

FROM SPEAKING NGIYAMPAA TO SPEAKING ENGLISH

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This paper¹ is both background and sequel to 'What's in a name? An etymological view of land, language and social identification from central western New South Wales.'² That paper's first part looked at traditional Ngiyampaa social nomenclature, and its second part 'at changes in the ways in which people of Ngiyampaa descent perceive their social world, changes . . . which have taken place alongside their changeover from speaking Ngiyampaa to speaking English'. Here I outline the causes of the changeover and discuss some of its symptoms.

Similar transitions have been or are being made all over Australia. It is now likely that less than a quarter of the two hundred odd discrete Australian languages known to have been spoken in the past are still being acquired by children. These children are also learning English, at the very least to the extent that educational policy is implemented. What does the future hold? Which elements in the linguistic history of the people of Ngiyampaa descent are likely to be repeated in communities whose languages are being as universally spoken now as Ngiyampaa was, at least in the southwest of Ngiyampaa territory, for a hundred years or so after the first intrusions of English speakers?³ (By 'universally' I mean 'right through', as the usual Aboriginal phrase goes, by all generations.)

I shall be concentrating on the twentieth-century linguistic experiences of a group of Ngiyampaa speakers from this southwest corner, from the dry *belar* and *nelia* tree country north of Willandra Creek and south of Cobar and Sandy or Crowl Creek — see Map — and on those of their descendants. Members of this group, and their language, are also known as Wangaaypuwan. Their Ngiyampaa is 'wangaay-having' (*-puwan* means 'having' or 'with'). That is, it has the word *wangaay* where the more northerly variety has the word *wayil* (both words meaning 'no'). Unless otherwise stated 'Ngiyampaa' should be taken from now on as referring to this group or to their Wangaaypuwan variety of the language.

One of the features of the more recent history of the Ngiyampaa which has parallels in the history of many other Aboriginal groups is their repeated institutionalisation in a series of government run 'Aboriginal stations'. I have already pointed out in 'What's in a name?'

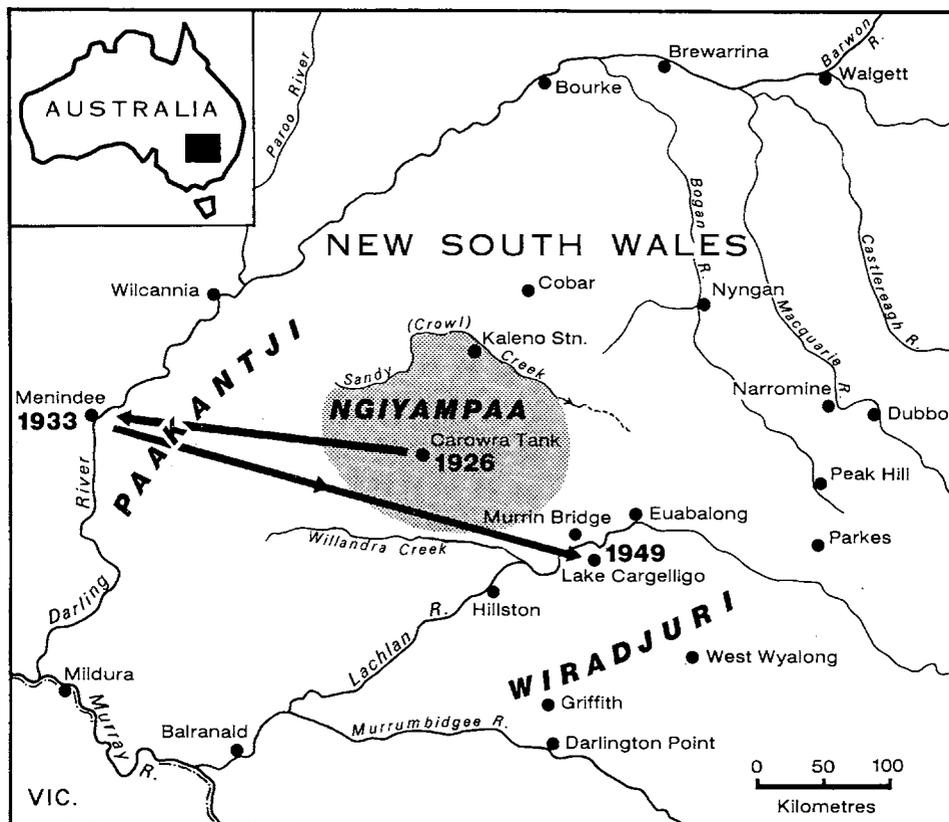
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1 This paper was written while I was a Visiting Scholar in the Linguistics Department at the University of Cambridge. I would also like to thank students of the course 'Language in Aboriginal Australia' at the Australian National University for their reactions to some of the material. The paper of course owes its existence to the knowledge and insights of my Ngiyampaa colleagues.

