

Frs. Herman Nekes and Ernest Worms' Dictionary of Australian Languages, Part III of *Australian languages* (1953)

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1. Introduction

After half-a-dozen years of frustrated attempts to publish his and Fr. Hermann Nekes' *Australian languages* in Australia, Fr. Ernest Worms (the surviving author) finally secured its publication in microfilm form by Anthropos, in 1953. This manuscript represents the culmination of research on Australian languages begun in 1930 by Fr. Worms, and continued in an intensified form in 1935 with the arrival of his former teacher, Fr. Nekes. The two men collaborated during the mid to late 1930s in recording data mainly on Dampier Land and nearby languages in Broome and Beagle Bay Mission. Later, in the 1940s, Fr. Worms visited other parts of Australia, and recorded information on a variety of languages (see Figure 1) and cultures, focussing his studies on religion.

The purpose of this paper is to describe and evaluate one portion of Nekes & Worms 1953, the substantial wordlist or dictionary that makes up the bulk (almost 75%) of the manuscript. The structure of this dictionary will be described both at the macro-level of organisation and contents (lexeme selection) and the micro-level of entry format; these will be linked to the authors' notions of morphology, syntax, semantics, and etymology. The dictionary will also be situated in relation to contemporary lexicography, and evaluated in terms of the quality of scholarship it represents and its significance to modern concerns.

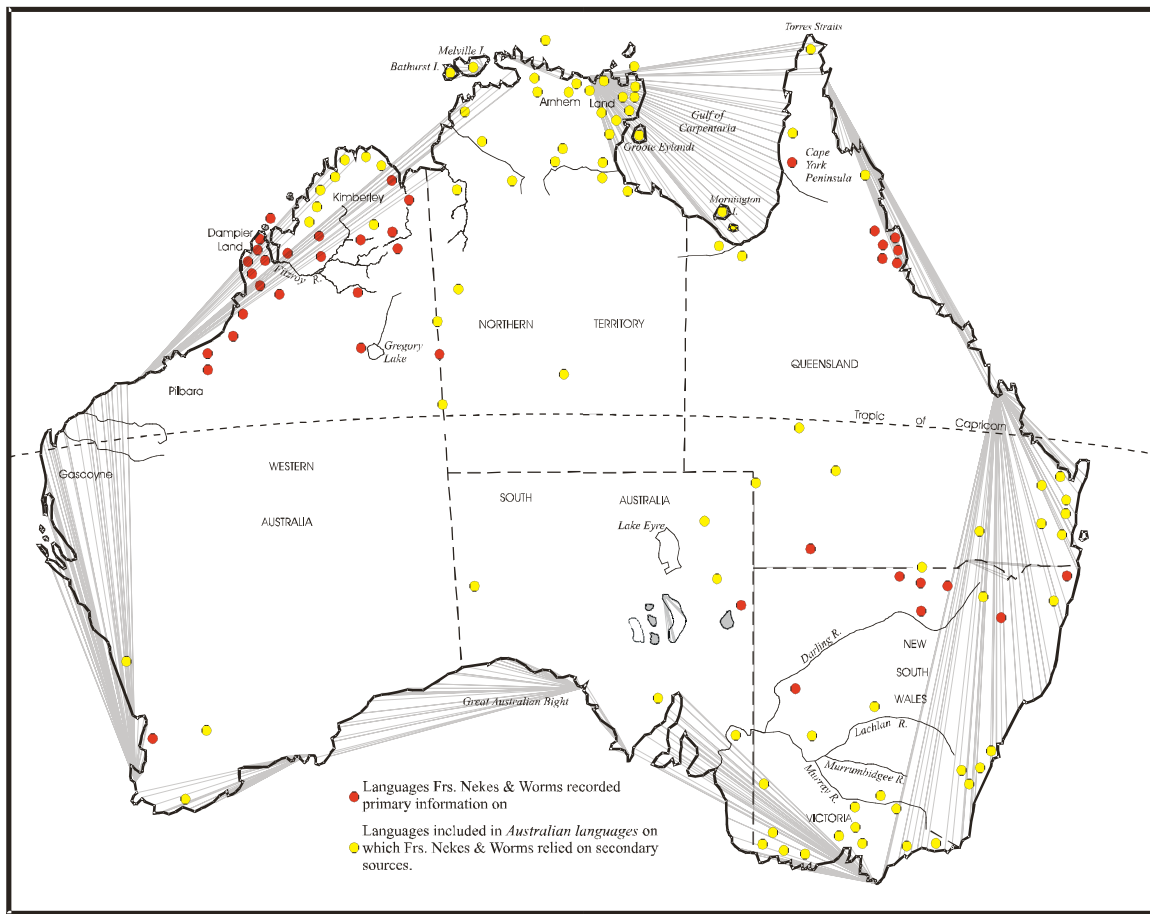


Figure 1 Map showing languages Frs. Nokes and Worms investigated

2. Nokes and Worms’ *Australian languages*

Nokes & Worms 1953 is a singular document both in conceptualisation and contents. Despite the title, it is not a survey of Australian languages. It can perhaps be best thought of as a pan-variety description of Nyulnyulan languages, with a generous measure of data from other languages thrown in. But it does not perfectly fit this mould, as the authors, while realising that the Nyulnyulan languages belong together as a subgroup within the prefixing languages, do not systematically distinguish them from nearby languages, especially from the Pama-Nyungan language Karajarri (a suffixing language). This mars the overall execution of a not unreasonable goal, a pan-Nyulnyulan grammar.¹

