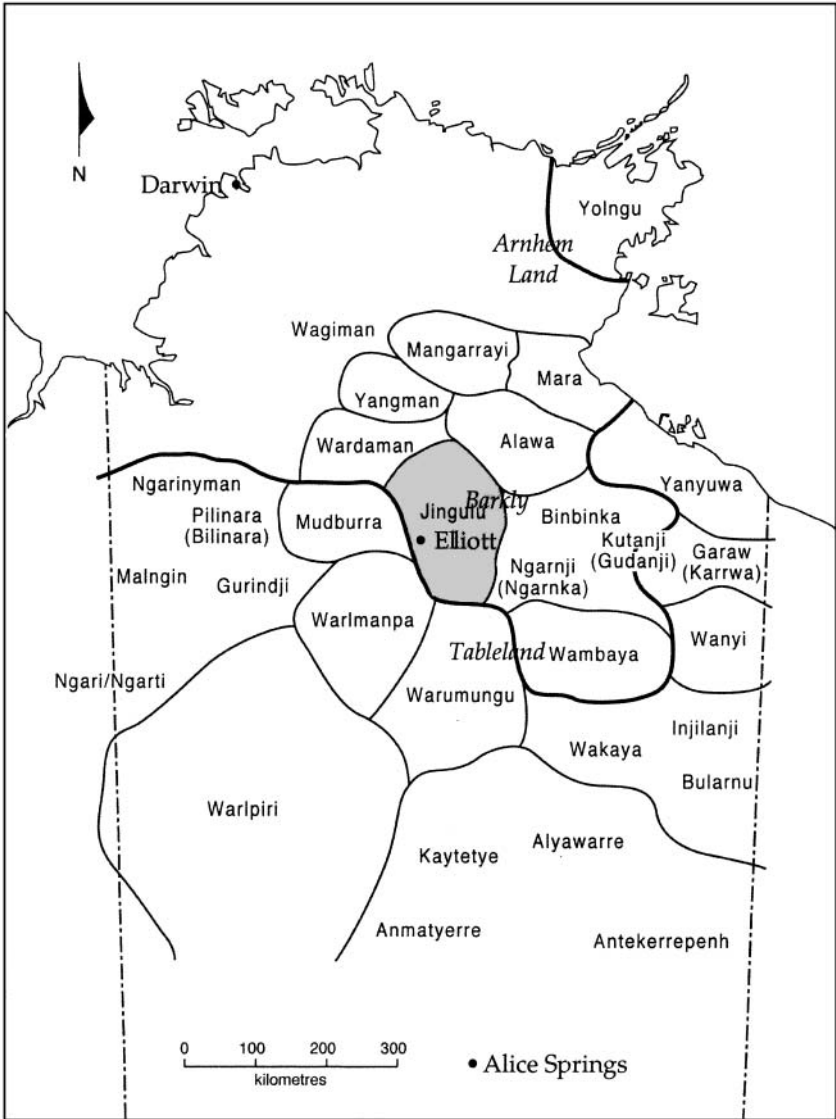


Figure 1. *The Barkly Languages and their neighbors*²

being the other, with Yolngu in Arnhem land being separated from other PN languages).¹

Culturally, the Jingulu, Wambaya, and Ngarnka language communities were often more closely tied to communities outside this group than to one another. Jingulu speakers are culturally fused with speakers of Mudburra, a PN language which came to the Barkly area between one and three hundred years ago. Eastern Mudburra and Jingulu speakers live together, marry freely among one another, and share ritual and daily life in all respects. All surviving Jingulu speakers (there are about a dozen) can speak Mudburra, though the converse is not true. From what I have been able to glean, western Wambaya and Ngarnka speakers had close cultural ties, sharing a ritual life, though Wambaya speakers to the east associated closely with Karrwa/Wanyi speakers. Ngarnka speakers apparently also had close cultural ties with Alawa speakers. Polyglossia is the norm in these communities, particularly among those born prior to the Second World War.