2 *Aboriginal History* 8, 1984:21-44.

3 Beginning with Charles Sturt's expedition of 1829.

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Note: Shaded area shows the *ngurrampaa* or 'camp-world' in which the oldest generation of today's Ngiyampaa speakers grew up. Places where later generations grew up are marked with dates showing when people were concentrated or shifted there.

how the three successive governmental institutionalisations of the Ngiyampaa, at first within their own country, and then in other people's, promoted the changeover from speaking Ngiyampaa to speaking English. Each brought with it new kinds of everyday transactions requiring English, and the proportion of the daily round in which Ngiyampaa could appropriately be used dwindled further.⁴ This was summarised in Table 2, reproduced here for ease of reference.

As a result, it is possible to distinguish four different twentieth-century 'generations' amongst those of Ngiyampaa descent, according to the different range of social contexts in which members of each acquired their Ngiyampaa and/or their English. I shall name these generations according to where members' early childhoods were spent. These places are listed in the leftmost column of the table.

⁴ Donaldson 1984b:33-6.

Date	Where the Ngiyampaa lived	In whose country (by language)	Use of Ngiyampaa	Use of English
1900	Their <i>ngurrampaa</i> , 'camping about' on pastoral stations	Ngiyampaa	First and main language	With pastoralists
1926	Carowra Tank, isolated 'mission'	Ngiyampaa	<i>Lingua franca</i> between Aborigines (mainly Ngiyampaa)	And with 'mission' management
1933	Menindee, 'mission' near town	Paakantji	Domestically among Ngiyampaa	And <i>lingua franca</i> between Ngiyampaa and Paakantji and in town
1949	Murrin Bridge, outside town (Lake Cargelligo)	Wiradjuri	Privately among oldest Ngiyampaa	Main or first language of all (Ngiyampaa, Paakantji and Wiradjuri descent) and at town school

Table: Ngiyampaa Institutionalisation and the Transition to English.

It is then in turn possible to link 'generational' background so-defined with specific changes in people's acquisition of Ngiyampaa, or more precisely, with certain formal symptoms of its progressive de-acquisition, generation by generation. These symptoms are manifested now in systematic variation between the Ngiyampaa of the two generations who speak it, and in the Ngiyampaa available to those who do not.

It is not possible, however, to link generation-by-generation increases in the need to use English as shown on the table in such a regular way with formal changes in the kinds of English spoken, plentiful though such changes have been. There are so many other types of event which have influenced Ngiyampaa people's experiences of English, both specific to their own history (eg. whether or not they were 'taken away' during childhood, the sorts of work they have done) and more general in their impact (e.g. the advent of radio, then television). Then there is the question of the processes involved in singling out which of the many forms in people's experience they actually use and transmit. I shall therefore only be discussing Ngiyampaa English or changes in it in so far as they throw light on changes in Ngiyampaa.

