

IN THE MARGINS OF AN ARABANA-WANGANURU DICTIONARY: THE LOSS OF INITIAL CONSONANTS¹

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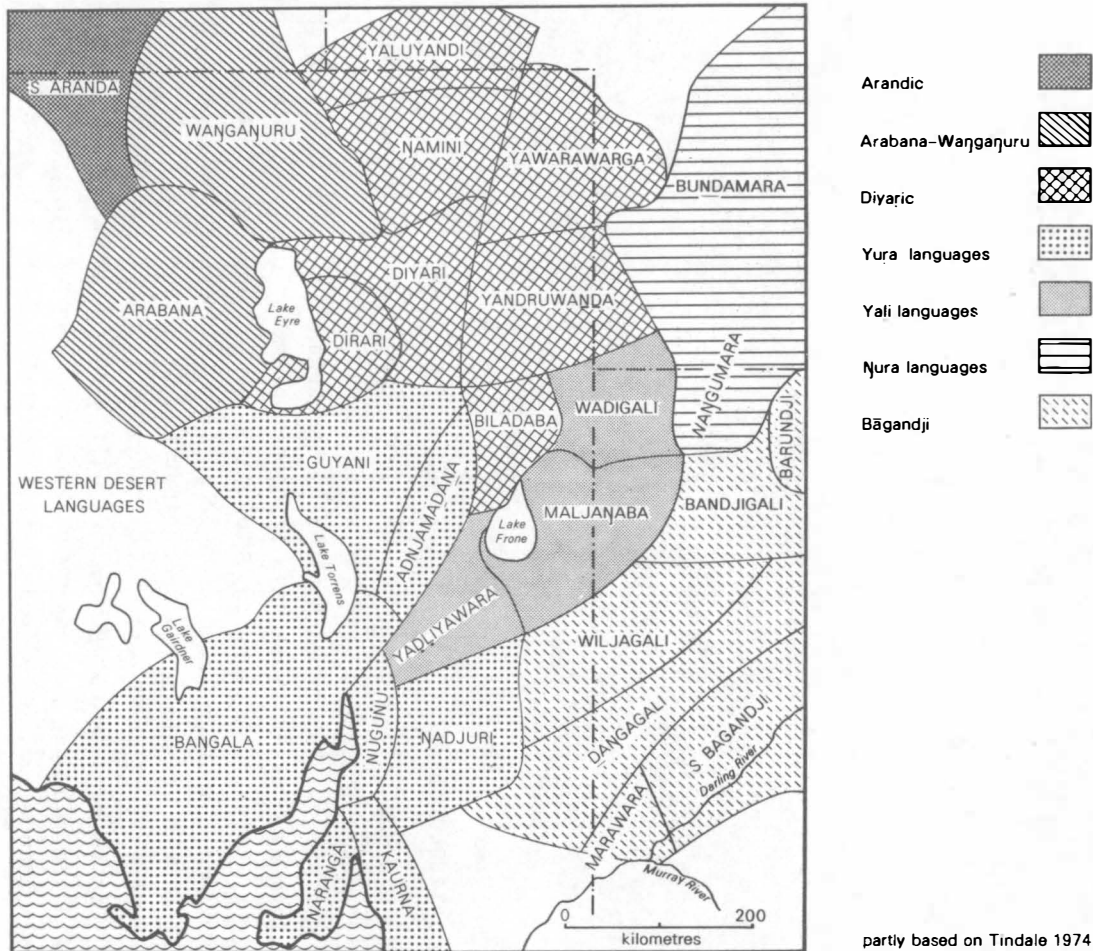
0. ABBREVIATIONS

A	Arabana
ANC	distant past
excl	exclusive
intrans	intransitive
TR	transitory aspect
trans	transitive
W	Wanganuru