As to structural features, all of the Barkly languages are highly inflecting (nominal case suffixes, four morphological noun classes or genders, and verbal subject and object agreement) and show great freedom of word order, with extensive null anaphora (subject and object pro-drop) and NP discontinuity. They are *nonconfigurational* in the strictest sense of the word (see Pensalfini 2004). They all have an inflectional complex, which typically consists of (in order) subject agreement, object agreement, and a monomorphemic element encoding tense, aspect, mood, and associated motion. In Ngarnka and Wambaya this element follows the first phrasal constituent in the sentence (Wackernagel's position, or COMP in many modern theories). In Jingulu it forms a verb by suffixation to a lexical verbal root (if there is one, otherwise it forms a verb on its own), and the verb is freely ordered with respect to other words in the sentence (see Pensalfini 1997, 2003 for Jingulu; Nordlinger 1998a for Wambaya; and Pensalfini 2004 for a comparison).

2. Previous descriptive work on Ngarnka

To date, no grammar of Ngarnka has been published. In the century leading up to its disappearance, some half-dozen researchers collected Ngarnka data, usually in the course of work focused on other languages.

The earliest work of European scholarship on Ngarnka appears to have been Gillen's (1894–1898) comparative 200-item wordlist for Ngarnka, as well as the related Wambaya and Jingulu, and their southerly PN neigh-

bours Kaytetye, Arrernte, and Waramungu. Orthographic idiosyncrasies aside, Gillen's work seems to have been quite accurate.

The next significant collection of data was not until the 1960s and 1970s by Neil Chadwick and Jeffrey Heath. Heath (1975) collected some seventeen pages of Ngarnka materials. The most extensive work, however, is that done by Neil Chadwick, who published a wordlist and partial analyses of the morphology of Ngarnka (Chadwick 1971, 1978, 1979, 1997). This was done largely in the course of establishing genetic relationships among the Barkly languages and between these and other non-PN languages.

During the 1990s, Rachel Nordlinger and Luise Hercus both recorded Ngarnka spoken by Wambaya speakers.

3. The last speakers?

In 1995, I went to the Barkly for the first time, to expand the existing Jingulu wordlist into a dictionary. By this time, it was generally believed that there was only one speaker of Ngarnka living. This was the opinion held by both linguists and language workers in the area, and by the Jingulu speakers with whom I worked. The one speaker in question had been a renowned polyglot, speaking over half a dozen local languages fluently with smatterings of as many others. He had worked with linguists when he was younger. By the time I met him, he had a reputation for being difficult to work with, in part because he was becoming quite vague and impatient and drifted from language to another, or refused to work on a particular language some days.

In 1996, I returned to the Barkly to collect more data for the Jingulu dictionary, and to collect sentences and texts for a grammar I was compiling. This was one of my most rewarding field trips. I was welcomed warmly by the Jingili people I had met the previous year, and accompanied them on many trips to see their traditional territory, to hunt, and to gather food and plant samples.³ Many of the children of Jingulu speakers, people in their forties and fifties who are not themselves able to speak the language, expressed a renewed interest in knowing their traditional language, as a result of my work the previous year. Some of them had even learned a few phrases in the intervening year.

About a month into this trip, we had to go to Tennant Creek (about 260 kilometres south of where we were) for supplies, and one of my closest Jingili associates accompanied us, hoping to visit some of his relatives there. He introduced me to one old man, originally from the Barkly, and we established that he was actually a good speaker of Ngarnka. However,

this man was by nature shy and reticent, barely speaking to his closest friends (I was told), as well as being very difficult to understand when he did speak, and would not have made an adequate language consultant.

This old man had not been back to the Barkly in many years, and expressed a desire to go, so we took him back to Elliott with us. It was by fortune, then, that the last two speakers of Ngarnka were brought together. One afternoon, when both of these very old and infirm men happened to be together, I summoned up the gall to ask them if they would be willing to record some Ngarnka and to teach me some elementary sentences and words. The old polyglot agreed immediately, and the taciturn one shrugged. The combination proved to be an excellent one, with the former speaking at length, while the latter all the while would nudge him or pitch in with an occasional correction (*sotto voce*) if he strayed into another language.