Before going on to characterise the linguistic environment in which each generation grew up in a little more detail, it is worth noting that although government policy led in this case to such clear-cut stages in the impact of English and the loss of Ngiyampaa it did not actually make the overall process of changeover to English faster than for other Aboriginal groups whose experiences of government interference did not involve such thorough-going institutionalisation. Indeed the first settlement at Carowra Tank concentrated Ngiyampaa speakers within their own country and away from any town. As a result Ngiyampaa was spoken by the southwestern drylanders for far longer than by most people of either Wangaaypuwan or Wayilwan descent elsewhere, who survived in a more scattered fashion as pastoral workers or

were gathered straight onto town-based 'Aboriginal Stations' together with people from other linguistic backgrounds, as at Brewarrina and Walgett.

The first generation, the oldest people whose memories we can draw on, I shall call the *ngurrampaa* generation, because they refer to their own ancestral country as their *ngurrampaa*. They were born there around the turn of the century, and grew up 'camping around' within it. Their elders had the sort of minimal contact with station people that had become necessary to them since their country had been taken over by pastoralists. Many of the men became stockmen and a few women worked in the laundries of the stations. Despite increasing economic dependence on rations and pastoral work, they determined much of the etiquette, if not the language itself, of communication with the usurpers. This can be seen in the following description of Ngiyampaa dealings with the Fletcher household on Kaleno Station (taken up in 1880) during the first decade of this century:

The men seldom came to the homestead complex, leaving the women to collect their requirements.

On rare occasions Jimmy Keewong appeared in the distance, turned his back on the Fletchers, and shouted his orders over his shoulder for Sarah or Fanny to relay.



Plate 1: Ironing at Kaleno Station, probably c.1911.

[Photograph: Emily Fletcher,
courtesy Cobar Museum]

If necessary Jimmy would approach with his request if Henry Fletcher or my grandfather came out, but he had no intention of speaking directly to the ladies of the household.⁵

Some of the *ngurrampaa* generation had white fathers, though only one of these became part of the Ngiyampaa community. As children, all of the *ngurrampaa* generation learnt and used Ngiyampaa as their first language. All of them were also learning some English, however rarely they used it. There is only one person remembered by the oldest people alive today who never learnt any English. He was also a person who never learnt to cope with clothes, put both his feet in the same trouser leg and so on, and was regarded as *mayaal* ('wild') by those who knew him.

The second generation are by their own reckoning the 'Carowra Tank mob'. As time passed and the life of 'camping about' became less and less viable, people had tended to congregate in the centre of the *ngurrampaa* at Carowra Tank, 'our main meeting place', the largest government tank in western NSW. This became a place where they were able to collect rations. Then in 1926 it was made an institutionalised 'camping place' (the official term) or 'mission' (the residents'), with a manager appointed by the Aborigines Protection Board. A number of people who were not Ngiyampaa came to live at Carowra. There were a couple of isolated speakers of distant languages such as Ned Rogers 'from the Northern Territory' (Roper River) and Dick Smith 'from Queensland' (Nockatunga). Otherwise the strangers were mostly Wiradjuri, mainly from Hillston on the Lachlan River, to the immediate south of Ngiyampaa country; and also people of Wiradjuri descent from the Warangesda Mission at Darlington Point on the Murrumbidgee, after it was closed in 1924. Ngiyampaa and Wiradjuri are closely cognate. Speakers of either would have had no great difficulty in learning to understand speakers of the other. It appears that Wiradjuri speakers began speaking Ngiyampaa as a *lingua franca*, while Ngiyampaa speakers were intrigued to learn differences between Wiradjuri vocabulary and their own. Jack Johnson, also known as Moolbong, a Wiradjuri man, was noted as a clever man and a singer. The language of the songs he made himself has occasional Wiradjuri characteristics.⁶ Even the manager learnt to distribute the meat rations in Ngiyampaa, singing out '*Purri, pirraay, kurraluu . . .*' ('belly, running guts, liver . . .'). In any case the children of Wiradjuri-speaking parents who grew up at Carowra learnt to speak the same kind of Ngiyampaa as did their Ngiyampaa peers. The English they were acquiring was considerably different from that of at least some of their elders. Charles Cherbury, the manager who used Ngiyampaa butchering terms, wrote an account of an elderly man 'proud . . . that "mine belonga Wonghibong tribe"' explaining how he made rain:

When time come to make rain, mine go away from the camp, where everything is very quiet, take mine rainstone, sit down for long time, and pray to 'Big One up there' . . . Then the wind bring along clouds, clouds hit one another, and rain falls.⁷

Although people who knew the rain-maker react adversely to Cherbury's account as making him speak 'Jacky-Jacky talk', maybe for its condescending tone as much as for the

5 Marjorie M. Wilson, letter to author, 6 January 1979. This Jimmy Keewong was probably the Jimmy Keewong who was grandfather to some of the surviving *ngurrampaa* generation, and Sarah, their grandmother.

6 Donaldson 1984a:248-51.

7 Cherbury 1932.



Plate 2: Growing up in the *ngurrampaa*, probably c.1911. 'An Australian Blacks' Camp' on Kaleno Station. (The man may be Jimmy Keewong.) [Photograph: Emily Fletcher, courtesy Cobar Museum]



Plate 3: Growing up at Carowra Tank, October 1929. Children outside the school, including (back row) Kathleen Johnson, Gladys Johnson, Chrissie Biggs and Mabel Biggs, and front row) Gus Williams, Isaac Smith and Gary Williams. [Photograph: AIAS N1608.25. Original photograph from Aborigines Welfare Board Collection in the State Archives Authority of New South Wales. Supplied by AIAS]



Plate 4: Growing up at Menindee, 1930s. Children pose for a visitor to the mission.
[Photograph: Aileen Morphet (then Underhill). AIAS N3577.7A]



Plate 5: Growing up at Murrin Bridge, 1957. Children in the school (including the teacher's, front row). [Photograph: Jeremy Beckett]

actual forms attributed to him, they enjoy remembering incidents when this same old man's English gave them pleasure through its oddity from their point of view. Nevertheless, at least one member of the Carowra Tank generation sometimes says that she never learnt either Ngiyampaa or English properly. It is not clear what impact the little school at Carowra had either on its pupils' English or their attitudes towards it. I have not met anyone who learned to more than sign their name there.

The third generation I have called the Menindee generation. In 1933 the water supply at Carowra Tank threatened to fail. The Carowra Tank mob were shifted out of their own country into Paakantji⁸ territory to a stretch of river bank outside the town of Menindee, together with Paakantji people gathered up from along the Darling River, of whom they were traditionally suspicious. The languages of the two groups were very different. Speakers of Ngiyampaa and of Paakantji would not have found each other's languages at all intelligible on first hearing. There was however a small group of westerly Ngiyampaa speakers of the *ngurrampaa* generation, whose territory abutted on Paakantji country, who already spoke Paakaantji 'as well as their own'. At Menindee English became the *lingua franca* between speakers of the two languages as well as being used in all dealings with non-Aboriginal people.

A decade after the move, Ronald and Catherine Berndt visited Menindee for six weeks. In their report, they comment: 'An interesting feature is the presence of the mother tongue as a secondary language, used by the majority in ordinary conversation'. That is, although English was used as a *lingua franca*, the Paakantji were talking Paakantji and the Ngiyampaa Ngiyampaa amongst themselves. The Berndts also got the impression that 'most of the children speak 'Pa:kindzi'. They go on to quote residents:

an old 'Pa:kindzi woman said confidently: "You known, that 'Nj:amba, that's a very hard language, sounds like 'dago' talk or Chinese talk. All this time and I've never been able to learn that language." A middle-aged 'Nj:amba woman remarked in the same way - "You'll never be able to learn that 'Pa:kindzi - I been here long time now and my mother talked 'Pa:kindzi, and I tried but I can't learn it. They sound queer somehow, like they were 'dagoes' talking. It's a very hard language."⁹

Children of both descents growing up with this linguistic background were speaking English to one another at the mission school, regardless of whether they had an Aboriginal language in common or not.