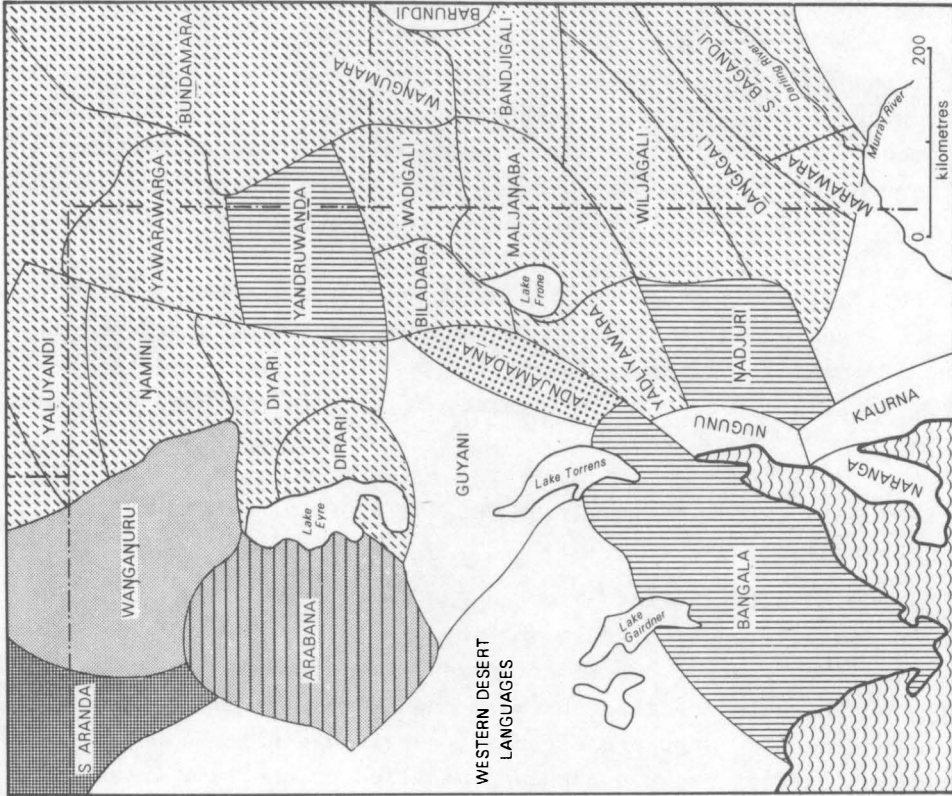
1. INTRODUCTION

In his work of 1956 (p. 84) A. Capell complained of the difficulty of 'establishing sound-laws for Australian languages' and of the 'lack of consistency that marks Australian languages' in their phonological development. Since those days important progress has been made in the study of historical phonology, initiated by O'Grady (1966): the advance made in these studies over certain relatively small areas is evident from the historical contributions to Sutton, ed. (1976) *The Languages of Cape York*. The general approach is now different: we have become more aware of regional diffusion and of Aboriginal multi-lingualism, and can see how much these have obscured the operation of strict sound-laws. Yet even in this context some of the inconsistencies still remain puzzling and unexpected: this can be illustrated by the Arabana-Wanganuru words beginning with a-.

MAP 1: GENETIC AFFILIATIONS OF LANGUAGES IN SOUTH-CENTRAL AUSTRALIA



MAP 2: INITIAL CONSONANTS



- Extensive loss / lenition
 - Aranda type
 - Adnjamadana type
 - limited loss of η -
 - limited loss / lenition of plosives
 - traces of lenition of g -
 - some pronominal forms beginning with y -, l -.
- note that Arabana is shaded both for and

partly based on Tindale 1974

It is generally agreed that all Original Australian words began with a consonant (Capell 1956:100). There are areas where it is clear that certain initial consonants were dropped bringing vowels into the initial position. This situation is found, for instance, in Cape York and parts of Western Queensland, in Central Australia and in two languages of North-eastern New South Wales, Anewan and Yaygir as shown by Crowley (1976). In these areas initial dropping and the related phenomenon of initial softening or lenition are regional features that cut across genetic boundaries. This has been shown for Cape York by B. Alpher (1976). The following pages are a summary of the South-Central Australian situation.

Genetically, the languages in the South-Central area belong to two groups, Arandic and Karnic (the Arabana-Wangaṅuru and the Yuṛa sub-group of Karnic); the languages on the periphery of this area also belong to Karnic, forming the Diyari, Yaḷi, Nura and Bāḡandji sub-groups.

2. LANGUAGES ON THE PERIPHERY OF THE SOUTH CENTRAL AREA

2.1. Bāḡandji

The Bāḡandji or Darling River sub-group consists of a number of related dialects once spoken along the Darling River south of Bourke and in adjacent areas. There are some major differences between the northern and southern dialects (Wurm and Hercus 1976). The two northern dialects, Guṅu and Bārundji, survived until recently. Throughout the extensive vocabulary recalled by the last speakers there was only one single word that began with a vowel: *ilāgu yesterday*, apart from *id̥i this* and *ina that* (present tense).

Ten years ago it was still possible to record two southern dialects, Bandjigali and Southern Bāḡandji from Pooncarie. It is typical of the way that initial consonant dropping cuts across genetic boundaries that in Bandjigali and Southern Bāḡandji, as opposed to the northern dialects, there is evidence of the occasional loss of the initial velar consonants *g-* and *ŋ-* before *-i-* in the free forms of pronouns: *ŋimba*, *imba you* sg. intr. subject, *ŋindu*, *indu you* sg. tr. subject, *gigi*, *igi this one*; *(g)id̥u* and *(g)in̥u that one* and *that one further away* are in fact the preferred forms. The same loss of the velar consonant in this environment is found also in pronominal adverbs *(g)in̥ara*, *(g)id̥ana there* and *here* and less frequently in *(g)ila not*. Apart from the adverb *ilāgu yesterday* (which probably shows loss of an initial *g-*) and the exclamation of surprise *ilāguai* lit. *my yesterday* there is also a small group of verbs which show optional loss of initial *ŋ-*, *(ŋ)ima-* *to lie down*, *(ŋ)iba-* *to put down* and *(ŋ)inga-* *to sit*.

Bāgandji illustrates the point that velars are particularly liable to be lost initially. But the situation is complicated by the fact that there is also a quite specific regional restraint against the occurrence of initial ŋ + i: this combination is totally absent from both the Yaḷi and the Diyari subgroup (Austin MS and Hercus MSb). Bāgandji is in fact the westernmost language in this particular area to permit initial ŋ + i at all.

The most important feature illustrated by Bāgandji is that initial dropping does not necessarily affect the whole vocabulary uniformly: certain classes of words, particularly pronouns are more prone to this change than the rest of the vocabulary.

2.2. Yaḷi Languages

The comparison of cognates from neighbouring languages shows that in the two very closely related and both recently extinct Yaḷi languages Maljaṇaba and Yaḍḍiyawara (Hercus MSc, Austin and Wurm MS) initial g- and ŋ- have been lost before i in pronouns and pronominal adverbs, hence inḷi *this*, idni, ini *you* sg., as in:

Yaḍḍiyawara: walja inḷi-na yawara ḍilga-ṅḍ -adu
not this -OBJ language know-PRES-1 sg. tr.
I don't know this language.

wanaṅaru idni
where you sg. Where are you?

Maljaṇaba: inḷi-na yawara ḍilga-ṅḍ - anji -ri
this -OBJ language know-PRES-1 sg. sub. -EMPH
I know this language?

waṛaṅa midji ini
what name you What's your name?

There are no words beginning with a- or wu-, u- in the Yaḷi languages, and there appear to be only a few words beginning with yi-, i- apart from the pronouns: the kinship term ibuḷu *sister's daughter, mother's sister* (see also Beckett, 1967), and ibi- *to lift up*.

The presence of initial yi-, i- in pronouns is widespread, far beyond the Yaḷi languages, as can be seen readily from the tables published long ago by Schmidt (1919) and from the recent investigations of Queensland languages by Breen (1971a and 1973) and by Blake and Breen (1971 and forthcoming). It is of significance, however, that initial yi-, i- is found only in the second and third person singular

pronouns and in adverbs derived from them and not to any extent in any other classes or words in the Yali languages and in the Njura sub-group (Wangumura, Bundamara and Gałali). In Southern Bāgandji and in the Diyari subgroup (Austin MS) not only pronouns, but also a few verbs begin with yi-, i-.