On that trip, I only had the chance to work with them once, gathering a hundred or so vocabulary items and simple sentences demonstrating the main morphological paradigms of the language. I left determined to return as soon as I could to gather more information on Ngarnka, hopefully enough to write a short grammar. Unfortunately, as soon as I could was not soon enough: I submitted my doctoral dissertation in 1997 (Pensalfini 1997), and it was not until 1998 that I was able to return to the Barkly. When I got there, I found that both of the men I had worked with in 1996 had passed away.

4. Postmortem ethnography and partial speakers

In 2002, I received a grant from the University of Queensland to assemble all available materials on Ngarnka and compile a sketch grammar of the language (in progress). As part of this project I traveled to the Barkly to talk to some of the older members of the community in the hope of learning more about the traditional territories and affiliations of Ngarnka speakers.

This ethnographic study turned up some interesting and confusing findings. First of all, it revealed to me the fluidity of ethnonyms in this part of Australia. This fluidity was something I had encountered in my work previously, when attempting to determine the nature of the relationship between Jingili and Mudburra people. The Jingili referred to speakers of Eastern Mudburra as *Mudburra*, while speakers of Western Mudburra were *Kuwirrinji*, which is a form of *Gurindji* — the name of a language further to the west which is (linguistically) distinct from Mudburra. Eastern Mudburra speakers, on the other hand, do not use *Kuwirrinji* to refer

to Western Mudburra (which they also call *Mudburra*), but use it only for speakers of Gurindji.

In the case of Ngarnka, I found that many Jingili/Mudburra people used the term *Ngarnku* to refer to a variety of Wambaya. My main consultant told me that *Wambaya* and *Ngarnku/Ngarnji* were in fact identical languages, but that *Wambaya* was used of and by Wambaya people closer to Anthony Lagoon (eastern) while *Ngarnku/Ngarnji* was used of and by speakers closer to Elliott and the Stuart Highway (western). The terms *Ngarnka* and *Ngewin* were not known to people with whom I worked in 2002.

The same consultant mentioned above has been one of my main consultants for Jingulu over the years, and it was widely known that his mother had been Ngarnji (and his father Jingili). I hoped therefore that he would remember some simple phrases in Ngarnka. Indeed he did, and both Mary Laughren and I have collected some samples of Ngarnka from him. This data remains to be analyzed, but a preliminary inspection of what I have collected suggests indeed that his *Ngarnku* is actually Wambaya and not what I had collected in 1996 as Ngarnka. The two languages are quite similar, and his *Ngarnku* does have some lexical items that are Ngarnka and not Wambaya, but the inflectional morphology appears to be purely Wambaya.

5. The linguistic and political situation in the area

The surviving Barkly languages, Wambaya and Jingulu, each have under a dozen reasonably fluent speakers, all in their sixties and seventies. Ngarnka has no speakers, but there are a handful (perhaps half a dozen) people, all over the age of sixty, who can remember some simple phrases and vocabulary. None of these languages are used on a daily basis. This was apparent to me when I first went to the Barkly in 1995 to work on Jingulu — even the acknowledged “best” speakers of the language were very rusty, not having spoken it for over a decade in most cases, and it took them a few days to be at ease with some of the more complex morphology of the language. Jingulu is therefore now only spoken in the context of linguistic research, which must cast some doubts on the reliability of the linguistic information gathered.⁴

While surviving Jingulu speakers also speak Mudburra, and most Wambaya speakers speak either Mudburra or Karrwa/Wanyi, the primary means of communication, for them as for the descendants of Ngarnka speakers, is a form of Kriol. Kriol is the English-based creole of the ‘top end’ of Australia, which has close to twenty thousand speakers,

making it by far the most widely spoken indigenous Australian language. Most of the lexical and morphological items of Kriol have their roots in English words, but the morphosyntactic categories of Kriol, and the ways in which the language are used (its pragmatics), are distinctly aboriginal Australian. For example, Kriol, like local traditional languages, distinguishes dual from plural number (examples [1a] to [1e]) and inclusive versus exclusive reference for first person (non-singular) pronouns ([1b] and [1c]). Kriol, unlike English but like local languages, does not distinguish gender in pronouns (1f). Kinship terms, while based on English words and having forms like *mummy*, *auntie*, and *cousin*, are used classifi-catorily, in the context of the eight subsection systems and not in the English linear model (see Pensalfini 1997 for a description of Jingili kinship structure).

