

5

Looking at some details of Reuther's work

Luise Hercus

The surviving work of J. G. Reuther fills 13 volumes and is an easy target for comments about Germans' meticulous attention to detail (see Lucas and Deane, Chapter 4, this volume, for details). A single word in Reuther's 4,035-word Diyari dictionary may have well over 30, and in a few cases even over 60, illustrative sentences. These sentences are important not only for their anthropological content, but also linguistically: they contain special idioms and turns of phrase that are characteristic for a whole area. The richness of detail is characteristic of his massive work, compiled at the Lutheran mission at Killalpaninna.

I focus here mainly on matters of detail in Reuther's comparative wordlists¹ in volume V and in his volume VII on placenames, using individual entries to illustrate general points. There is a bit of 'devil' in the detail: there are many difficulties of interpretation. I will show how evidence gathered in the 1960s and 1970s from speakers of the nearby languages—particularly Arabana/Wangkangurru, Yaluyandi and Kuyani—may help to solve some of these difficulties.

1 Information on Diyari is largely from Austin (1981); on Yandruwandha from Breen (2004a, 2004b); and data on adjacent languages is from Hercus (1994) and from other publications and fieldwork by the author.

Background

The mission at Killalpaninna in Diyari country was a long way from any major centre of white population, and could only be reached via the Birdsville Track. Travelling there in the latter part of the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth century was still a major undertaking. Killalpaninna was a centre for Diyari people but also a refuge for people of many other groups. Despite its isolation, it was once a vibrant place with Aboriginal people coming and going. It had a school and a church and a supply of food; there were rations and the daily bread was baked there (Jones and Sutton 1986: 35).

The people from neighbouring groups who had come there were the ones involved with the wordlists of seven Aboriginal languages: Wonkarabana, Jauraworka to English, Wonkanguru, Kuyani to English, Ngameni, Tirari to English and Jendruwanta to English. In modern spelling, these language names are Arabana, Yawarrawarrka, Wangkangurru, Kuyani, Ngamini, Thirrari and Yandruwandha. These wordlists are single glosses and have no illustrative sentences. They figure as four lists in the English translation by P. A. Scherer from the original German.²

In addition, there was some information from groups of people from:

- Pilardapa (Reuther's Pillatapa) from the nearby Blanchwater area: their language was very close to Diyari (Austin 1981).
- Yaluyandi (Reuther's Jeluyanti) from the Diamantina to the north of the Ngamini.
- Wangkamadla (Reuther's Wongamarla) from west of Bedourie in far western Queensland.
- Karangura adjacent to Yaluyandi: this was always a small group and just a couple of people from there are known to have gone to Killalpaninna.

So, including Diyari and the seven groups who contributed to the comparative dictionaries, there were therefore 12 different groups of people speaking separate languages who had been resident at one time or another at Killalpaninna. We must be grateful to Reuther for continuing

2 Scherer's English translation of much of Reuther's work, including the wordlists, was made available on microfiche by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (Reuther 1981).

to work undaunted, and contributing to the knowledge of all of them. What is perhaps the most impressive part is that Reuther must have used the Diyari language in eliciting the information in all of his many volumes.

After the mission effectively closed in 1915, the place went into decline. By 1969, there was only one building left standing and now there is nothing except one European gravesite. There are no Diyari or any other Aboriginal people living permanently anywhere in the vicinity.

In its heyday, Killalpaninna—despite the harsh climate and spartan conditions—was an ideal place for language studies because of the diversity of speakers. Reuther was there for 18 years, so it is not surprising that the sheer quantity of his work is overwhelming, his 13 volumes covering every imaginable aspect of traditional life, as well as general topics that one might not expect, such as the *toas* and lists of personal names. The placenames volume has 2,449 entries.

Reuther's huge work is unique, but it cannot be considered in isolation: Regina Ganter³ has recently discovered at Neuendettelsau a notebook from Reuther's predecessor, Flierl, which contains brief vocabularies and some grammatical features from four languages—Diyari, Ngamini, Wangkangurru and Arabana. One can tell it is an early work because the writer is just coming to grips with the sound system of these languages and has missed hearing the initial *ng*, writing *ura* for *ngura* ('camp'), and *Aumini* for *Ngamini*.

There are too many similarities between Flierl's four-language vocabulary and Reuther's seven-language vocabulary for this to be coincidental—for instance, the word for 'valley' is translated in both sets of vocabularies by the Arabana and Wangkangurru speakers as *jikara*, which means 'swamp', and the words for 'alive' are given as translations for 'life'. Both Flierl's list and Reuther's original manuscripts have glosses in German. Flierl's vocabulary and grammatical lists must have given an initial incentive and served as a model for Reuther's work, confirming his adherence to the German missionary linguistic tradition.

3 Personal communication.

Reuther's achievement

It is difficult to comprehend how Reuther achieved this work. He had no typewriter, as they were only just coming into usage; no filing cards, just sheets of paper; no encouragement apart from the work of Flierl and the collaboration with his co-worker Carl Strehlow; and there was hostility from the synod to contend with.