3. CENTRAL LANGUAGES

It is in the Central languages that initial dropping is most prominent.

3.1. Aranda

Comparative data show that in Southern Aranda as in the entire Arandic group initial ɲ- and usually also initial g-, w- and d- have been lost:

S. Aranda	Arabana	English
abma	wabma	snake
aḡa	aḡu (Diyari ḡadu)	I (tr. sub.)
alinja	ḡalɲinji	tongue

There are a number of exceptions and irregularities, as has been pointed out by A. Capell (1956:100). But there can be no question about the fact that Aranda has the most general loss of initial consonants of any of the languages in the area.

3.2. The Yuṛa Languages

The Yuṛa languages are:

Kurna
 Naranga
 Nadjuri
 Nugunu
 Bangala
 Guyani
 Adnjamadana

They were once spoken over a vast area in South Australia, from Adelaide to Lake Eyre. They are all very closely related: they must in fact be regarded as dialects of one language. Adnjamadana of the Flinders Ranges and Guyani from the plains to the west and north-west of the Flinders are especially close according to recent recordings (Hercus MS_e). This is evident from both the morphology and the

vocabulary, which is over 80% cognate. There were close social links between all the Yuṛa group: they shared the same kinship system, which is reflected in the complex pronouns (Hercus and White 1973). They shared some major ceremonies, in particular the Wiljaru cicatrisation rite, and they all had the same system of birth-order names. It is clear that Nadjuri can be included in this respect, as Tindale mentions (Tindale 1937:149) that his main informant was called Waria. This means in fact *Second Son* and corresponds to Bangaḷa, Wari and Guyani, Nugunu, Adnjamadaṅa (and even Yaḍḷiyawara) wariya. Naturally there were some minor differences in social behaviour (Schebeck 1974:173) but Yuṛa people were conscious of their basic solidarity and they sensed a kind of continuity between the various Yuṛa 'tribes'. As an elderly Adnjamadaṅa man, Angus McKenzie once explained: 'There were really two kinds of Guyani, there were the Adnja-Guyani 'Hills-Guyani' - they were just like us Adnjamadaṅa 'Hills people' - and then there were the Vaṭa-Guyani 'the Plains Guyani'. The same way there were really two kinds of Vangaḷa (Bangaḷa), the Adnja-Vangaḷa 'Hills Bangaḷa' - they were nearly the same as the Nugunu - and there were also the Vaṭa-Vangaḷa ('the Plains Vangaḷa').' This shows how closely, in the eyes of a most knowledgeable man, the Guyani and Adnjamadaṅa were associated on the one hand, and the Bangaḷa and Nugunu on the other (cf. Tindale 1974:213). Yet the changes involved in the dropping and lenition of initial consonants cut across those close links.

Guyani and Nugunu, and from older evidence, the extinct Kurna and Naraṅga maintained all their initial stop consonants:

but

Adnjamadaṅa shows loss of initial g- and lenition of initial d- to y- and b- to v-.

Bangaḷa (Schürmann 1844 and also Hercus MSc) is in an intermediate position: there is weakening of initial d- to y-. There are therefore words beginning with yi-, i-, but not wu-, u- or a-. We were able to record only the one isolated proper noun Ara-bangaḷa, the name of the northern group of Bangaḷa (with n, not ŋ) as opposed to the Bangaḷa proper, from Eyre Peninsula. Tindale (1974:216) and Green (in Curr 1889) quote also the name Arkaba-ṭuṛa which should be translated as *the red ochre men* from their proximity to the red ochre mine at Parachilna. The written records of the extinct Nadjuri (Berndt and Vogelsang, 1941) also show evidence, though sporadic, of weakening of initial d- and b-, and loss of g-.

The situation is summarised in the following table:

	loss of initial g-	lenition of d-	lenition of b-
Guyani	-	-	-
Adnjamaḍaṇa	+	+	+
Ṇadjuri	±	±	±
Baṅgaḷa	-	+	-
Nugunu	-	-	-

Because of the high proportions of cognates between the Yuṛa languages, there is spectacular evidence for these changes. They took place throughout the vocabulary and in any kind of vocalic environment.

Examples are:

	Guyani	Nugunu	Baṅgaḷa	Ṇadjuri	Adnjamaḍaṇa	English
loss of g-	gaḍḷa	gadla	gadla	'gadla'	aḍḷa	<i>fire</i>
	gaḍu	gaḍu	gaḍu	'atuni'	aṭuṇa	<i>wife</i>
	gudnju	gudnju	gudnju	'winju'	udnju	<i>white man ghost</i>
	gubmaṇa	gubma	gubma		ubmaṇa	<i>one</i>
	guḍḷu	guḍḷu	guḍḷu	'wudlu'	uḍḷu	<i>kangaroo</i>
lenition of d-	ḍadna		yadna		yadna	<i>they</i>
	ḍaba-	ḍabadja-	yaba-		yaba-	
	ḍiga	ḍigadja	yigada	'ikana'	yiga	<i>to sit</i>
	ḍinda-	ḍindadja-	yinda <i>injury</i>	'indata'	inda-	<i>to die</i>
	ḍuṛa	ḍuṛa	yuṛa	'juru'	yuṛa	<i>man</i>
lenition of b-	baḍṇa	baḍṇa	baḍṇa	'budna'	vaḍṇa	<i>goanna</i>
	babi	*mama*	babi	'vabi'	vabi	<i>father</i>
	baḍṇaba	baḍṇaba	baḍṇaba	'vadnapa'	vaḍṇaba	<i>young initiate</i>
	biṛa	biṛa	biṛa	'beṛa'	viṛa	<i>moon</i>
	budḷi	budḷi	budḷi	'budli'	vuḍḷi	<i>star</i>
	bulga	bulga	bulga		vulga	<i>old</i>

It is clear that the loss of initial consonants must have occurred after the separation of the Guyani and Adnjamadaṅa dialects, and there is every likelihood that it is a relatively recent development. The change was not felt to be very profound: Guyani people could still understand what the Adnjamadaṅa were saying and vice versa.