- (1) a. *Mi bin waak langa haami*
 1sg PAST work PREP army
 ‘I worked for the army.’
- b. *Yunmi jidaan langa riba*
 1dl(Inc) sit PREP river
 ‘You and I will rest/stop at the river.’
- c. *Mintubala numu bogi langa jat riba*
 1dl(Exc) NEG swim PREP that river
 ‘S/he and I don’t swim in that river.’
- d. *Yuntubala jidaan langa kemp na*
 2dl sit PREP kamp EMPH
 ‘You two stay in camp!’
- e. *Yumob lukimbat blanga uuman*
 2pl look_about POSS woman
 ‘You all are searching for women.’
- f. *Im na bin bogi-bogi atsaid langa riba*
 3sg EMPH PST swim-PROG deep_part PREP river
 ‘She was swimming in the deep part of the river.’

Example (1f) also shows that Kriol, like many traditional aboriginal languages, employs reduplication for purposes such as marking progressive aspect or repeated action. For further descriptive information on Kriol, readers are urged to consult Sandefur (1991).

Kriol, with as many regional variants as there were traditional speech communities, is also the fastest growing indigenous language in Australia, growing both in number of speakers and in geographical spread.

It is widely claimed by linguists that as languages disappear from the planet, so do certain ways of looking at the world, that certain kinds of cultural or intellectual information are lost to humanity. This is undoubtedly true in many parts of the world where local languages are replaced by standard varieties of colonizing languages and speech communities are assimilated into mainstream culture. The widespread use of Kriol throughout the Barkly and its status as a truly indigenous code, however, weakens any similar claim that we can make about the disappearance of local languages in this area. Flora and fauna terms, spiritual knowledge, complex kinship relationships, and the like are readily accommodated by the emergent indigenous code. Much of this knowledge is indeed disappearing, but that cannot be put down to the loss of the language alone, but rather to the loss of interest in the culture on the part of younger members of the community. Local speech communities are not fully integrated into mainstream Australian society, but rather exist as semi-independent “refugee camps” on the outskirts of modern towns and on excisions granted by pastoralists and the government. Traditional cultures limp along in this part of the world, with a new language of their own.

However, it is not true that *all* grammatical categories expressed in the local languages have reflexes in Kriol. The Barkly languages (unlike most of their neighbors) have a four-gender noun class system, and Kriol has nothing like this. The noun class systems of the Barkly languages encode culturally significant groupings of concepts that have no equivalent in Kriol or English. For example, birds and fish are typically masculine in gender, but marked members of these categories are feminine. Thus the word for “emu” is feminine, because as flightless birds they are atypical of their class. Likewise insects are typically neuter in gender, but the words for stinging insects, which atypically “bite with their tails,” are feminine. Other objects are classified by shape, with the result that all long thin items are classified as vegetable gender (the typical vegetables of the area being tubers), including the words for such things as road, nose, tail, and penis. Through a complex agreement system, all modifiers (adjectival and determinative) of a noun are marked with the same noun class, so that it becomes possible to omit head nouns entirely without loss of clarity or precision. These categories, as Lakoff (1987) suggests, reveal something about culture-specific organization of cognitive spaces, and for the speakers encode culturally salient distinctions. This strategy is not available in the languages that are replacing traditional ones.

Whenever I tell people that I work with Australian aboriginal languages, the question of the future prospects for these languages is eventually raised. People ask about the possibility of maintaining or revital-

izing the languages, and the answer is never simple. In the case of the Barkly languages, however, the answer is depressingly straightforward. The Ngarnka language is no more, and the Jingulu and Wambaya languages are moribund (there is no intergenerational transmission, with the exception of words such as plant names which have made their way into the local variety of Kriol). Mudburra is conceivably maintainable, but this would require an enormous upheaval of the educational and socio-political status quo.