The fourth generation I have named the Murrin Bridge generation. The Menindee mission proved a disaster, for a great many reasons which it is not relevant to examine here. In 1949 the residents were shifted once again to what was officially described as a 'model village', Murrin Bridge on the Lachlan River, a few kilometres outside Lake Cargelligo. This new mission was neither in Ngiyampaa country nor in Paakantji country, but in Wiradjuri territory. There were also a few local people of Wiradjuri descent living there, and more in the district, especially at Euabalong, none of them Wiradjuri speakers. In 1964 children were sent for secondary schooling in Lake Cargelligo, and four years later, for primary schooling also. From 1971 the old Murrin Bridge school has housed a Save the Children Fund pre-school.

⁸ For the Paakantji community's practical orthography see Jones 1981.

⁹ Berndt and Berndt 1943:19.

From the time of this move on everyone of Ngiyampaa descent was speaking English either exclusively or most of the time. There was increasing intermarriage between descendants of all the different groups. Twenty years or so later, in the early seventies (when my own acquaintance with Murrin Bridge people began) there were no Ngiyampaa people left older than the *ngurrampaa* generation born around the turn of the century. These were the only people who were still speaking any Ngiyampaa. They were doing so rarely and privately amongst themselves, joined occasionally by some of the younger Carowra Tank mob. Amongst other and younger people they would be speaking English.

There are perhaps two main principles governing what variety of language you (choose to) speak to whom. The first could be called 'communicative economics': you maximise your ability to be understood by those you need to have understand you. I have just described how this principle of communicative economics has increased the role of English as a *lingua franca* for each successive generation of the people of Ngiyampaa descent. The second principle is very different. It is one of what might be named 'emotional comfort': through using particular linguistic forms you are able to share your sense of feeling at home with those whom you belong amongst and, conversely, to distance yourself from others to whom you may feel opposed. Anyone who has a first language or dialect which differs from the public standard will know the sense of privacy and intimacy which its use confers, constantly recreating old ties between its users.

What about the feelings of members of the four generations of Ngiyampaa descent towards the fact that they cannot now share the intimacy of speaking Ngiyampaa with one another?

When I showed the Table to a meeting of people predominantly of the two younger generations for their views and comments, one person, with a Paakantji father and a mother who had spoken Ngiyampaa 'right through', made a point of telling me afterwards that the Table did not give the real reason why people of his age had not learned to speak the language. 'We just weren't interested. We'd sooner be playing football or something.'

Members of the *ngurrampaa* generation, asked during the nineteen seventies what was happening to the language, and why, would usually reply with a rhetorical question born of observing the relative confidence of the increased numbers of post-war migrants in talking their languages in public. Varying the formality of the response they might say to me: 'Dagos learn their own kids their own yabber' (or 'gibberish') 'so why are we shamed?' or perhaps: 'The Italians teach their own kids their own language, so why don't we?'¹⁰ As with the views offered to the Berndts at Menindee, using languages neither Aboriginal nor English as points of reference eases the approach to inherently disturbing issues of social relations and linguistic power. Such answers are, however, still questions, and rhetorical ones. They invite no further probing. That might seek to involve this generation in responsibility for at the very least colluding in the undermining of their own language and culture, although their own more personal feelings have consistently been, on the one hand, of loyalty to the culture and language and, on the other, of a sense of impotence about maintaining them in the face of 'this modern world'. I am not of course suggesting that they haven't also enjoyed increasing their word-power in English (to borrow a phrase from the *Readers Digest*), or welcomed

¹⁰ 'Yabber' and 'gibberish' here are not pejorative so much as relaxedly Aboriginal. That they may seem pejorative to non-Aborigines is a reflection on the kind of English vocabulary which was used in the pidgin of early contact, and so survived in the English that Aboriginal people made their own. See also footnote 25.

many, though by no means all, of the other experiences offered by the 'modern world'.