3.3. Diyari Sub-group

The languages of the Diyari sub-group were once spoken throughout the far north-east of South Australia. They have been studied extensively over recent years by P. Austin and by J.G. Breen (see Austin MS, Breen MS). The sub-group comprises the following languages:

Diyari
Dirari
Ŋamini
Yaḷuyandi
Yawarawarga
Yandruwanda
Biladaba

Apart from the pronominal forms quoted in 2.1. and a few isolated words beginning with yi, i- (mainly verbs) and wu, u- there is no general evidence of any loss of initial consonants in Diyari, Dirari, Yaḷuyandi, Ŋamini and Yawarawarga, but in the languages closest to Yawarawarga, namely Yandruwanda, there is evidence of weakening of initial dj- to y- (Breen 1971a).

	Yandruwanda	Yawarawarga	English
	yiwa	djiwara	woman
	yimba	djimba	black
	yara	djara	boomerang
but	djuguru	djuguru	kangaroo

From the limited evidence we have, it appears that this development was not shared by the neighbouring Biladaba (Hercus MSc). Again we find that the weakening of the initial is a feature that must be of relatively recent origin.

4. ARABANA-WANGANURU

4.1. Plosives

Arabana and Wanganuru were two dialects of one language once spoken west of Lake Eyre and in the Simpson Desert, i.e. immediately to the west of the Diyari sub-group. In Arabana-Wanganuru the situation with initials is most complex, and there are differences in this regard even between these two very similar forms of speech. In Arabana there is incipient weakening of initial plosives, in Wanganuru there is not. In Arabana:

$\underset{d}{d}$ and $\underset{d}{dj}$ are lost at the beginning of the second member of a reduplicating verb.

$b > w$ at the beginning of the second member of a reduplicating verb.

Examples are:

$\underset{d}{d}$ arba-arba-	<i>to trample</i> ($\underset{d}{d}$ arba- <i>to step on something</i>)
$\underset{d}{d}$ anga-anga	<i>to sit around</i> ($\underset{d}{d}$ anga- <i>to sit</i>)
$\underset{d}{d}$ arga-arga	<i>to stand around</i> ($\underset{d}{d}$ arga- <i>to stand</i>)
djindja-indja-	<i>to cut up, to operate on somebody</i> (djindja- <i>to cut</i>)
buda-wuda-	<i>to hurt</i>

This development has not spread to reduplicating adjectives and nouns, e.g.:

bařa-bařa	<i>long</i>
dja a-dja a	<i>lizard species</i>

$g-$ is lost in Arabana at the beginning of the word *gađi seed* (Austin, Ellis and Hercus 1976) when this is used as a compound formative and in the stem-forming transitory aspect marker *-ga* after verbs ending in *-a*. This leads to a long vowel in Arabana, a language where distinctive length is otherwise unknown.

Arabana	Wanganuru	English
gađna-ađi, gađnāđi	gađna-gađi	<i>money</i> (lit. <i>stones</i>)
gudna-ađi, gudnāđi	gudna-gađi	<i>guts</i>
bandja-ađi, bandjāđi	bandja	<i>knee</i>
$\underset{d}{d}$ anga - a - bugana <i>sit</i> - TR - ANC		<i>they used to sit around for a while</i>

but

ḡaṅi - ga - bugaṅa
eat - TR - ANC

they used to eat as
they went

This weakening of initial consonants is very restricted, as can be seen by the fact that it is confined to reduplication, to stem-forming suffixes and to -gaḡi: the past tense marker -ga is never affected by the change.

4.2. Initial ŋ

Initial ŋ has not been dropped generally in Arabana-Wanġanġuru. There are numerous words beginning with ŋa-, ŋu- (ŋi- is absent as mentioned in 2.1.). In fact over 8% of the vocabulary begins with ŋ-: this includes rare and obscure words just as much as some of the commonest words in the language. At first sight there appears to be no system in the loss or retention of initial ŋ-, but on closer examination it would appear that ŋ- is retained except in particular categories of words.

4.3. Pronouns

In Arabana-Wanġanġuru there is loss of ŋ- (and rarely m- and nj-) initially in some circumstances as shown by cognates. As there is no phonemic distinction between yi and i-, and wu and u-, the clearest decisions with regard to consonant dropping can be made when this results in initial a. The present discussion will therefore centre on words beginning with a- in Arabana-Wanġanġuru.

ŋ has evidently been dropped in all pronominal forms as for instance:

Arabana-Wanġanġuru	Guyani	Diyari
aḡu I 1 sg. tr. subj.	ŋaḡu	ŋaḡu
aṅḡa I 1 sg. intr. subj.	ŋayi	ŋani
ari we two excl.	ŋadli	ŋali
aṅi we pl. excl.	ŋalbula	ŋayani

and in the special kinship pronouns, e.g.:

alanda we two of the same moiety but different generation levels	ŋadlaga	ŋalanda
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nj-, ŋ- was lost in the dual and plural forms of the second person

pronoun: *urubula you two*, *urgari you pl.* as opposed to Guyani *nura you pl.* This sound-change was absolute: there are *no* pronominal forms in Arabana-Wangaṅuru where initial *ŋ-* (and *nj-*, *ŋ-*) are retained.