Australian languages presents some of the best or only extant information on several moribund and almost moribund languages (e.g. Jabirrjabirr, Nimanburru, Jawi), as well as original information gathered by fieldwork on a number of other languages. Thus, it presents some of the earliest recorded data on Queensland rain-forest languages. There is nothing new or noteworthy about the classification of Australian languages: the authors

¹ I am not suggesting that the authors had this goal specifically in mind. In fact, I am confident they did not. They remained equivocal on the nature and scope of the work they were composing. As a result, the book in places tends to become a diffuse listing of everything they knew about Australian languages.

adopt a version of Capell's typological classification without question or discussion. In this respect the work contrasts sharply with Fr. Schmidt's *Die Gliederung der australischen Sprachen* (Schmidt 1919), which presents no new data, but puts forward the first systematic classification of Australian languages. Nor, from today's perspective, is there anything noteworthy in their grammatical analysis or theoretical perspective: the authors adopt description in terms of traditional grammatical categories. To their credit, however, they did not attempt to squeeze the languages mindlessly into the traditional categories, but grappled more or less successfully with problems posed by the languages.

The main domain in which the authors had a theoretical axe to grind was semantics. Fr. Worms in particular took a rather radical Whorfian perspective, believing that investigation of lexical semantics and etymology would reveal the Aboriginal mind at work, the Aboriginal conceptualisation of the world. This is one of the main reasons why the lexicon looms so large in their work.

The authors also believed that investigation of the languages — including etymologies of words — would reveal something about the prehistory of occupation of the continent. However their thinking in this domain is not easy to comprehend, partly because they do not distinguish very clearly between the history of languages and the history of their speakers, or between synchronic and diachronic perspectives. Nor did the authors apply the comparative method to reconstruct the history of the languages. They did not attempt to establish cognate sets as a step in reconstructing proto-languages. Rather, they identified “syndromes” of phonetically and semantically related words that, in their view, demonstrated the Aboriginal way of thinking. Often they considered that such related words were not retained from a proto-language, but represented borrowings. Indeed, borrowing of lexical items and cultural traits looms large in their thought, and it is not unfair to say that they anticipated the modern focus on borrowing by some decades.²

Whilst Nekes and Worms were fascinated in the etymology of words, this interest was very much restricted to specific lexical items in isolation. The histories of the individual words were not immediately and directly connected with the history of languages. This fits with the overall orientation of the authors to words, which is also manifested in the organisation of the grammar, and their focus on the dictionary.

These two considerations — the unity of Aboriginal conceptualisation of the world (including religious beliefs) and the prehistory of the continent — are, it seems to me, the main motivations for the pan-Australian perspective the authors adopted.

² The difficulty is that (aside from the fact that they do not use the term *borrowing*) they do not make it very clear that this is in their opinion the primary mechanism of linguistic and cultural change. The following quote from Fr. Worms' description of the book bears out this remark with uncharacteristic clarity:

Each word is ear-marked by the abbreviation of that tribe or those tribes where it has been discovered. This identification occasionally reveals the existence of more than one signification for the same term which is sometimes a good indication of external tribal connection. Such communication is often maintained through the practise of marrying women of other tribes whether near or distant. The present members of a tribe in many instances have forgotten the fact that these words were introduced into their own language from elsewhere.” (Worms 1953: 964).

So much for the general background. The manuscript of *Australian languages*, which runs to just over a thousand typed pages, is divided into five parts, constituted as follows:

Part I, *Grammar of prefixing and suffixing languages of the southern Kimberley*, deals with grammar, focussing in particular on Nyulnyulan languages. This part is relatively short, and counts for a bare 20% of the manuscript.

Part II, *Dictionary English–Native Languages*, is a finder list of words from English to Aboriginal languages. This part consists of just over one hundred pages, alphabetically organised by English headword. Other than indicate the provenance of each word, no further information is provided.

Part III, *Dictionary Native Languages–English (A Paradigmatic Syntax)*, accounts for over six hundred pages, and consists of an alphabetically arranged list of words from a variety of languages, primarily (though not exclusively) from the far north-west. A considerable number of example sentences illustrate the headwords.

Part IV, *Comparative Dictionary of Australian Pygmoid Languages*, is a wordlist in half a dozen Cairns rainforest languages, gathered by Fr. Worms in the 1940s. Words from each language are enumerated in a single list alphabetised by English headword. This part makes up only about thirty pages of typescript, i.e. 3% of the work; in addition there are a few pages of discussion of the origins of the “Pygmoid” peoples, and linguistic relations to other parts of the continent. This part is excluded from the present article.

Part V, *Aboriginal texts*, contains transcriptions of a selection of texts of various genres in a number of languages.

3. Parts II and III of *Australian languages*

We now turn to our main topic, the wordlists of Parts II and III. I begin by situating Nekes and Worms’ work in its times. Then I zero in on their work, outlining the overall conceptualisation and execution of the dictionary. Then I look selectively at a few details.