Some have even made an explicit virtue of perceived necessity, withholding Ngiyampaa from the young on the grounds that they need 'all English' now, in order to succeed in their modern world. In this they are subscribing to a, from an Aboriginal point of view, novel notion, appropriated from monolingual English-speaking culture: the notion that people (or those who are younger than themselves, at least) can only really cope with speaking a single language. Traditionally, a degree of multilingualism was normal in Aboriginal societies, as amongst the westerly *ngurrampaa* generation people who had spoken Paakantji as well as Ngiyampaa. But in not speaking Ngiyampaa in front of younger people its remaining speakers are also drawing on traditional values within their own culture. Earlier generations died in possession of untransmitted ceremonially-derived knowledge because there were no younger people appropriately prepared through other, prerequisite, ceremonial experience to receive it. Someone now in her sixties described to me how in her youth she had overhead members of the *ngurrampaa* generation talking Ngiyampaa together 'like music'. They would drop their heads in sudden silence, *kuyanpuwan*, as she said ('with shame') at the approach of children. 'Shame', or 'shyness', as Aboriginal people, for want of better equivalents, translate *kuyan* and corresponding terms in other languages, is the moral response, the traditional safeguard of propriety 'our pride what we live by and the principle of the country' as someone of Wiradjuri descent put it to me recently.¹¹ The language itself was becoming in some respects like ceremonial knowledge. It was not to be lightly exposed to children who were, as we have seen, likely to show themselves 'not interested', even if moved by it at some, then probably unacknowledged, level, as the describer of Ngiyampaa as sounding like music obviously had been. The old people were becoming elegiac custodians of what was now primarily a cultural property, a heritage rather than the unselfconscious vehicle of daily life. As one person who had grown up in the *ngurrampaa* began with wistful dignity, when I asked in the early seventies if she had any particular message she would like preserved on tape: '*Ngianuna palunhaarra, wangaay mayi wiityakala, Ngiyampaa ngiyarapa.*' ('When we die, there will be nobody left who can speak Ngiyampaa.')¹²

It thus makes sense that the oldest Ngiyampaa speakers should feel awkward with any implication that they might be individually answerable for letting go of a source of communal comfort or solidarity or unique shared identity. The community of Ngiyampaa descent has been caught in a paradoxical situation. They are faced with two inescapable binds, binds of a kind being confronted by linguistic minorities in rapidly changing societies all over the world.

The first bind lies in the fact that, as a precondition for being used to create feelings of solidarity, a language has to satisfy the communicative needs of those who speak it. To keep doing this for the whole community of Ngiyampaa descent with all its generations, Ngiyampaa would have had to change and develop to meet the new communication needs of the younger generations as the world they are living in changes. In changing, the language becomes tainted, as far as the older generations are concerned, with the very 'otherness' of the modern world against which they see their language as a defence. So it becomes emotionally easier to progressively restrict it to use amongst themselves, to retreat into an elegiac

¹¹ John Pike of Narromine. (He describes himself as 'from the Nalangga [nal'æŋga] tribe on the Macquarie River' and the Wiradjuri as 'part of our tribe'.) Tape LA 9728 in A.I.A.S. Sound Archive.

¹² Eliza Kennedy, A.I.A.S. Sound Archive tape deposited in A.I.A.S. Sound Archive.

integrity shared with their peers.

The second bind in this paradoxical situation is that once the process of breakdown in automatic transmission has begun, for those who do not already speak the language 'right through', the feelings of comfort and intimacy in trying to use the language or even in listening to it may yield rapidly to very mixed feelings including for instance the fear of making conspicuous mistakes. These can easily amount to positive discomfort, which can in turn contribute to further lessen the chances of the language's successful transmission. Ultimately acquiring the language becomes a matter of personal commitment to conscious learning, an activity in competition with others such as playing football. It may then be easier to be 'not interested', or even derisive.