4.4. Kinship Terms

The loss of initial *ŋ-* is absolute in both Arabana and Wangaṅuru in certain other categories of words apart from pronouns, notably in kinship terms.¹ This is not surprising as kinship terms are closely associated with pronouns particularly in south-central Australia (Hercus and White 1973). As the whole of society is viewed in the light of kinship, these terms are used in Aboriginal languages where Europeans would simply use a pronoun. This is even carried over into Aboriginal English and sentences like the following can be heard frequently: *My brother is no good*, or *Go and change your uncle's nappy!*, where Europeans would say: *He's no good*, or *Go and change the child's nappy.*

ŋ is lost in:

Wangaṅuru	<i>abiḷa</i>	<i>female cross cousin, father's mother</i>	Guyani	<i>ŋabaḷa</i>
Eastern Wangaṅuru	<i>adabiyaga</i>	<i>son (man speaking)</i>	Diyari	<i>ŋadamuḷa</i>
Wangaṅuru	<i>aḷuwa</i>	<i>child</i>	Guyani	<i>ŋaḷu</i> (<i>father's elder brother, like son, refers to a person of the opposite moiety and of the adjacent generation level</i>)
Wangaṅuru	<i>aḍada</i>	<i>mother's father</i>	Diyari	<i>ŋaḍada</i>
Wangaṅuru	<i>anja</i>	<i>father</i>		
Arabana	<i>abidji</i>	<i>father</i>	Dirari	<i>ŋabidji</i>

The word for *mother* is of interest: Arabana has a term *ḷuga* which does not appear to have cognates in neighbouring areas and which is the only ordinary Arabana word to begin with *ḷ-*. In Wangaṅuru there was originally a word **ŋama* which had two meanings: *breast*, as in Diyari, Guyani and a number of other languages, and *mother* which corresponds to *ŋami* in Guyani, Adnjamaḍana and neighbouring languages, and to *ŋamaga* in Bāgandji. This Wangaṅuru word split in two according to its meaning: *ŋama* was retained in the sense of *breast*, whereas the kinship term lost the initial *ŋ*, hence *ama mother*. This is a clear indication of the fact that kinship terms occupied a distinctive position in Arabana-Wangaṅuru speech.²

4.5. Interjections and Adverbs

Interjections, and particularly the words meaning *yes* and *no* in Aboriginal languages are often 'irregular': they, like kinship terms may contain phonotactic and phonetic features that are not found elsewhere in the language. Thus in Maljanaba *ŋaga* [ŋaya] *yes* contains the sound [ɣ] otherwise unknown in Maljanaba. In Eastern Wanġanuru [kɔ̃] *yes* contains the otherwise unknown [ɔ̃]. It is therefore not surprising that interjections as opposed to the bulk of the vocabulary were affected by the loss of initial ŋ- in Arabana-Wanġanuru.

Examples of such interjections are:

aŋa *oh yes, you don't say!* (Diyari *ŋaga* *oh yes!* Guyani *ŋaga* *ɟura* lit. *yes people!, you really mean that!*) Both the Arabana-Wanġanuru and the Guyani interjections are used to encourage someone telling a story.

anagu *I don't know* (Diyari *ŋana* *guwu*)

aŋu *hey there!* *aŋu* 'nba *hey you there, what about you?*

arayi *yes, certainly* (Arabana)

aradja *right, correct.* This word is also used as an adjective *straight, correct.*

alada *ready!* *alada* *yugalugu* *ready to go!*

aga|i *wrong!, in contradiction* (adv.)

a|a *truly, indeed!* This is also used adjectivally.

When musing to himself over a campfire, Mick McLean, the last Simpson Desert Wanġanuru, sometimes said *a|a*, *a|a*, *ŋa|a*. This was surprising as *a|a* is equivalent to Diyari *ma|a* and represents one of the few cases where an initial *m-*, not *ŋ-*, has been dropped. He explained that he was saying this only in fun, playing with words: yet his fun indicates that the loss of initial consonants was recent enough for speakers to feel that a consonant really could be present and that this consonant normally should be *ŋ-*: *ŋa|a* is simply a back formation.

There are a number of words that are frequently used in single word utterances as if they were interjections, but they also have an adverbial function. A high proportion of these begin with *a-*, as for instance:

	<i>andi</i>	<i>soon, directly</i>
	<i>andilimba</i>	<i>for the first time</i>
Arabana	<i>aguru</i>	<i>over there</i>

Wanganuru	awaḍa	<i>over there</i>
Arabana	arada	<i>on top, up!</i>
Arabana	ambaḍa	<i>in the middle, get in!</i>
	anari	<i>this way</i>
	arura	<i>quickly!</i>
Wanganuru	awula	<i>anyhow, it doesn't matter how! never mind</i>

As a category, interjections and interjectional adverbs show total loss of initial ŋ-. Just as there is no kinship term or pronoun beginning with ŋ- in Arabana-Wanganuru, there are *no* interjections, or adverbs that may be used as interjections, which begin with ŋ-.

4.6. Proper Nouns

As has been well known, particularly since the days of Dauzat (1926), place-names contain archaic features, and Arabana-Wanganuru is no exception to this. Archaisms are found in vocabulary: *ḡaba-maḡa* *fresh water*, the name of the lower Neales, contains the word *ḡaba*, a widespread word which has cognates in Diyariic but is no longer found in Arabana-Wanganuru where the word for water is *ḡuḡa*. Place-names also show archaisms in phonetics and in phonotactics: *ḡandji-wanbaḡa* *Grandson-carrying* the name of the most important Arabana rain-site stands for *ḡandji-wanbaḡa* and takes us back to the days of a single laminal phoneme, with allophones conditioned by the vocalic environment (Dixon 1970); *Wudmaḡa*, the Woodmurra Creek contains the cluster *-dm-* not found elsewhere in the language. Pre-stopping of nasals and laterals, which is a recent development, is sometimes absent from place-names (Hercus 1972). One would therefore *NOT* expect to see the loss of initial ŋ- in place-names, and indeed there are only a few instances of place-names beginning with a-. Borrowing is not unheard of in place-names, particularly where the locality involved belongs to a history that traverses several tribal areas. This may be the explanation of the few place-names beginning with a-; none of these names is easily analysable: *Argariḡa* (Arckaringa Ck.) actually has its source in Western Desert country and the name may come from there too, while *Aldaguwana* (in Peake country), *Andiridja* a plain near Mt. Robinson and *Adabunaga* (near Peake) are all northern Arabana sites that show the influence of Aranda, while *Ariḡdji-baḡaḡa* (Algebuckina) would appear to be half Aranda, half Arabana: this is not surprising as it is a site connected with the ancestral red-bellied black snake

and the green snake who travelled from Coolata Springs (NT) through southern Aranda to Arabana country.