3.1. Relation to contemporary and previous dictionaries and wordlists

In his history of lexicographical research on Australian language Geoffrey O’Grady lists *Australian languages* as one of only eight dictionaries of Australian languages published prior to 1971, where by *dictionary* is meant a wordlist that satisfies the requirement that it has over a thousand headwords (O’Grady 1971: 779).³ In fact, according to this definition, *Australian languages* contains no fewer than seven dictionaries — it presents intertwined between two covers as many dictionaries as were elsewhere published prior to 1971! Thus O’Grady describes it as “a multi-language comparative dictionary of considerable scope” (O’Grady 1971: 780).⁴

3 O’Grady adopted this weak conception of dictionary since otherwise no work could have been classified as a dictionary at the time he was writing. It was not until the 1990s that reasonably comprehensive dictionaries of Australian languages began to appear (Goddard 1997:178).

4 It needs hardly be said that the wordlists of *Australian languages* bear little resemblance to popular wordlists such as Ednacott 1924/1990 and Reed 1965/1974, beyond the fact that words from diverse languages are listed together in a single alphabetical list. In accuracy, content, conception, and every other respect, Nekes & Worms 1953 far surpasses these popularisations.

Other than *Australian languages*, just one of these eight dictionaries falls into the period 1930-1960, the dictionary of Gumbaynggir appearing at the end of W.E. Smythe's grammar (Smythe 1952).⁵ Smythe's dictionary is divided into two parts, English to Gumbaynggir, and Gumbaynggir to English. The latter contains just over a thousand headwords, making it about half the size of the Bardi and Jabirrabirr wordlists in *Australian languages*, and around two thirds the size of the Nimanburru, Nyulnyul, Yawuru, and Karajarri wordlists.

Conceptually, the organisation of Nekes & Worms 1953 makes more sense: the English to Aboriginal languages section is basically a finder list, the detailed information being contained in the Aboriginal languages to English list. By contrast, in Smythe 1952 the English to Gumbaynggir section contains the grammatical information (conjugation class for verbs, declensions for nouns),⁶ as well as the few illustrative example sentences provided. Part III of *Australian languages* contains fuller explications of the meanings of words, as well as many more example sentences. On the other hand, it does not consistently provide grammatical information on the lexical items, such as part-of-speech membership, or membership of verbs to conjugation classes.

In terms of number of headwords for the best represented languages, Part III of *Australian languages* is perhaps better compared with the four dictionaries published in the nineteenth century, each of which had between 1800 and 3000 entries. My impression from the descriptions of these works (which I have not actually seen) is that their coverage of the major semantic domains is roughly comparable with that in *Australian languages*. George Fletcher Moore's dictionary is notable for its extensive coverage of bird names (about 150 terms across the various dialects), which surpasses Nekes' and Worms' coverage. But unlike Smythe's and Nekes and Worms' wordlists, the four nineteenth century wordlists had no English finders.

Moore's dictionary of Nyungar (Moore 1842), consisting of 1952 headwords, is noteworthy for the encyclopaedic ethnographic information it provides (O'Grady 1971: 795-796, Moore forthcoming). Nekes and Worms' dictionary is somewhat less comprehensive in terms of the ethnographic information it provides, although it does give a considerable amount of information, albeit very tersely expressed. However, more detailed ethnographic information can be found in other publications by Fr. Worms, which are sometimes cited in the dictionary entries.

5 Some unpublished dictionaries were compiled during these three decades, including a dictionary of Worrora by J.R.B. Love (Love 1939, 1941). Norman Tindale gathered quite extensive wordlists in a variety of different languages (Monaghan 2003). T.G.H. Strehlow had begun a comprehensive dictionary of Arrernte in the 1950s, which was expected by some to eventually contain up to 30,000 words. By 1957 it contained 3160 entries, and was still growing. Unfortunately the project was never completed; see Moore 2003: §6.5 for details. A number of shorter wordlists of varying quality were published by both amateurs and professionals; a fair number of wordlists, mostly quite short, appear in Arthur Capell's survey articles and unpublished manuscripts.

6 Eades 1979, however, is quite critical of this aspect of Smythe's analysis, referring to the conjugation and declension classes as the "worst aspects" of the grammar (p.258): in fact, almost all nouns and verbs are regularly inflected according to a single paradigm, with phonologically conditioned allomorphy; just a few verbs are irregular. She puts the problem down primarily to Smythe's lack of understanding of Gumbaynggir phonology. In fairness to Smythe, it should be remarked that phonology was best incipient in Australianist linguistics of the 1940s, and did not become well established until the 1960s.