Reuther was describing Diyari and the neighbouring languages as living and evolving, and he followed the German missionary model in paying attention to the intricacies and details. His situation differed from that of Strehlow, who was later with Arrernte and Luritja people as the population at Killalpaninna contained not only local Diyari, but also displaced people from other parts of the Lake Eyre Basin.

The initial concept of Reuther's work seems to have been that the Diyari dictionary was going to include comparative material from all those neighbouring languages. Even he found this huge vision impracticable and there are hardly any parallel sentences from these languages after the first volume of the Diyari dictionary. But Reuther did not abandon the wider view; he followed the unwritten German missionary rule of 'never give up', so he produced dictionaries with German glosses, with 1,744 entries for each of the seven languages listed above as well as Arabana, Yawarrawarrka, Wangkangurru, Kuyani, Ngamini, Thirrari and Yandruwandha, except that the first 127 entries of the Ngamini–Thirrari vocabulary have gone missing, and Yandruwandha has only 857 words.⁴

4 A combined electronic version of these lists with the call number 0379 was prepared by Peter Austin and Pia Herbert, and consolidated by David Nash. However, during the decommissioning and transfer of this database from the Aboriginal Studies Electronic Data Archive (ASEDA) (see aseda.aiatsis.gov.au/) to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), it went missing. ASEDA can now be found under the Australian Indigenous Languages Collection (AILC) at the AIATSIS.

Reuther's volume V, the comparative vocabularies: Problems

The only way to proceed when one has only sheets of paper is to keep on collecting and simply adding new material even if there is some duplication or contradiction. With the profusion of information that Reuther encountered, there can be a few problems. Here is just one example to show how data from Wangkangurru can clarify contradictions.

There is a Wangkangurru fixed locution *milyki warru withirnda* ('his eyes turn white'; literally, 'eye white becomes he'), which is used on a number of occasions in mythological texts to describe an impressionable young man watching a ceremony when girls are dancing. It is roughly equivalent to the expression 'his eyes lit up'. Reuther's lists use this expression to translate 'fornicator among relation' (no. 670), when it really means 'just looking' and has nothing to do with kinship. However, further on at word number 1,022, 'fornicator' is translated into the appropriate 'swearwords' in the Aboriginal languages, except for Kuyani, which still has the innocent expression *mini ngarla* ('eyes big').

This example shows the effects of Reuther simply adding on to existing vocabulary, rather than crosschecking or correcting. The contradictions show the probity of his work and seem to confirm that Reuther never tampered with his information.

With the constant inflow of new information and probably little opportunity for looking back, all kinds of other mistranslations can slip through. There are a number of entries in the comparative vocabularies where some knowledge of Wangkangurru and the other languages tells us that the speakers have marginally misunderstood Reuther. He had the horrendous task of having to operate via Diyari rather than his native German, while at the same time keeping track of seven other Aboriginal languages. Examples are:

- Number 70, 'to brood': All the speakers gave him the word for 'to sunbathe', and three have even included the word for 'sun', which is listed just before, at number 69.
- Number 44, 'oppress': The words given by the speakers simply mean 'to put something down on the ground'.

- Numbers 528 and 639, ‘to graze’, ‘to eat’ (of animals): Reuther appears not to have been told by his advisers that the widespread verb *marka* used by them means ‘to crawl’ and that this is an extended meaning of the verb ‘to crawl’ in all the languages of the area—that is, ‘to crawl along, eating’.
- Number 212: The gloss ‘friend’ is wrong; the words given by the speakers mean ‘one’s own’, referring to a close relative rather than a classificatory one.
- There is also confusion introduced by the translator (Scherer) over word number 1,518, ‘otter’: All seven Aboriginal languages answer with the word for ‘poisonous snake’, and it seems that the German word ‘otter’ simply has not been translated, and we are dealing not with the English word ‘otter’, but with a German word for ‘poisonous snake’, as in the once much feared ‘*Kreuzotter*’.

The glosses often ignore lively metaphors, as in number 87, ‘obey, be obedient’, when the Aboriginal terms say ‘ears awake’. Numbers 263 and 274 refer to ‘moderate with food’ and ‘sober’, respectively; however, all speakers say ‘strong liver’ for both items, except the Kuyani speaker, who says ‘sorry, sad’, probably conveying the thought that being stingy about food is miserable.

It can happen that some of the speakers have interpreted the question differently from the others, as in the case of number 71, ‘thorn, sting’: one has given the word for ‘sting’, two have given the word for ‘sharp thorn’ and two have given the word for ‘sandhill cane-grass’. These are just a few examples of problems taken from near the beginning of the wordlists; there are many more of the same kind.