What Mudburra would require in order to have a chance at survival is a *raison d'être*. The language is not being transmitted from one generation to another because the younger generation does not *need* to speak it. The language of power, of the media, and of school is English. English is associated not only with power but with being “cool,” as it is the language of popular culture. Aboriginal Australians are close to invisible in the media. It is common to see aboriginal teenagers in remote outback communities, seeking alternative role-models, dressed as gangsta rappers, complete with the “pimp” walk and hand gestures, and listening to American hip-hop music (their parents listened to reggae and country music). Australian media promote American images of counterculture as much as they do American images of mainstream culture. Aboriginal cultures, and thereby aboriginal languages, cannot but drown in this deluge. The loss of language is (unquestionably to my mind) a symptom of this cultural loss, and not its cause.

On reaching their thirties and forties, and parenthood, many aboriginal people that I met in the Barkly expressed a regret that they had not learned their traditional language. They hoped that their children would learn these languages, and because they themselves were not able to give them this knowledge, they looked to the school system to provide this through its language and culture programs.⁵ This is one place where, in theory, the descriptive linguist can enter the language maintenance and revitalization process, by preparing providing materials in conjunction with educators which can be used for language learning in the Western school.

In practice, however, this is not usually the case. Throughout the Northern Territory there were, in the 1990s, a band of dedicated “teacher-linguists” who, as their title suggests, were conversant in both educational and linguistic matters. These people worked tirelessly alongside both linguists and educators, and one teacher-linguist typically serviced a large number of schools. These positions have now been axed due to central budget cuts. Even during the heyday of teacher-linguists, the language programs suffered from serious challenges. As anyone who has studied a language at school knows, a few hours of instruction per week do not

help a person to learn a language if there is no place to use the language outside of that class. In the case of the Barkly languages, where the functional load of the language in the community is zero or close to it, pupils did not retain material from one week to the next. This was a source of great disappointment and consternation to the old men and women, fluent speakers of the languages in question, who were brought in to help with these sessions, and these speakers eventually stopped showing up to the classes as the “kids weren’t learning.” No amount of excellent materials or classroom planning will resolve this. The matter is, as Bobaljik and Pensalfini (1996) have argued, more one of politics than of language alone.

There is disagreement within the educational community as to the value of language maintenance. The value each school/district places on it is as much a product of individuals in the system as of government policy or community desire. To give a fairly typical example, when I first worked in Elliott, the headmaster (principal) of the school, Ian Hopwood, was enormously supportive of efforts to include traditional languages in the curriculum and of community-supported research. He allowed me to use the school’s resources to produce materials that would be of use to the school, he advised me on which community members had displayed the greatest skill and dedication for language work, he allowed me to use his personal vehicle to get out to more remote communities where I could work with the most fluent speakers, and he introduced me to key members of the community. On my second trip, a year later, he arranged accommodations and working space for me, which freed up both time and money to pursue intensive work with language speakers. In short, without Ian’s help, I would never have been welcomed as readily and easily into the Jingili/Mudburra community and could never have progressed as far as I did on the Jingulu dictionary and grammar in such a short time.

Two years after that, when I returned to the Barkly for the third time, Ian was no longer headmaster. The new headmaster was opposed to the teaching of traditional languages in the schools. He did not want to talk to me about my work or assist in any way. He did not see the pursuit of traditional culture as being useful to the aboriginal students. He himself was a physical education teacher, not a humanist, and he saw academic excellence and physical prowess, in the Western tradition, as the ways to economic betterment for the local children, and economic betterment was the goal to be pursued. Fortunately, I had already established myself as a member of the community so this did not hinder me in my work. Timing is everything.

Yet the new headmaster had a point. The majority of aboriginal people from traditional communities who have achieved success by Western

standards are sportspeople. Students who perform well academically or on the sporting field will have the opportunity of leaving the Barkly to go to good schools, to pursue sports at a higher level or, for the most minuscule minority, of getting a university education and going into a profession. These people will, more often than not, leave their traditional territory and move to the cities; and return only for brief visits if at all. They will be better off, economically, than their parents and grandparents, by far. They will never need to use their traditional languages. These Western measures of success ignore traditional economic, political, and spiritual values — yet it is far too easy for academic anthropologists and linguists to criticize this choice when we do not have to grow up amid the senselessness, squalor, and violence which I have seen in the refugee camps of the dispossessed people of the Barkly.