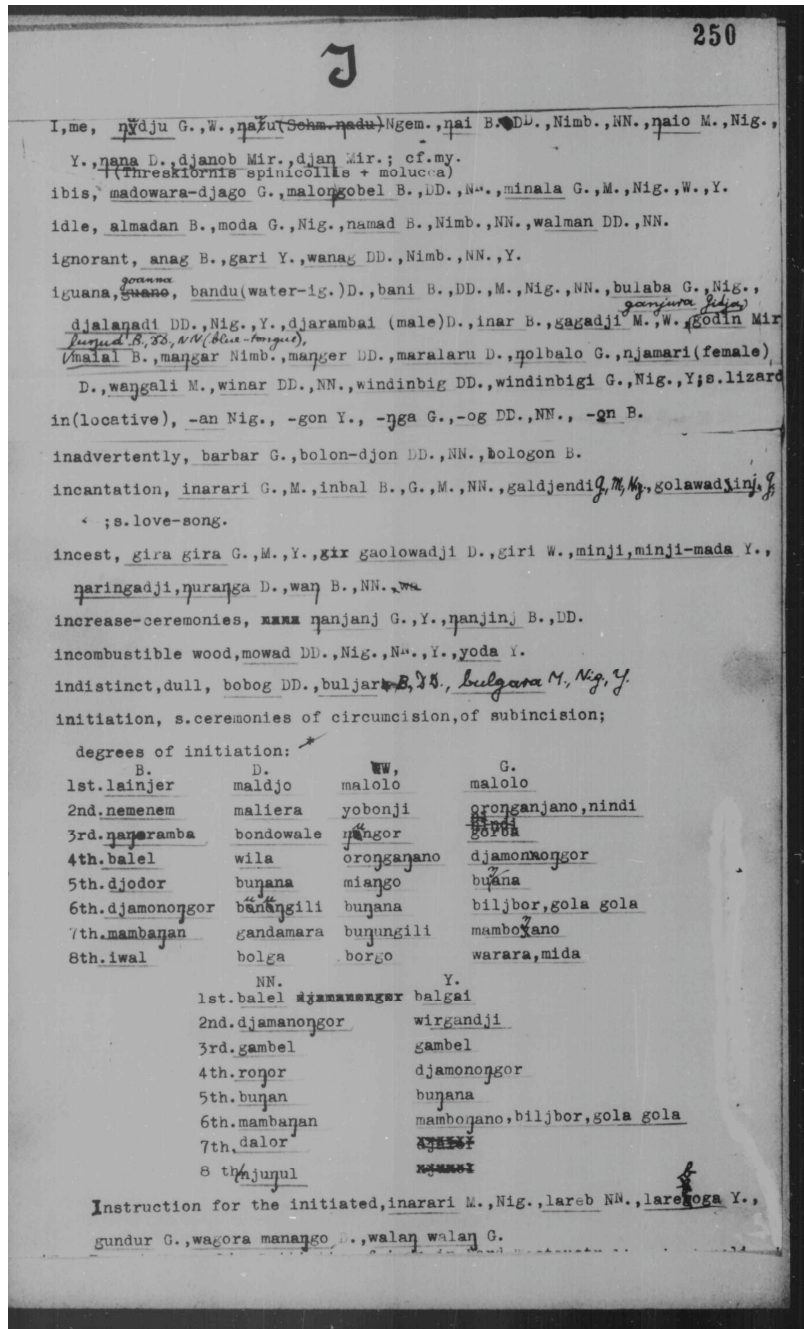
3.2. Structure of Part II

Part II is, as already explained, primarily a finder list for Part III. It consists of an alphabetised list of English headwords, and corresponding terms in various languages, with the languages specified by an abbreviation. Given the number of languages mentioned in the book, this consistent use of abbreviations is quite demanding on the reader, and the source of a number of errors in the authors' part.

For illustration, consider page 250, reproduced in Figure 2, the beginning of the letter 'I' (see next page).

The first entries show traditional language terms for the English headwords *I*, *me*; *ibis*; *idle*; etc.. There is also an entry for *in (locative)*, listing suffixes in half a dozen languages. Some entries have cross-references to others: for instance, under *incantation* is a cross-reference to *love-song*.

If the dictionary were no more than a wordlist of exactly corresponding terms, the construction of a finder list would be relatively unproblematic. But of course, this is not so: a number of words have no simple English glosses. Nekes and Worms had no consistent means of dealing with such items, and chose what appear to be more or less arbitrary solutions, giving rise to headwords in the finder-list that few speakers of English would be likely to search under. An example appearing on p.250 is *incombustible wood*, which is likely to be accessed only indirectly, if the user had come across the gloss under a headword in Part III. In fact, however; there is no such gloss for any item in Part III. Two entries are listed under *incombustible wood*, *mowad* (Jabirjabirr, Nyikina, Nyulnyul, and Yawuru) and *yoda* (Yawuru). In Part III we find *mowad* glossed as 'without fire, in the dark' (p.738). There is no mention of *incombustible wood*, although under the subentry *mowad djung* is found the right sense, though glossed 'non-combustible wood' (*djung* (*jungk* in modern spelling) is the word for 'fire, firewood'). There are no entries in Part II for *without fire* or *non-combustible wood*; nor is there a subentry under *fire*. But under *dark* we find the subentry *in darkness, without fire*, which takes us to *mowad*. The subentry for *dark* contains no mention of *yoda*. Nor does this lexeme (under any obvious alternative spellings) appear as a headword in Part III. Instead, we find under the *dark* subentry the alternatives *ɲoradj* (Bardi and Nyulnyul) and *waloma* (Nyikina). Turning to Part III we find the first lexeme spelt *ɲuradj*. The search for *waloma* turns up nothing, though inspection of page 863 reveals a *waluma* crossed out. Looking on the following page, we find our word spelt as *waloma*!