There are also interesting and unexpected items that are listed without adequate explanations, such as number 217, ‘thoroughly healthy food’. The answers are equally unexpected: the overwhelming reply is ‘raw’; two speakers even say ‘live meat’. What the speakers are telling us is that they are missing fresh meat. There is a special expression for this elsewhere in Reuther’s data and in Wangkangurru data: ‘my mouth is getting hard from eating only vegetable food’. In Wangkangurru stories, old women are the ones who say this, complaining that their male relatives are not bringing them any meat.

There are three entries with the gloss 'once, formerly' (nos 1,434–6) without any distinction made between them. The united evidence of the different languages makes it clear that the three entries are all distinct. Thus, number 1,434 is the base form in all three and it means 'once upon a time, long ago'; the second entry is a reduplicated emphatic form of this; and the third is an elative 'coming from', and it means 'from ancient times, of old', so, in the case of Wangkangurru, it is *waru*, *waruwaru* and *warungana* (*waru-nganha*).

This is not an isolated case: it shows that Reuther did not analyse these forms at the point of entry, nor did he ask what was the difference between these words, but simply assigned one and the same meaning to all of them.

A slippage is evident in the glosses of line numbers 330–3 and there are also some gaps in the glosses. All of these could be easily filled with some knowledge of the languages involved, particularly Wangkangurru. Because of the circumstances in which Reuther had to write, there is still a lot of work to be done to elucidate his massive work.

Reuther noted new words in the comparative dictionaries for concepts that did not previously exist; some of these are quite practical, such as number 51, 'sourdough leaven' ('eyes [holes] shut in food'), and these would be lively examples for use in modern language revival:

- Wangkangurru: *milki-wapili-workana*: eyes (holes)-shut in-food/bread.
- Arabana: *miltji-wapili-workana*: eyes (holes)-shut in-food/bread.
- Kuyani: *maji-pamara-nku-ni*: food-rise-CAUS-emphatic.
- Yawarrarrrka: *duldruwindribuka*: holes(?) gone-in food.
- Yandruwandha: *tjilawari*: meaning unknown.

The words for 'sourdough bread' died out with the closure of the mission.

None of the Christian-oriented vocabularies included in the comparative wordlists appears to have survived. Six Wangkangurru speakers who lived until the 1960s had spent some time at the mission. They included one man, Ben Murray, who had kept in touch with the last of the missionaries. None used any of those religious terms. The word *purrrka*, which meant 'sad, sorry', was used by Reuther to mean 'conscience'. It formed the base of different compounds to express the notions of 'rueful, to humiliate, to repent, to be compassionate, to be dejected'. These have not survived.

The idea of ‘fasting’ never really caught on, nor did the religious meanings of words connected with this. Reuther himself explains this in the Diyari dictionary: ‘By “fasting”, of course, one must not understand something voluntary, but compulsory. The speaker has probably already eaten to excess, or has no appetite for some reason or another’ (Reuther 1981: Vol. III, p. 1155.4).

There was also no sign of survival of the new words used in Bible translations connected with finance, such as ‘debtor’ and ‘tax collector’. The Diyari, Arabana and Wangkangurru words for ‘stone’ are still used today for ‘money’, even by younger people—but Reuther’s lists do not mention money! They do, however, represent a valiant effort to adapt seven different languages to European concepts.

Reuther’s volume VII, the placenames: Methodology

Reuther’s method of elicitation involved the use of the Diyari language, the local Aboriginal language at Killalpaninna. The alternative would have been English, which was not familiar to him nor to the Aboriginal population. So, when it came to getting information about other languages, he had to use one Aboriginal language, Diyari, to elicit another. This method can break down when the ways of expressing complex concepts differ between Aboriginal languages. This is what happened in the case of the Diyari words *Mura* and *muramura*.

Reuther in his Diyari dictionary made valiant attempts to clarify what was meant by the Diyari word *Mura*. His trouble was that he could not bestow any worthy definition on ‘paganism’. Reuther defined the term *Mura* (entry 1.36) as ‘supernatural ancestor’ and he illustrated this by quoting sentences where it means ‘a person’s main totemic ancestor’. He cautiously added, after some sentences showing a man’s devotion to his own *Mura*, ‘I would not knowingly like to attach more meaning to a pagan point of view than actually applies’ (Reuther 1981: Vol. I, p. 36, no. 29).

The translator, Scherer, here adds a footnote defining *Mura* as *Obergott*—that is, ‘supreme God’. There are various instances where Reuther used the word *Mura* in the sense of something that represents one’s *Mura*—that is, *churinga*, ‘in the corner of the string-bag lies my *mura* “sacred stone”’ (or ‘*churinga*’) (Reuther 1981: Vol. I, p. 40, no. 42).

He also mentioned the very special notion of 'one's own *Mura* song'. When a man was dying, his *Mura* song was sung to him (Reuther 1981: 1200).

Reuther clarified this personal connection with the *Mura* when quoting the phrase *mura kamaneli* = 'one's own totemic ceremony' (Reuther 1981: entry 1295).