There are a few names of people which are taken from part Aranda, part Arabana-WanĠaŋuru song-cycles, and not surprisingly some of these begin with a-: Arabalga (from the grass-seed cycle), is the name of an Arabana woman; an old Arabana rain-maker was called Anindjoĵa after the Aranda rain-man who travelled to Mt Kingston. There was obviously some give and take between Arabana-WanĠaŋuru and neighbouring languages, particularly Aranda, over place-names and personal names, and this would account for the few proper names beginning with a-. There are no indications of any loss of initial consonant in proper names within Arabana-WanĠaŋuru.

There is one important exception and that is the word Arabana. The neighbouring Guyani and Diyari say ŋarabana. Tindale (1974:210) indicated that the older accepted pronunciation among the Arabana themselves was ŋarabana, and this was hesitatingly affirmed in recent recordings. Tribal names in many parts of Australia resemble kinship terms with regard to 'irregular' phonological and phonotactic features (e.g., the presence of initial ɭ-) and the name Arabana can therefore be classed with the kinship terms. It gives a particularly clear proof that the loss of initial ŋ- was recent and was still in process at the time of European occupation.

4.7. Song Language

One of the stylistic features of the difficult and not always analysable song-language is the repetition of words and parts of words. Frequently this is accompanied by alternation between initial nasals and l- (not used as an initial in the ordinary language) or y-. The form without nasal always comes first; it is in the initial position. Thus in the songs that accompany the WanĠaŋuru myth Djaĵba Bargulu

Two Trees:

badla ɭamburu - ŋamburu nayi (meaning uncertain)

and

wabaɖabaɖa iɭa - ŋiɭaŋgurume

i.e. wabaŋɖa iɭaŋguru *he is searching like this*

and

yalbara-ŋalbara *thirsty* (Goanna History)

This may simply be a game with words, such as English 'doggie-woggie', but the fact that it happens mainly with initial nasals and particularly with ŋ- would seem to indicate that initial nasals were felt to be more dispensable than other consonants.

4.8. Special Words

This category comprises terms which have a ritual, mythological or trade significance. Some of these words are shared by people over a large area, and they do not necessarily conform to the phonotactic system of Arabana-Wangaṅuru: for instance they frequently begin the third syllable with a plosive, which is unusual in Arabana-Wangaṅuru. There are several such words which begin with a-. Examples are:

argaba	<i>red ochre</i>
ambaga	<i>malicious mythological being</i>
aba ga	<i>dream</i>
aḍidjumba	<i>wild honey</i> (connected with the Aḍidjumba myth which ends in Southern Aranda Country near Finke)
aruguda	<i>bush boy</i> (young initiate not yet allowed back into camp)
amira	<i>woomera</i> (of the Aranda and Western Desert type, see Spencer and Gillen 1899:582)

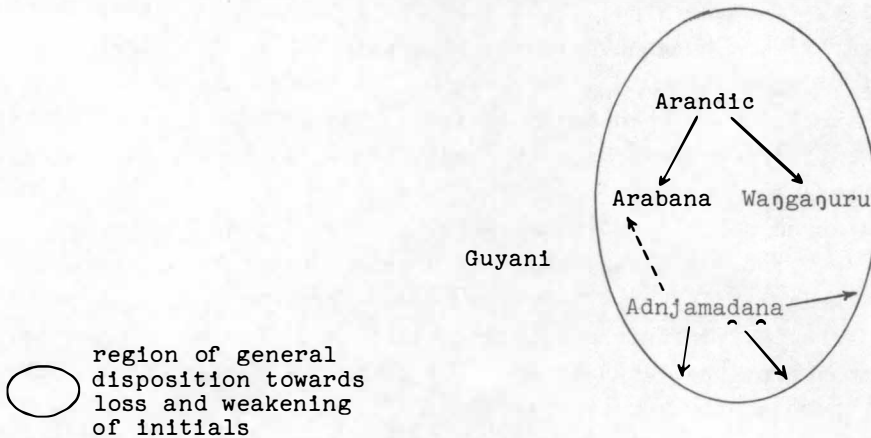
As these are 'special' words, their vocalic initial is not immediately connected with the loss of initial ŋ- in Arabana-Wangaṅuru.

4.9. Other Words

Apart from the particular categories comprising pronouns, kinship terms and interjections there are very few words in which the loss of ŋ- has brought about an initial a-. None of these are simple verbs. There are some secondary verbs based on adverbs such as aradja-ma- *to straighten*, a|a-widji- *to come true* and one single rare reduplicating verb andji-andji- *to cajole, to try to organise an (illicit) meeting with a girl*. There are only about a dozen other words beginning with a-. As they do not have reliable cognates it is difficult to prove that they originally had an initial ŋ-: examples are Arabana ambalda *cloud*, Wangaṅuru abada *the eastern side of a sandhill*, Arabana alba *tepid*, alga *colour, appearance*, algidjira *dead finish tree*. The word abira *river gum* is highly unlikely ever to have contained an initial ŋ- as is shown by the cognate Guyani bira, Adnjamaḍana wira. Outside the categories listed, therefore, words beginning with a- and showing loss of an original initial ŋ- form an insignificant portion of the Arabana-Wangaṅuru vocabulary.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The data connected with loss and weakening of initial consonants in south-central Australia show that these changes are relatively recent and regional, cutting across genetic boundaries. As in the case of several other conspicuous linguistic features, such as the pre-stopping of lateral and nasal consonants, and kinship pronouns, there appear to have been two areas of maximum development which were also the two main centres of diffusion: Arandic and Adnjamadana. The changes involved differed in detail between the two centres. A simplified schematisation of the situation would be as follows:



The rules regarding the loss of initial consonants in Adnjamadana are invariant: they correspond to Labov's Type I rule where exceptions and violations do not normally occur (Labov 1972:111). But in Arabana-Wangaŋuru *the changes were still in progress*.