This digression underlines a general observation. *Australian languages* is sloppy by anyone's standards: words are spelled in a variety of different ways, even when adjacent, and the book is replete with inconsistencies of every imaginable type (in alphabetical ordering, cross-referencing, quotations, etc.). One accusation that cannot be levelled at the authors is that they displayed a Teutonic fascination with accuracy and detail!

Looking at the bottom of page 250, we see another function the listing of Part II serves: namely to group together items belonging to a single semantic domain. Here we have lists of various stages in initiation in six languages, as well as a few other relevant items. Elsewhere are lists of subtypes of trees, tribal groups, places, and so forth. This is not

always consistently done — there is no superordinate category *bird* (the headword provides just the generic terms), or *kinterm* or *kinship* for instance, and one has to look up the specific terms.

3.3. Structure of Part III

3.3.1. Sequence of entries

Part III is structured as a single alphabetical listing of words regardless of language.⁷ The words are spelt in a “phonetic” orthography — in fact, it is effectively a phonemic orthography. The letters used are as follows:

a, b, d, dj, e (i), g, l, lj, m, n, ŋ, nj, o (u), r, w, y

In addition, a dot is placed under *d, l, n* and *r* to indicate retroflexion; this is inconsistently used, however. Note that the voiced stop series is used, and the high vowels are normally represented by the mid-vowel symbols *e* and *o*, although *i* and *u* are sometimes used, especially when the authors heard the vowel as high. Nekes and Worms realised that the high and mid vowels do not contrast, and ignore the difference in their alphabetisation.

The listing shows some inconsistencies. Thus, *ŋ* and *nj* are treated separately from *n*; so also are *dj* initial words listed separately, though in this case they are tagged onto the end of the *d* section, without their own heading. But the retroflex diacritic is ignored in the alphabetisation. Verbs (i.e. inflecting verbs) are cited in infinitival form, which takes the prefix *ma-* in Nyulnyulan languages. They are alphabetised according to the initial segment of the root, disregarding the prefix, as revealed in the sample page reproduced in Figure 3. By contrast, prefixing nouns in Nyulnyulan languages are listed under the third person singular form, which typically takes the prefix *ni-*.

Most Australianists will be familiar with R.M.W. Dixon’s excoriating dismissal of the Dyrbal dictionary of Part IV (Dixon 1972: 365-366), according to which “Almost every word is mistranscribed”. As regards the Nyulnyulan words in Part IV, my opinion — shared by Claire Bovern (Bovern forthcoming) — is that the transcriptions are reasonably accurate, although inconsistent in the marking of retroflexion on stops and the rhotics. Some of the errors can be put down to mishearings; others are almost certainly due to sloppiness in the typescript and in proof reading.

⁷ In his description of the book, Worms states that “The words are alphabetically arranged, in such a way that the respective term in the Bād language determines their succession throughout. Words which do not occur in this language are found in their proper place alphabetically due to them” (Worms 1953:964). If it was the authors’ intention to do this, they effected it with characteristic carelessness. In the bulk of cases we do find words in their proper alphabetical position regardless of the Bardi word.