Furthermore, Reuther went through the difficult task of explaining the word *Mura* versus *muramura*:

mura dikana = 'to teach or relate the stories [tales or legends] of the muramuras.'

Note by Reuther: The expression is *mura dikana* (and not *muramura dikana*), because the *mura* is respected on account of or through the *muramura*. (Reuther 1981: entry 1109)

Later, in volume III of the *Diyari* dictionary, he addresses this problem directly:

Let us now pass on to the word *Mura*, and observe in what relationship it stands to the reduplicated word, *muramura*. This form of reduplication is an [idiomatic] peculiarity of the local language, for it is to be found in all word-forms with the exception of the pronoun.

The word *Mura* stands in relation to *muramura* as genus does to species. There is one *Mura*, whilst there are many *muramuras*. *Mura* is a personal name, whereas *muramura* is a generic term, for there are many of the latter who also bear a personal name. Reuther: 'Stammvater.' P.A.S.⁵ (Reuther 1981: Vol. III, p. 24, no. 1520)

Reuther was unaware that reduplication in nouns involved a diminutive and sometimes even a pejorative rather than a pluraliser, and that *muramura* basically meant 'lesser *Mura*'. He did, however, as in the quotation above, analyse it as a subdivision of the *Mura*. Reuther was clear when discussing *Mura* and *muramura*, stating that this was an idiomatic 'peculiarity of the local language'. Arabana and Wangkangurru people did not distinguish between a notion of *Mura* and *muramura*. For them, there was a creation time, or History Time, and that was called *Ularaka*. This term also covered the notion of 'ancestor belonging to the History Time', but was always accompanied by the name of that ancestor, whether important or not

5 This is a note from the translator, P. A. Scherer.

so important. This meant that a person would say ‘*antha Yaltya Ularaka*’ (‘I [belong to] Frog History’) in the same way as one belonging to the important long *Kurrawara Ularaka* (the ‘Cloud’, i.e. the ‘Rain History’) would say ‘*antha Kurrawara Ularaka*’ (‘I Rain History’), and it would mean ‘I identify with this history’. Although Reuther learnt about many myths from ‘the Saltwater Blacks’, I cannot find any reference to the word *Ularaka* in his works. He used only the Diyari terminology.

A search through the wordlists in volume V reveals that Reuther has, under item 723, a Yandruwandha entry, *jelkura*, and a gloss (‘spirit, creator’—both crossed out), so he was having trouble with this gloss, presumably for religious reasons. There was no such trouble with the Arabana–Yawarrawarrka entries, where Yawarrawarrka has the same *jelkura* and Arabana has *muramura*, with the gloss ‘ancestral being’. *Yelkura* is the word that is rendered by ‘*muda yalkurra*’ in Breen’s Yandruwandha dictionary, with the gloss ‘God’ (Breen 2004b).⁶ Reuther’s Wangkangurru–Kuyani comparative vocabulary has *muramura* throughout, with the same gloss of ‘ancestral being’.

Both Ngamini and Thirrari are close to Diyari and one might have expected them to have the term *Muramura*, but the Kuyani entry *muramura* is surprising. One might be surprised, too, at the Arabana and Wangkangurru *muramura* because, in all the recorded material from their elders in the 1960s and 1970s, they used only their term *Ularaka*. Spencer’s 1903 notebook from the Peake in Arabana country confirms this.⁷

There is, however, a word, *muramura*, in Wangkangurru. It refers to mythical beings, the ‘little fellows’ who were said to be living in stony cliffs and rises. We cannot know whether Reuther’s speakers of Wangkangurru were thinking of the ‘little fellows’ when they must have agreed with *muramura* in answer to Reuther’s question, or whether they simply went along with his word *muramura*. I would like to guess the latter, as this would account also for the Arabana and Kuyani entries. For Kuyani,⁸ I have recorded only *Mura* (‘ancestor, traditional story’), never *muramura* or anything like it. Adnyamathanha, closely related to Kuyani, also has only the one term, *Mura* (‘history’).

6 Breen writes ‘d’ for the tapped ‘r’.

7 Spencer (1903: 1) has an entry ‘*ularra aka, ularaka–alcheringa*’.

8 The fluent Kuyani speaker who recorded her language, Alice Oldfield, was a traditional person and a rainmaker in her own right.

It seems, therefore, that only the Diyari and possibly their nearest neighbours, Ngamini and Thirrari people, made a distinction between *Mura* and *muramura*, while, for everyone else in the southern Lake Eyre Basin, such a distinction did not exist, and there was only one term. The difficulties involved in the definition of *Mura* and *muramura* are a clear example of the fact that one cannot always explain one Aboriginal language in terms of another, particularly where deeper differences in concepts are concerned.

Reuther was a careful observer, but, by always using the Diyari language, he was beginning to see the world through Diyari eyes.