The intricacies of the loss of initial plosives in Arabana reduplicated verbs and in certain bound morphemes make it likely that a Type III rule was operating, that is a rule subject to certain variations. As regards nasal consonants there was already an invariant rule:

- | | |
|---------------|--------------------------|
| | + kinship term |
| initial ŋ > ø | + pronoun |
| | + interjection or adverb |

As shown by the term Arabana, by the back formation ŋa|a, and by the verb andji-andji- the rest of the vocabulary was governed by a variable Type III rule but the details of this are no longer evident.

The question that arises is: 'Why should pronouns, kinship terms, interjections (and adverbs that can be used in single word utterances) be affected by the loss of initial consonants ahead of every other class of words?' The following answer may be suggested. The feature that is shared by these three categories of words is that in Arabana-Wangaṅuru they are precisely the words found most frequently at the beginning of an utterance. Their initial consonant was therefore in the initial position *par excellence* and most liable to loss.

Labov's work shows the operation of sound-changes still in progress; it shows the fine gradients that are noticeable in the essential variability of these Type III rules. The situation in the remnants of modern Arabana-Wangaṅuru is invariable; what we have here is an 'atrophied' Type III rule. The loss of initial η - was halted just as it was starting to spread to the rest of the vocabulary beyond those special categories of words that occur frequently at the beginning of an utterance.

The Arabana social system was totally disrupted in the period around the First World war; this was through European influence and through the great influx of Western Desert people and subsequent strife. The 1919 influenza epidemic killed most of the old people. Those who learnt the language then learnt it 'correctly' from their elders, there was no longer a sense of 'fashion' and none of the pressure for change that comes with a young peer group. There was nothing left of the vitality that makes a variable rule of Type III. The Arabana language was as it were halted in its tracks around 1915-1920, the Wangaṅuru language even earlier, at the time of the migration from the Simpson Desert, around 1900, while the loss of initial η - was still in progress. It could be safely said that were these languages to be re-vitalised, the impulse for this particular change, loss of initial η -, would no longer be felt: quite different sound-changes might occur. The Arabana-Wangaṅuru example shows that periods of total social disruption and atrophism of the impulses for change may well explain some of the partial sound-changes that are so bewildering in historical linguistics.

NOTES

1. Fieldwork was carried out under the auspices of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies and the Australian Research Grants Commission. I am indebted to Mr P. Austin for advice and for information on Diyari.

2. According to the list of kinship terms given by Elkin (1939:63) there was a similar development in Southern Yawarawarga, where, as opposed to Northern Yawarawarga, these terms lost an initial velar nasal: 'atatji' wife's mother's brother (Northern 'ngatatji') and 'alari' sister's child (Northern 'ngalari'). Elkin's lists contain even a few examples from Yandruwanda, e.g. 'aparti' for ḡabiḡi *father*. None of these forms have been confirmed in recent work by Breen and by S.A. Wurm (Breen MS, Wurm and Austin MS). Elkin's lists, if accurate in this respect, would therefore indicate the fact that even sub-dialects may differ from each other with regard to the loss of initial consonants; the lists would also confirm the special development of kinship terms.