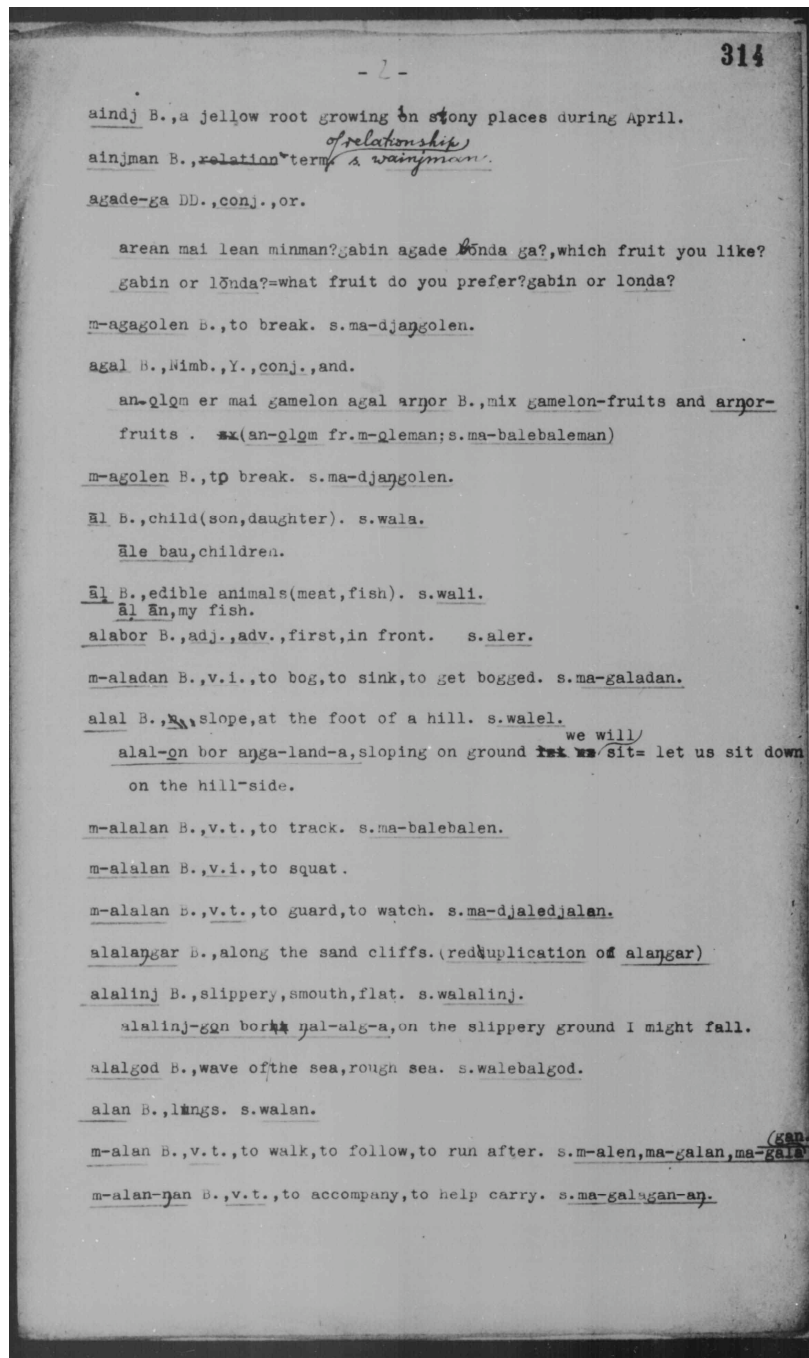


Figure 3 Page 314 of Australian languages

Similarly, Diana Eades considers Nekes' and Worms' transcription of the "eleven" — actually there are nearly four times that many — Gumbaynggir words in Part III to be reasonable, except that vowel length is not indicated (Eades 1979: 256).⁸

⁸ Worms must be credited with the transcription of the Gumbaynggir words: it was he alone who did the fieldwork outside of the Kimberley.

3.3.2. Size and language-constitution of Part III

Part III of *Australian languages* consists of some 9,223 headwords in the revised and edited version I have prepared, corresponding to an original wordlist of some 9000 ± 250 distinct entries, disregarding the language provenances of lexical items sharing the same form and meaning. Thirty languages are represented, with lexical data from the authors' own fieldwork. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the languages in terms of the number of words listed.

Table 1 Language constitution of the dictionary of Part III

Language	Number of headwords or subentries	Language	Number of headwords or subentries
Bardi	2106	Ngumbarl	1
Jabirrabirr	2092	Nyikina	1375
Jawi	22	Nyulnyul	1762
Jukun	7	Yawuru	1696
Nimanburru	1508		
Bunuba	84		
Kija	30	Miriwoong	199
Bemba	141	Worrorra	4
Ngarinyin	109		
Badjiri	19	Muruwari	53
Gamilaraay	66	Ngiyambaa	112
Gumbaynggir	42	Paakantyi	44
Jaru	835	Pitungu	5
Karajarri	1447	Walmajarri	849
Kukatja	335	Widjela	63
Mangala	824	Yuwaalaraay	77
Malyangapa	41		
Total	15948		

3.3.3. Scope of the dictionaries

The fullest dictionary is of Jabirrabirr, which gives a fairly good overall coverage of the

basic semantic domains, as Table 2 reveals.⁹

Table 2 Semantic domains represented in the Jabirrjabirr dictionary

Semantic domain	Subdomain	Number of entries
Entities	Human beings	64
	Kinterms	40
	Body parts and products	165
	Animals and animal products	240
	Technology and artefacts	107
	Environmental	107
	Vegetation and vegetable products	114
	Proper names (persons, places)	6
	Fire	13
	Abstract nouns and cultural practices/beliefs	92
Qualities		207
Quantities		32
Events	Human activities	19, 18 ¹⁰
	Conditions and caused conditions	19, 42
	Violence	71, 35
	Production of noises (non-speech)	33
	Grasping, grabbing, holding	15
	Bodily activities and states	93, 30
	Thinking, speaking, and perception	60, 67
	Motion	81, 42
	Positional	14, 6

⁹ I caution that this is a rough-and-ready classification, and in many instances a lexical item can be equally well assigned to two or more semantic domains. It is given purely for illustrative purposes.

¹⁰ The first figures indicate the number of preverbs, the second, the number of inflecting verbs from each semantic sub-domain.

Semantic domain	Subdomain	Number of entries
Adverbials	Temporal	40
	Spatial	32
	Other	11
Determiners		16
Pronouns		25
Particles		15
Conjunctions		3
Interjections		9
English borrowings		14
Nominal postpositions		24
Nominal suffixes		20
Verbal affixes		24
Total		1825

There are disparities across the domains. Thus there are just 6 proper nouns in the listing — no doubt no reflection on the actual situation. By contrast, the domain of abstract terms and culturally significant entities is quite well represented. Other surprises include the temporal domain, which is better represented than the spatial; qualities are also very well represented; there are a surprising number of quantifying lexemes.