Reuther's vision

Reuther's work on the dictionaries had him in constant contact with senior Aboriginal men, especially Diyari, and so, as indicated above, he came to have an understanding of how they viewed their world. He could see how they viewed the landscape, he could hear from them how all the natural features came to be and how this was part of a vast network of stories of creation. So he began to compile a list of placenames, which was, like his dictionaries, unique in size and detail. It forms volume VII of his work, and spans most of the southern part of the Lake Eyre Basin. It comprises the homelands not only of the Diyari, but also of those other people who participated in the work on the comparative dictionaries, as listed in section two above, as well as the Yaluyandi, north beyond the Ngamini. Karangura country was covered only indirectly by evidence from neighbouring people (see Hercus 1992); there had been only very few Karangura people at Killalpaninna. The sites of the Pilardapa to the south-east were classified under Diyari.

Reuther was a practical man and his vision went beyond the compilation of this huge listing; placenames had to have a map. He got the collaboration of the Killalpaninna schoolteacher, H. J. Hillier, who drew up an enormous map, based on the pastoral map. This map displayed inspirational foresight: it was intended to show the Aboriginal view of the landscape with all but the most prominent European names ignored. Clearly defined conspicuous features such as high hills and large lakes can be located easily with this map. It was ahead of its time and ahead of the infrastructure of its time. This had disadvantages in that many of the

placenames, particularly those of the Wangkangurru in the Simpson Desert, were in uncharted territory. Most others were in poorly surveyed areas. In Hercus and Potezny (1990), we put the names (other than those of conspicuous features) into four categories:

1. Places within reasonable reach of Killalpaninna, along the old Kalamurina track and the southern portion of the Birdsville Track, which Reuther and/or Hillier are likely to have been able to visit personally.
2. Places with Aboriginal names that were shown on the pastoral map; these are mainly the prominent features mentioned above, such as hills and lakes, as well as some very conspicuous waterholes—as, for instance, Kantritya, Goyder Lagoon waterhole.
3. Places for which Aboriginal people were able to supply series of names in lines of travel or following watercourses in areas where European geographical knowledge was adequate for reasonably accurate positioning on maps.
4. Places for which Aboriginal people were able to supply a series of names in a sequence, but where European knowledge was so inadequate that the names simply appear as lists or are just put in a general location.

This means that the locating of sites from the Hillier map is very difficult in places of category three and almost impossible in category four.

Here are examples of this: in June 2003, John McEntee, Philip Jones, Vlad Potezny, Kim McCaul and I tried to locate some sites marked on the Hillier map along Strzelecki Creek. We were unsuccessful. Here is an extract from the record compiled by me (Hercus MS 1):

Ngapamankamankani and Ngapamunari are two placenames on the Hillier map just south of Montecollina Bore (Mantukalina, Reuther X 138, but not listed in the placenames volume, VII), probably in the same small branch of the Strzelecki Creek. We assumed that we were looking for a soakage but did not find signs of one, but there was evidence of occupation all along the creek. Artefacts and remains of a hearth were identified as well as human skeletal material. As we had no additional information about the possible nature of these sites, neither could be positively identified.

Reuther has the following explanations for these names:

1376 Ngapamankamankani: ngapa = 'water', mankamankani = 'to find'

Leaving the creek behind, Mitikujana went overland, where he found water: he therefore named the place accordingly.

This implies that this particular site is not in the creek—but must be near it and we did not find any likely place.

1323 Ngapamunari: ngapa = 'water' munari = 'a steep bank' meaning: 'water near a steep bank'.

Here, at [the foot of] a steep bank, Marumaruna found water in the creek, he therefore gave the place the above name.

No particularly steep bank was found. (Reuther 1981)

These searches and subsequent attempts to find particular Swan sites around Lake Gregory confirmed the difficulty of locating sites using the Hillier map.

Nature of the entries

Reuther did not have the special personal intimacy with important sites that is displayed by T. G. H. Strehlow for *Akár' Intjôfa* in lower southern Aranda country (Strehlow 1970: 134). Reuther's connection to country was mainly at second hand. As the items in volume VII show, he had developed a systematic set of questions for his advisors: 1) what was the meaning of a placename? If it is not a Diyari name, what would be the Diyari equivalent? 2) Why was it so called? 3) Who named it? In other words, he was asking for both the etymology and the etiology (the story of the bestowal of a name; see Koch 2009).

This does not leave any scope for the emotions displayed so frequently by people when talking about their country:

- 'I want to get back to my country, my country with the red sandhills': Murtee Johnny (Yandruwandha) talking about places off the Strzelecki Track.
- 'Makes me feel sorry to talk about this country': Linda Crombie (Wangkangurru/Yaluyandi) talking about sites on the Diamantina.

There is little doubt that Reuther's advisers must have felt the same.

As a result of the systematic nature of Reuther's methods, the entries for placenames in volume VII follow a distinctive pattern: Reuther's number comes first, then the name of the site, then the language, then the name of the ancestor who named the site. This means that important extra information can be left out simply because it does not fit into those exact slots. The names are often descriptive of the site, especially the vegetation of the site—for example: '2187, Wariwaringura, Tirari, Jikaura, Meaning: The Wariwari plant or creeper Jikaura always found this *species of grass here*, hence the name.' (Reuther does not tell us that *jikaura* is the name of the native cat, nor does he tell us that this creeper was the one used for making carrying pads. These would be vital pieces of information.)