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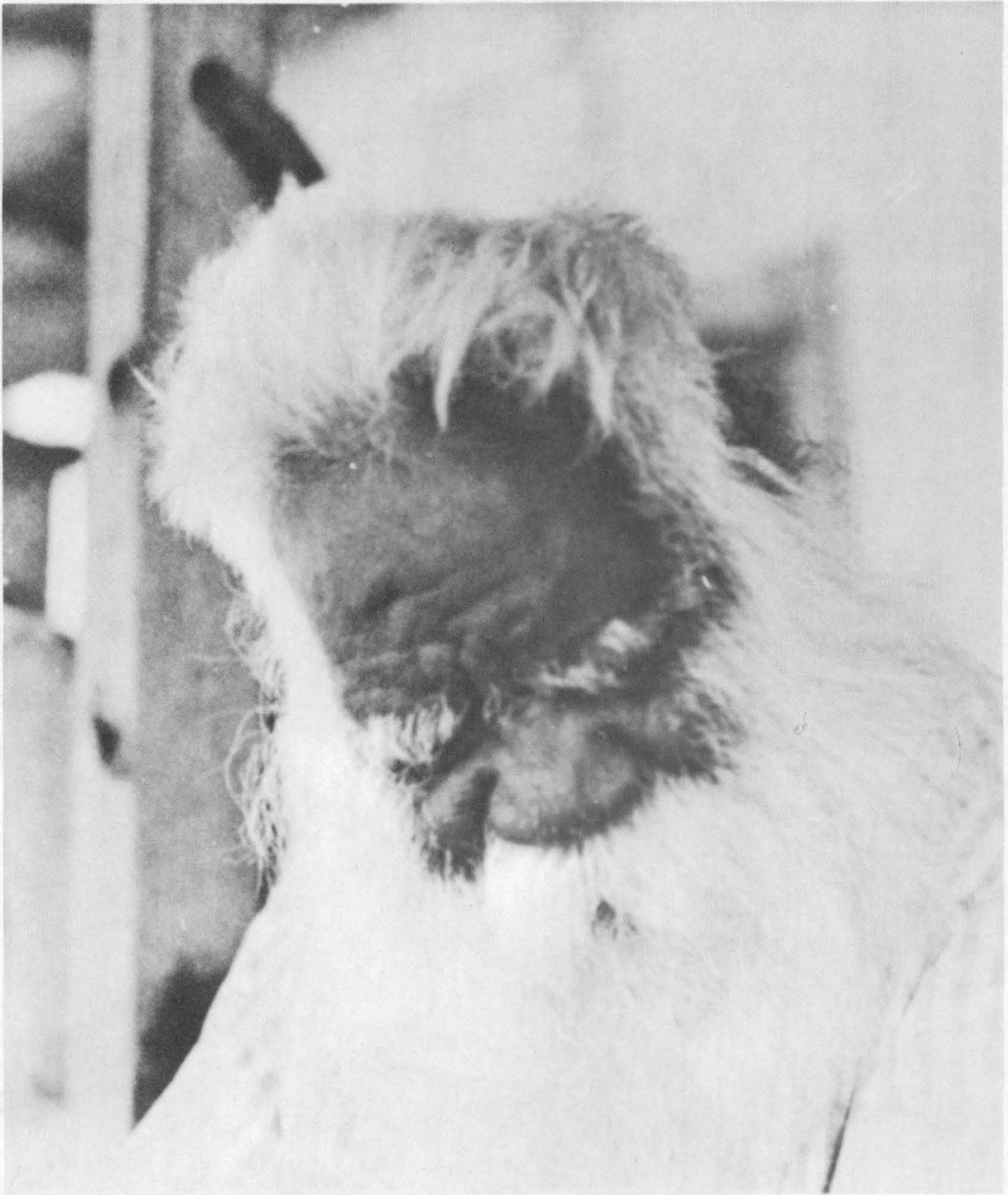
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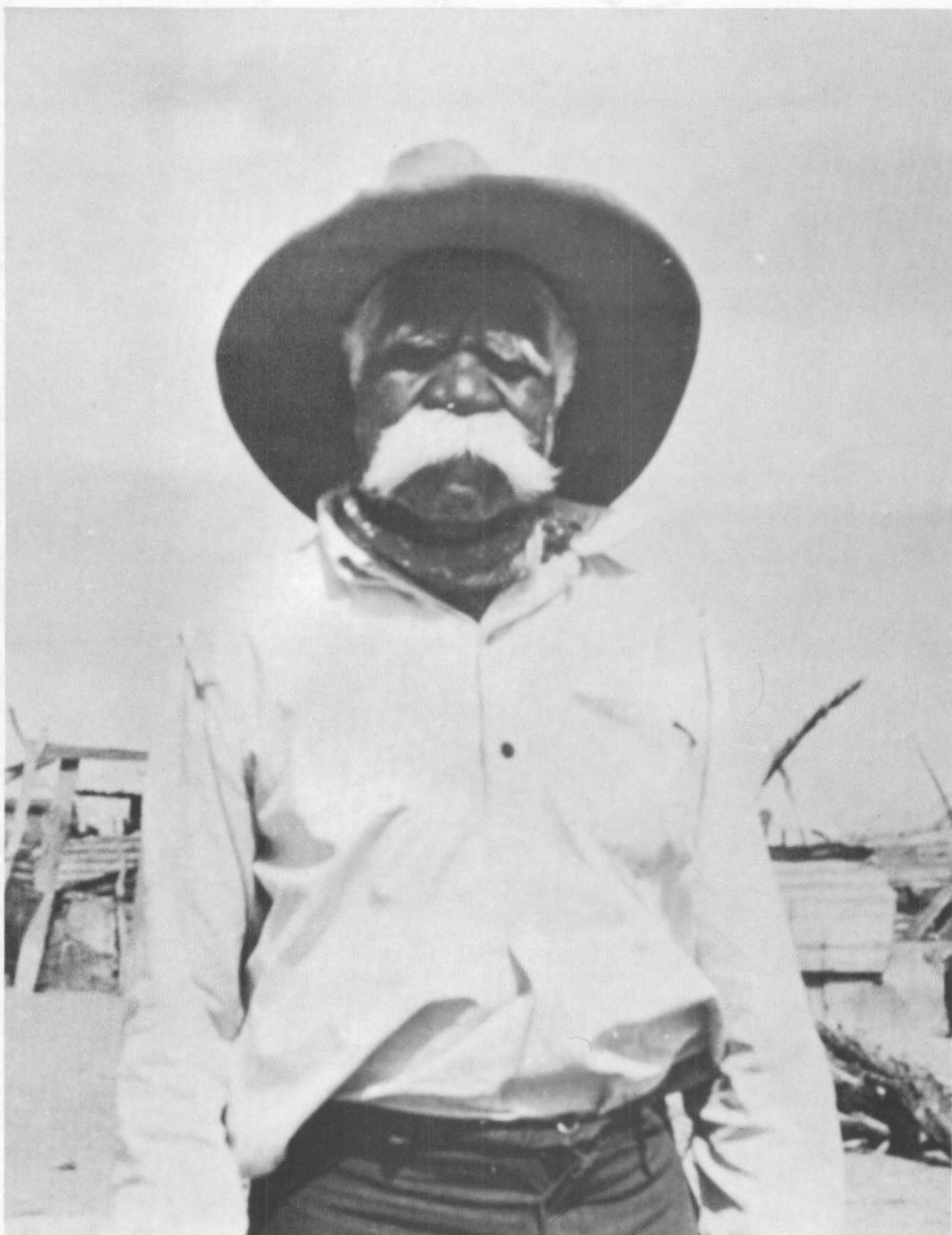
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Murtee Johnny (dec. 1976) born at Murtee Station, in about 1880, the last speaker of Yandruwanda (Innamincka dialect), at Lyndhurst in 1972.



This is Murtee Johnny, the last Yandruwanda from Murtee Station, when working on Mt Hopeless Station.



Mick McLean Irinjili (dec. 1976), Simpson Desert Wanganuru, at Dalhousie Springs in August 1975.



Where Aranda and Wanganuru country meet: looking towards the desert (Wanganuru country) from the Idnjundura (Kingfisher) spring at Dalhousie, in Aranda country.



Gilbert Branfield (left) (dec. 1973), the last Nugunu, and Tim Strangways (dec. 1972), the Arabana fish-history man, at Andamooka opal field in August 1965.



Archie Allen, the only northern Arabana, at Finke in August 1974.



Angus MacKenzie (dec. 1975) and his wife Eileen
in their garden at Port Augusta, August 1973.

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