Language maintenance requires cultural maintenance. Cultural maintenance requires some degree of political and economic autonomy. Political autonomy for dispossessed people cannot exist under the tyranny of the majority that masquerades as democracy in the so-called “free world.” The system is set up to encourage people to succumb to the values and lifestyles of the majority, not to foster ethnic (and thereby linguistic) diversity.

Under the current political model, the most that can be done by a descriptive linguist (when he or she is not agitating for political change) is to document these moribund languages. This is essentially archival work, providing fodder for comparative, historical, and theoretical linguistics (which should not be undervalued as a goal in and of itself), but I cannot delude myself that I am helping to conserve or maintain the languages or cultures in any way.

Without a doubt, and as reported by Terrill (2002), the production of descriptive or pedagogical materials can by its very act lead to an increase in psychosocial confidence, to use Dorian’s (1998) term. To some extent, this has happened with Jingulu, among the middle aged descendents of Jingulu speakers. But this boost in confidence is not enough to counteract the overwhelming political and cultural climate described above, nor has it (yet) impacted on younger Jingulu people.

Some hope comes from a recent development in the Jingulu dictionary project. I had wanted to have the dictionary illustrated, so that it might have more appeal to members of the community, particularly younger ones. Greg Dixon, a linguist with Diwurruwurru-Jaru (the Katherine Regional Aboriginal Language Centre) and a student at the University of Queensland, is negotiating to have children in the Elliott school create the illustrations for the dictionary. The hope here is that this level of tangible involvement in the language documentation process might instil in the

students a sense of pride in their traditional language(s) and a sense of hope through direct involvement in the documentation process that may lead to maintenance activities.

6. The linguistic significance of Ngarnka

Despite points made in the previous section, I believe my project of sketching the grammar of Ngarnka to be a worthwhile one, at least from the point of view of academic linguistics. Ngarnka is potentially a key link in a typological and historical chain along the PN/non-PN boundary in northern Australia. In recent years, many linguists have begun to question how distinct these two groupings of languages are, with Dixon (1997) going so far as to deny the genetic distinction altogether.

Languages north of the putative boundary are typified by weak (or nonexistent) systems of case-marking and rich pronominal agreement on verbs, typically prefixing. Languages south of the boundary have rich case systems, and where they do make use of pronominal agreement, this is suffixing.

The Barkly languages make use of both extensive case-marking systems and rich agreement systems. Like their neighbor non-PN languages, agreement is prefixed to a verbal element, except that in the Barkly languages it is prefixed to an auxiliary-like element (as in many PN languages) and not to the lexical verb. Among the Barkly languages, Jingulu most closely resembles the non-PN neighbors in having agreement closely linked to a lexical verbal element, while Wambaya is more like PN languages such as Gurindji and Warlpiri in having the agreement-auxiliary complex separated from the lexical verb, occupying a fixed position in the clause. In other words, the typological split within the Barkly languages straddles the types usually associated with each side of Australia's major genetic boundary.

In the midst of this lies Ngarnka, which may well be the missing color in this spectrum. While it is usually like Wambaya, in placing the agreement+auxiliary complex in second position in the clause, under certain combinations of tense and mood it behaves like Jingulu, with the agreement+auxiliary complex phonologically suffixed to the lexical verb stem, which can occur anywhere in the clause.

The Barkly languages have also provided some of the most interesting recent insights into the perennial (non-)configurality issue, with Nordlinger (1998b) and Pensalfini (2004) taking up different analyses. Nordlinger's analysis is largely based on the facts of Wambaya, and Pensalfini's on Jingulu. It will be interesting to see what evidence Ngarnka,

as a language that lies between these two, probably both genetically and typologically, will bring to bear on this and other theoretical questions.

7. Conclusion: whose linguist am I?

I am vexed by the question of who benefits from linguistic work on moribund languages. Working on Ngarnka, I have a clear academic mission: to document a language. When I started on this mission, the language had few speakers. I had barely begun my work when they died. There are now a small number of people who had first-hand contact with native Ngarnka speakers. There is a clear sense of urgency, which lends a certain fervour to my endeavors to document everything I can about this language. I am equally clear about the potential benefit to the Western academic community of this work being carried out.