Most, but not all entries adhere rigidly to the pattern of Reuther's three questions. The following is one of the cases where the *muramura* ancestor who named the site is himself not named: '2143 Wirramudla, Kujani, Wirra = D patara gumtree Meaning, The end of the *gum trees*.'

Here the gum trees along the creek finish up. The *muramura* therefore named the place accordingly.

As is often the case, the physical characteristics of the site are the source of the name. These may be anything but spectacular:

2334 Wirkaripudla, Wongkanguru, Kurkarli,

Wirkari=D wirka crack, crevice in the ground

Pudla the Dual form

Meaning Two cracks in the ground

Here Kurkarli came across two cracks in the ground and on that account gave the place this name. [Reuther does not tell us that *kurkarli* is the mulga snake.]

380 Karkumarra, Diari, Warliwuluna

Karku = red ochre; marra = with

Warliwulana found evidence here of red ochre ground, meaning 'the ground here is impregnated with red ochre'.

1153. Manakarlakarla, Wongkanguru

mana (as in Diari) = mouth, opening, inlet

karla = the fork of a tree

karlakarla = numerous forks

Meaning: Here where the creek runs into a main level expanse of water Kuruljuruna came across a tree which had many forks. He therefore gave the place the above name. (Reuther 1981)

Reuther does not tell us that the ancestor Kuruljuruna is in fact the diamond dove. Moreover, he always implies that reduplication of nouns means a plural (Reuther 1981: Vol. II, p. 1), whereas it implies 'little' in all the languages of the area, so the name actually meant 'it had little branches'.

These descriptions refer to ancestral times and may, of course, not be true of the present.

How easily things can change is shown by the following example.

Reuther has a site called Nganarawirli.⁹ This is the large and permanent Andrewilla waterhole, and there is no difficulty locating it:

1475 Nganarawirli, Ngameni,

nganara as in D = munari 'bank'

wirli in D = jelpi = 'border, edge; end'

Meaning a steep bank on the edge (of the creek)

(Here) along the edge of the Cooper, Kimilina (found) a steep bank.
He therefore named the place accordingly. (Reuther 1981)

This was a descriptive name, and remained descriptive of the site until 1974 when floods swept the bank away.

What strikes one immediately is that there is nothing important or dramatic in these entries, and that is true of the majority of the placenames: they may refer to a minor event—an ancestor may see a particular bird or animal in a place, or something unexpected may happen. Thus, we find entries such as:

843. Jelujanti. At Karatji waterhole Wutjukana discovered that his men 'were infested with a host of lice he therefore gave the place this name'.

1039. Wonkanguru. Madlabulu: 'Godagodana named this place after his dog'

madla in D = Kindala 'dog', la = he, bulu as in D = white. (Reuther 1981)

9 Although Reuther's text talks of it being on the Cooper, the Hillier map has it on the Diamantina in the right position, which shows that Hillier personally obtained independent information.

Madla is the Wangkangurru word for ‘dog’, as Reuther himself states, and cannot be split into *mad-la*. There is no word ‘la’ = he, and he does not tell us who Godagodana is.

What links these places to the main network of mythology is the ancestor who named the site; it means that the ancestor has been there and it is part of his/her journey. In the traditional Aboriginal view of the people in the area, the ‘ancestral beings’ were the ones who named most of the features of the countryside; modern humans had no part in this. This view was often expressed by senior Wangkangurru people and is also clear from Reuther’s evidence. Reuther’s huge list of placenames confines what is actually a great vision to precise slots. It also appears to contain trivia, but that is all part of his merit: he recorded simply what he was told, and fitted it into a system of data management. He never maximised or dramatised the importance of particular sites or even expressed particular views about them; in that sense he was a truly impartial observer and collector.

The names of the *muramura*, the ancestors

One likes to think of Reuther as perhaps being a little more easygoing than other missionaries, and he was well known, having been at Killalpaninna for such a long time. Above all, he had evidently built up lasting lines of communication with the senior men—his old advisers, whom he never names (see Jones and Sutton 1986: 52).

This might explain the way in which the ancestors were named in his works. In traditional times, the creation stories were told over campfires to an audience which already knew the gist of them—and so did Reuther. There was no need to name the main protagonists, though they might be referred to occasionally by nicknames—insider terms that were understood by this audience. They were not secret terms, just familiar. It seems that Reuther’s mythological stories in volume X were based on an open version of the myths, as were the discussions in volume XI. The names used in the placenames volume, VII, however, were based on insider versions of the stories, and some of these insider names recur in the *toa* volumes.