It would be remiss not to give a small selection of the more interesting Jabirrabirr entries, to bring out the significance of the dictionary. First, consider the following for their lexical content:

- balal* ‘channel with rain-water’ (p.341)
- djagal* ‘steps, cuts in the tree for foothold; fig. side of mother’s hip as nest for baby’¹¹ (p.442)
- djiber* ‘presentiment, foreboding of coming event on account of nervous jerks or palpitation of a vein’ (p.473)
- gombon* ‘white skinned-ghost haunting mangrove swamps’ (p.612)
- langai* ‘slowly burning tree, used as fire reservoir’ (p.644)
- miror* ‘Orion’s Belt’; a Jabirrabirr person compared the Orion to a saucepan with the three stars of the Belt as the handle (p.722);

¹¹ The underlined words are written in by hand.

<i>modaŋ</i>	‘bag, a whole bag (of flour) not yet opened’ (p.724)
<i>mōnd</i>	‘bury, bury spell; a magical spell of burying the name of an enemy’. The bones of a lizard are broken with a pointing-stick (<i>wadaŋgar</i>), then the animal is singed and buried in a hollow log. The name of the person to be enchanted is called during these actions and the victim will soon die. (p.731)
<i>nomolor</i>	‘stern of boat, back of cart, big end of axe-head’ (p.760, 765)
<i>waŋ</i>	‘cohabitation, fornication, adultery’ (p.877)
<i>wēn</i>	‘shy, bashful, avoidance between certain relationship-groups (as <i>djadji</i> , <i>djamenjar</i> , <i>babeli</i> , <i>raŋaŋ</i> , <i>wainman</i> , and <i>yaler</i>)’ (p.895)
<i>yelm</i>	‘“against the wind”, camping place for boys and unmarried men; sleeping-house (dormitory)’ (p.931)

For their grammatical relevance, consider the following:

<i>ma-magandjen</i>	(reflexive verb) ‘to carry oneself, to surrender, to make peace’ (p.670). This is interesting because it is the derived reflexive-reciprocal form of the inflecting verb <i>-ka</i> ‘carry’, unattested in my own Nyulnyul corpus. Only reflexive senses are specified.
<i>ma-moran</i>	(transitive and intransitive verb) ‘to pour out, to upset, to throw away, to capsize’ (p.734-735). Example sentences also illustrate the intransitive sense ‘flow (of water)’; this verb is also used in describing the birth of puppies (in a transitive clause). The ‘capsize’ sense is not well illustrated — the example apparently illustrates the intransitive sense ‘to flow’.
<i>ma-ŋaden-aŋ</i>	‘to cover’ (p.771) — Cf. <i>ma-ŋadan</i> ~ <i>ma-ŋaden</i> ‘to cover, to make a shade or screen’ (p.771); the <i>-aŋ</i> is clearly the applicative suffix, and the example sentence illustrates an instrumental applicative, ‘cover something with a covering’.

It is also significant that the authors include in the dictionary various bound morphemes — mainly verbal and nominal prefixes, suffixes, and enclitics (generally treated as particles, the distinction between free and bound being ignored). The list is incomplete, but the inclusion of bound morphemes is significant in terms of the authors’ understanding of the constitution of a dictionary. Finally, the authors were not so purist as to exclude English borrowings from the dictionary as do some compilers. The number is relatively small, to be sure (0.7%), and is doubtless partial, even for the 1930s and 1940s.

My impression, based on having examined the entirety of Part III word-by-word at least once, is that the coverage for the other Nyulnyulan languages is similar.

As to the poorest represented languages, with under 100 lexemes, only very basic items of vocabulary tend to be given. This is the case for Bunuba (two exceptions being a proper name, and the word for ‘lightning’), Paakantyi, Gumbaynggir, and Kija; to a perhaps lesser extent it is true of Jawi.

A glance at languages with a few hundred items tends to show a similar picture. The three hundred odd Kukatja entries are principally basic items, though there is a generous selection of culturally relevant items as well, many relating to the religious domain — e.g. terms for various types of tjuringa and their markings. The rather more substantial Walmajarri wordlist has somewhat fewer cultural terms (although there are still a reasonable number, covering stages of initiation of a male, tjuringas, and so forth), and appears more representative of the major semantic domains — that is, the list looks like the Table 2, except that the numbers in each category are fewer. There are few terms that one would not expect in a list of its size, other than the culturally relevant ones. What is particularly noteworthy about this list is the inordinate number of alternative terms — about a third of the English glosses have two or three Walmajarri alternatives.

This reveals that Worms was cognisant of basic principles of linguistic fieldwork: that one first gathers basic items, and expands from that base. The lists are not arbitrary collections of words; nor did his interest in the religious domain mean that he focused initially on such terms — he began with the basics.

3.3.4. Information provided in the entries

The following description describes the structure of the fullest possible entry; few, if any, entries exhibit all components:

- (1) Headword, (Etymology, Gloss), Languages, (Second headword, Languages)ⁿ, Part-of-speech, Gloss, Cross-reference (to another lexeme), Paradigm or other form of the headword, Example phrases and/or sentences

Following the headword, there is occasionally an etymology in brackets. Thus, the entry for *waluma* has immediately following the headword the implausible etymology “(=*wada-luma* ‘without light’)” — implausible because neither of the segmented elements is listed in either meaning.

Part-of-speech information is given for only about 10% of the entries, over half of which are inflecting verbs. Almost all of the remaining entries are for closed classes including bound morphemes. Part-of-speech information is inconsistently given: for at least 100 inflecting verbs this information is not supplied.