I would like to believe that my work is also of some use socially; that it is of some value to the descendants of the speakers of the language. I would very much like to believe that I have somehow given something back to the community, and not just been the last in a long line of exploiters (first those who took their land and resources, then those who took their knowledge of local plants and animals), picking over the bones of a disappearing culture to build my career. I have painted a rather futile picture of the social value of describing a terminally moribund language in this article, and I desperately wish I could be more positive.

It is true that some of the older speakers and semi-speakers of Jingulu have held copies of the draft Jingulu dictionary in their hands with great pride, even those who could not read. This is theirs or their parents' language, their people's language, in tangible material form. They thank me for that. But this gratitude in itself has a bittersweet quality — the community values the work I do because it qualifies their language according to Western values: our language exists, whether we speak it or not, because it is in a book.

I believe, however, that I have done some work of social value, when I have taken the knowledge that I have gained, both in the field and from books, and put it to use in arguing the case for recognition of emerging varieties (Kriols and Aboriginal English) in the legal and educational systems. In the year 2000, I was involved in a project of the Queensland department of Justice which produced a handbook for judges, lawyers, jurors and police officers, explaining in lay terms the differences between Standard Australian English and Aboriginal Englishes, the misunderstandings that can arise in legal proceedings as a result of these differences, and how these might be avoided. The project is now being emu-

lated by other states. This kind of work has clear social value and benefits to speakers of Aboriginal Englishes.

In the academic world, however, the kind of work described above is considered less important than, and an accidental by-product of, my collecting, analyzing and theorizing over linguistic data. When it comes to calculating funding ratios, assessing impact and quality of research, the theoretical article and the reference grammar are valued much more highly than materials, which can be used for the direct benefit of speech communities. For example, in calculating funding to my department, five points are assigned to an original authored scholarly book, one point to a refereed journal article, and absolutely nothing, zero points, to the kind of work described above. Even where academic linguists would like to be of use to the communities from which they draw the resources for their career, the pressures and priorities of the academic world mitigate against this.

Even in the academic world, then, as in the speech communities, the matter is sociopolitical. Endangered languages require a shift in sociopolitical context more than just adequate linguistic resources in order to survive. Similarly, those who have the knowledge and desire to help communities maintain their languages must demand that this kind of endeavor be recognized on a par with the advancement of scholarship.

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Notes

- * Thanks to Nancy Dorian, Mary Laughren, and Rachel Nordlinger for information and suggestions. Special thanks and much love go to the Jingili people for all that they have given me. My heart is too poor to repay them all I owe.
1. Within the PN family there is one known discontinuous grouping — Warluwaric, in which Yanyula is separated from other members of the group.
 2. This map, showing the Northern part of Australia's Northern Territory, is based on one which originally appeared in Pensalfini 2003 and is reproduced with the kind permission of Pacific Linguistics. The heavy line represents the boundary between Pama-Nyungan and non-Pama-Nyungan languages. All language boundaries are approximate.
 3. The term *Jingili* refers to the people, while *Jingulu* is the name of the language.
 4. However, working on a language in such an advanced state of attrition also reveals some interesting properties about the language faculty. Underlying systems of the language can become more apparent, and advanced attrition often accelerates language change, even resulting in the development of new morphological categories. Two examples from Jingulu are the widespread occurrence of gender “disagreement” revealing the underlying hierarchy of noun classes (Pensalfini 2000) and the rising use of case markers as indicators of pragmatic prominence (Pensalfini 1999).

5. This reminds me of my experience with immigrant communities, where the second generation of immigrant families, having turned away from or ignored their ethnic affiliations and languages, “re-discovered” their ethnic identities later in life. They commonly expressed regret that they had not kept up their language, and hope that their children might learn these languages in school. One difference between these groups and most aboriginal communities is the availability of pedagogical materials and opportunities on the languages in question. Italian and Chinese, for instance are taught commonly in schools throughout Australia. However, a much more salient factor is the status and prestige of these immigrant languages: television and radio shows in these languages are not uncommon, and the languages are associated with highly visible independent states, unlike indigenous Australian languages. In some parts of Australia there are radio stations that transmit in traditional aboriginal languages, but this is not the case in the Barkly.

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