Philip Jones (2002: 196) drew attention to this situation, stating: ‘It appears that Reuther may not have understood that the same Ancestor could be referred to in several ways, and by various cryptic terms.’ These insider or cryptic terms are numerous; they are basically nicknames.

From the way they are used in volume VII, one cannot deduce any coherent story from them, as each entry refers to a particular place, but, at the same time, each entry helps to plot the route of the ancestor.

A striking case of the use of nicknames is that of the ancestral turkey, who is associated with initiation over a large area south and west of Diyari country. The ordinary word for 'turkey' is never used as the name of a *muramura* throughout Reuther's data, be it in the 'open' myths of volume X or among the placenames and the *toas*. The ancestral turkey is always called *Papapa* ('maternal grandfather') (in Kuyani) because he is associated with one particular story. In this story, grandfather (i.e. turkey) repeatedly warns his grandson not to touch his bag of ceremonial objects, but the young boy escapes with a bullroarer and races from hill to hill all over the landscape. He swings it standing on top of the hills, with the furious grandfather struggling along after him until ultimately grandfather cuts him off on a narrow peninsula and kills him. In this case, the identity of the 'grandfather' is obvious.

The aim of the following pages is to solve some of the more cryptic terms with the help of information learnt from Wangkangurru people. The insider terms are often hard to analyse because volume X with the open names tells only some of the stories and volume VII has only fragmentary references spread out among the placenames. A *muramura* called 'Godagodana' appears over and over again as the main ancestor for particular placenames, somehow connected with eagles and with rain. There is no mention that he is in fact a bird. But when one has learnt from Arabana and Wangkangurru people the story of the origin of the *Wilyaru* higher initiation rite and the associated myth of the eagles and the rain (as in Spencer and Gillen 1912: 24; and Hercus MS 3), one would realise that he is Kuta-kuta, the spotted nightjar. He pretends to be a piece of bark in this story, and, in fact, that is what he looks like. His actions ultimately bring the rain, so he is part of a major line of mythology.

Naming from what the *muramura* said

Some *muramura* ancestors are named for their favourite sayings. One can work this out only if one has heard the story from another source—in the following case, from the descendants of the 'Saltwater Blacks', the Wangkangurru people who told Reuther the story in the first place.

The ancestor Namparlinamparli figures prominently in Reuther's volume VII on placenames. This esoteric nickname refers to Wurrū, the heron. In an Arabana–Wangkangurru story and song cycle (recited in the 1960s by the Wangkangurru elder Mick McLean; Hercus 2007), Wurrū leads the waterbirds purposely into the desert 'to perish them' while he himself knows where to find water. He fakes sunstroke, calling out over and over again with a pathetic voice in an archaic form of Arabana: '*Nhampali nhampali nganha!*' (Cover me over, cover me over [with cool sand]), which was the traditional treatment for sunstroke.

Reuther tells the story of Marikilla in volume X (1981: entries 114–23). Marikilla is the Diyari name for the mulga snake; Wangkangurru, Ngamini and Yaluyandi people called it Kurkari. Most of Kurkari's later exploits are in Ngamini country. In volume VII, Reuther calls him Kurkarli, and also Ngaltimpara, which is the Ngamini word for 'bachelor'. This is because in the story he repeatedly called out loudly, speaking in Ngamini: 'I am a bachelor, looking for girls.' Linda Crombie was the last person who could still recall his utterances in Ngamini ('*Ngaltimpara nganyi mankara kapukapu!*'), and she could show the place north of Mount Gason where 'the Bachelor' abducted two Goanna girls, and the Milkiparda swamp where he ended up.

Naming from what the *muramura* did

The story of the Two Boys is one of the most important in the Lake Eyre Basin. Wangkangurru people called them Thutirla-pula ('Two Boys'); their eastern neighbours called them Kanku-wulu ('Two Boys'). They are mentioned under their ordinary name in volume VII: entry 1,443 speaks of 'the Province of the Kankuwulunas', because the area along the lower Eyre Creek and Mithaka country to the east was the centre of the Two Boys Cult. They usually appear under their main insider name, which is Kunjarlikunjarli ('One by One'), because they sometimes acted in unison, and sometimes separately. It is never stated in Reuther's works that this is another name for the Two Boys. He uses at least two further esoteric names for them further north, mostly in Wangkamadla country. We can explain these from Mick McLean's version of the story: *Kadlaburu Kadlapurru* ('carrying a bag') and *Kadlatjuwari Kadla-tyuwiri* ('[with] a bag that is long and narrow'), because they carried a bag full of brightly coloured

feathers for a major ceremony, the Warrthampa ceremony, and they thereby introduced the use of feather decorations to people to the east of the Simpson Desert.