Overall, definitions are restricted, and often consist of just a few terse words that serve more as glosses than definitions. Words for culturally significant practices or phenomena are often given a little more explanation. Occasionally, as is the case for *noŋ* we are given information about metaphorical or extended uses.

Among the definitions we sometimes find indication of semantic extensions to introduced items and concepts, usually with the remark “by adaptation” or “metaphorically”. Thus under the headword *nalm* is given ‘head, lid; by adaptation bottle-stopper, cork’ (in fact *nalm* is the 3sg possessor form ‘his/her/its head’, as the authors were well aware); under *wōr* is ‘horn of the box- and reef-fish; by adaptation, horn of cows and goats’; under

minmēd is ‘the three stars of the Orion’s Belt, “The Men”; by adaptation “The Three Wise Men”; and under *ŋag* we find ‘sponge; analogously bread, on account of its spongy character’.

Cross-references to other lexemes are fairly numerous, but neither consistent nor reliable. Doubtless their unreliability stems in part from changes made to various drafts of the dictionary, where headwords were revised, but cross-references left unchanged.

The best feature of the dictionary is the inclusion of illustrative example sentences, which appears to be the motivation for the rather pretentious label *paradigmatic syntax*. My estimate is that there are some 2,500-3,000 example sentences of various lengths, a not inconsiderable number. In fact, the example sentences provided in Part III, together with those in the body of the grammar, provide a not unreasonable corpus of information on which syntactic generalisations (barely attempted by the authors) can be made. This is especially significant for Nyulnyulan languages such as Jabirrabirri for which almost no other information is available.

Example sentences are often given just a free translation; the source sentence itself may show some morpheme (sometimes syllable) divisions, but this is irregular and unreliable. Sometimes the authors give a more literal translation instead or in addition; morpheme by morpheme glosses are almost never provided. Illustrative example sentences include many that are evidently elicited (example (2) below); a smallish number appear to have come from natural conversation (examples (3)-(6)).¹²

- (2) *alal-ŋn bor anga-land-a*
 sloping on ground we will sit
 ‘Let us sit down on the hill-side.’ (*alal* ‘slope, at the foot of a hill’, Bardi; p.314)
- (3) *banban in-djaŋ bab-en, mai ibal-en in-au djer djen*
 excitement throbs child, food Father gave him
 ‘The child is excited (by joy) as the Father gave him an orange.’ = The child is blushing etc. *in-djaŋ* fr. *ma-djaŋan*, to throb (*banban* ‘excited’ Jabirrabirri; p.352)
- (4) *anog min-nj-djer bēne baib? lēm ŋan-nj*
 where you took that pipe? ownerless I took
 ‘Where did you get that pipe from?’ ‘I found it.’ (*lēm* ‘orphan, ownerless, derelict’ Nimanburru, Nyulnyul; p.650)
- (5) *gaŋgo ŋa-ŋaran ŋanga-ni*
 tired I am language(agentive)¹³
 ‘I am tired of your questions about Aboriginal words.’ (*gaŋgo* ‘stiff, tired’ Nyikina; p.578)
- (6) *barai ŋan-man robert ibal-og (iwal-ŋn)*

¹² In the representations below I retain the authors’ wording, but for convenience separate the examples into lines; in the typescript they run on from one another. No attempt has been made to align the glosses with the morphemes – which would be impossible without complete reworking of the examples.

¹³ A gloss for the agentive postposition is almost as rare as hens’ teeth in the typescript.

‘I told the father about Robert.’ (*barai* ‘accusation, confession’ Jabirrabirri, Bardi; p.365)

4. Conclusion

I have described Parts II and III of *Australian languages* in some detail in an attempt to provide a considered and fair evaluation of the work of Frs. Nekes and Worms, an evaluation that contextualises their work in its time. Their dictionary is, I submit, a valuable piece of work, that represents some of the best of lexicography from the period 1930-1960. The information it contains appears to be relatively reliable: the phonetics is not unacceptable, and the definitions as good as most from the period and before (although they do not measure up to modern expectations). The dictionary presents particularly important information on cultural practices and phenomena that have to my knowledge long since been forgotten. Fr. Worms considered this aspect of the dictionaries to be especially important, as revealed in the conclusion to his outline summary of Part III:

It can be expected that a student having made himself more fully acquainted with the material offered in “Australian languages” will discover other synonyms and radical relations which will give him a deeper insight into the Australian native life than the writers themselves could acquire. (Worms 1953: 965)

To wind up the paper, I mention two issues for further investigation. First, the period 1910-1960, sometimes referred to as the second period of research on Australian languages, has often been considered to represent the “dark ages” in the study of Australian languages (e.g. Dixon 1980: 16). It is high time for a reevaluation of this period. Part of the motivation of this paper is to challenge this view. Others who have contributed to a reevaluation of this period include David Moore on TGH Strehlow’s Arrernte research (Moore 2003), and Paul Monaghan on Norman Tindale’s work (Monaghan 2003).

Second, the German contribution to missionary linguistics in Australia demands investigation. What was the intellectual background of men like Carl Strehlow, C.G. Teichelmann, C.W. Schürmann, and Frs. Nekes and Worms? What did they learn and/or teach in the seminaries in Germany? One also wonders about the influence on and from academic linguistics in Germany.

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