The Two Men of Initiation are the most widely known and most celebrated of the ancestors. They come from the Simpson Desert and travel all around to teach people about the use of knives in circumcision. Reuther has written about them as 'Malku-malkuwulu' (1981: Vol. X, entries 108–13), a name interpreted by Wangkangurru speakers as 'the two with the bilby-tail small headdress'. Reuther does not give an interpretation. Siebert has written about them as the Yuri-ulu (Howitt 1904: 783). They are listed in Reuther's placenames work as having named a number of sites. They also appear in the same volume under the pseudonym of Wutyuka, who is spoken of as a single entity. This name is based on the Wangkangurru word connected with initiation. And, as in the case of the Two Boys, it is never stated by Reuther in volume VII or elsewhere that Malku-malkuwulu and Wutyuka are alternative names for the same pair of ancestors.

The many different names that are given to the *muramura* ancestors are not readily comprehensible, but some are explained by more recent information—mainly from Wangkangurru speakers of the 1960s and 1970s. The world of the *muramura* and their link to the landscape become clearer when, with the additional information, we can begin to see who is who in that ancestral world and by what routes and with what motivations they travelled.

Concluding remark

The work of Reuther is still the main source of information, not just for Diyari, but also for the whole of the southern Lake Eyre Basin. Without Reuther, and without the Aboriginal elders who put in many hundreds of hours working with him, much of that wide landscape would be meaningless. Reuther went on getting data without going back to correct, to change or to interpret, so he has left a unique unaltered written record of what those elders told him over his many years at Killalpaninna. There is, however, much editorial work that still needs to be done to deal with the inevitable inconsistencies and to learn more about the identity of the ancestors.

References

- Austin, P. 1981. *A Grammar of Diyari, South Australia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Breen, G. 2004a. *Innamincka talk: A grammar of the Innamincka dialect of Yandruwandha with notes on other dialects*. Pacific Linguistics 558, The Australian National University, Canberra.
- Breen, G. 2004b. *Innamincka words: Yandruwandha dictionary and stories*. Pacific Linguistics 559, The Australian National University, Canberra.
- Hercus, L. A. MS 2 [n.d.]. Arabana–Wangkangurru dictionary. Available from PARADISEC: www.paradisec.org.au.
- Hercus, L. A. 1992. Glimpses of the Karangura. *Records of the South Australian Museum* 25(2)(1991): 139–59.
- Hercus, L. A. 1994. *Grammar of the Arabana–Wangkangurru language, Lake Eyre Basin, South Australia*. Pacific Linguistics Series C128, The Australian National University, Canberra.
- Hercus, L. A. MS 1 [2003]. Report on fieldwork in the lakes area of South Australia, with input from J. McEntee, P. Jones, V. Potezny and K. McCaul.
- Hercus, L. A. 2007. The story of Wurru the crane. [Electronic version with sound-files 2008.] Privately distributed and at Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and National Library of Australia, Canberra.
- Hercus, L. A. MS 3 [in progress]. The rain from the Peake. Arabana/Wangkangurru text with verses and illustrations.
- Hercus, L. A. and Potezny, V. 1990. Locating Aboriginal sites: A note on J. G. Reuther and the Hillier map of 1904. *Records of the South Australian Museum* 24(2): 139–51.
- Howitt, A. W. 1904. *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*. London: Macmillan.

- Jones, P. 2002. Naming the dead heart: Hillier's map and Reuther's gazeteer of 2468 placenames in north-eastern South Australia. In *The Land is a Map: Placenames of Indigenous origin in Australia*, (eds) L. Hercus, F. Hodges and J. Simpson, pp. 187–200. Canberra: Pandanus Books.
- Jones, P. and Sutton, P. 1986. *Art and Land: Aboriginal sculptures of the Lake Eyre region*. Adelaide: South Australian Museum in association with Wakefield Press.
- Koch, H. 2009. The methodology of reconstructing Indigenous placenames: Australian Capital Territory and south-eastern New South Wales. In *Aboriginal Placenames: Naming and re-naming the Australian landscape*, (eds) H. Koch and L. Hercus. Aboriginal History Monograph 19, pp. 115–71. Canberra: Aboriginal History Inc. and ANU E Press.
- Reuther, J. G. 1981. *The Diari*. Translated by P. A. Scherer. Microfiche No. 2, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra.
- Schürmann, C. W. 1844. *A Vocabulary of the Parnkalla Language. Spoken by the natives inhabiting the western shores of Spencer's Gulf, to which is prefixed a collection of grammatical rules, hitherto ascertained*. Adelaide: George Dehane.
- Spencer, B. 1903. Urabunna Old Peake Station. Ms. Museum Victoria, Melbourne.
- Spencer, B. and Gillen, F. J. 1912. *Across Australia*. London: Macmillan & Co.
- Strehlow, T. G. H. 1970. Geography and the totemic landscape in Central Australia. In *Australian Aboriginal Anthropology*, (ed.) R. M. Berndt, pp. 92–140. Perth: University of Western Australia Press.

This text is taken from *German Ethnography in Australia*, edited by
Nicolas Peterson and Anna Kenny, published 2017 by ANU Press,
The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

[dx.doi.org/10.22459/GEA.09.2017.05](https://doi.org/10.22459/GEA.09.2017.05)