The linguistic situation I have been describing so far has taken a slightly different turn in recent years. Since 1971 survivors of the *ngurrampaa* and Carowra Tank generations have been sharing their knowledge of Ngiyampaa with me, tape-recording songs, stories and other material and teaching me the language so that I could also preserve in writing a description of its grammar and lexicon.¹³ Latterly they have also produced Ngiyampaa material, in conjunction with younger illustrators, for use within the community and in schools, both locally and further afield.¹⁴ All this activity has contributed to, and is itself a sign of, a change in the status of Ngiyampaa within the community. There is yet another generation growing up which is free (though not, it is to be hoped, under any compulsion) to be interested. Although the gap in spontaneous oral transmission can no longer be effectively bridged, people not brought up as Ngiyampaa speakers may if they wish set themselves to learn back something of the language, or to learn about it and its history. A more informed understanding on the part of others not of Ngiyampaa descent is also now a possibility.

What the linguistic consequences of all these developments may or may not be in terms of everyday usage forms part of a story as yet in the making. Here I want to draw on the research done so far to give an overview of the kinds of changes that took place in people's Ngiyampaa as its daily use declined in favour of English, of the symptoms of the decreasingly complete transmission of the language from one generation to the next. First I shall discuss changes in grammar, then changes in the nature and context of use of Ngiyampaa vocabulary.

Obviously, my evidence refers to the characteristics of each of the older generation's Ngiyampaa as it has been used in my presence, usually but not always in working sessions, over the past decade. Evidence for exactly how each generation was speaking while the next were infants cannot of course be more than anecdotal.

GENERATION BY GENERATION CHANGES IN NGIYAMPAA GRAMMAR.

We may say of the *ngurrampaa* generation that they learnt a full Ngiyampaa grammar, in the sense that those who are interested in recording the language can, when they think about it, find a way to recast in Ngiyampaa anything which they now normally say in English. (This, of course, is in addition to being able to remember Ngiyampaa ways of talking about things which they don't usually mention in English.) They may sometimes lack appropriate

¹³ The story of their decision to do so is told in Kennedy and Donaldson 1982:23-4.

¹⁴ Some published, e.g. Johnson et al. 1982, other booklets and a tape.

Ngiyampaa vocabulary, and have to introduce a few English words, but they can find the syntactic means. This does not necessarily mean that members of this generation nowadays spontaneously do use Ngiyampaa constructions to say everything they want to say, without any reversion to English, even on those rare nostalgic occasions when, united in each other's company, they are moved to speak a little Ngiyampaa, or 'talk up' as some put it. Individuals vary in the relish and ease with which they 'talk up' and also, at least since the beginning of the project to record the language, in the degree of linguistic self-awareness, amounting sometimes to determination, with which they do it. In any case, such nostalgic 'talking up', for instance after funerals, is a matter of slipping back into once-habitual ways of talking, not of recasting or translating from English. One person withdrew altogether from speaking Ngiyampaa after suffering a stroke, finding it taxing and distressing, as she said, to 'think back'. Another stroke sufferer on first recovery spoke Ngiyampaa exclusively, at the same time mistaking the hospital nurses and patients for the relations and companions of her youth. Here I am characterising this generation's maximal grammatical resources as a group, what they learnt while growing up, as evidenced in what various individuals have in various circumstances been able to recall for use over the period of my fieldwork: the grammar of Ngiyampaa as described in *Ngiyampaa the language of the Wangaaybuwan*.¹⁵

The second generation, who grew up at Carowra Tank, have inherited essentially the same grammar. I have not been aware of any member of this generation being nonplussed by the grammar of anything said by their elders. But their Ngiyampaa speech differs grammatically in two very obvious ways from the *ngurrampaa* generation's.

Firstly, they have ironed out some of the formal complications of the language by allowing some of the most widespread grammatical word-endings to appear even more widely, in a predictable and regular fashion, either ousting or reducing the range of occurrence of rarer forms. A comparable phenomenon in learner's English would be that stage when the past tense of all new verbs is formed according to the rule 'add -ed' (appropriately pronounced). Such learners (infants, foreigners or whoever) may say 'readed, singed, thought' etc., before going on to adopt 'read, sang, thought'. It is worth noting that this sort of practice, though it indicates incomplete mastery of the formal system used by those from whom the learner is learning, does not inhibit communication at all. There is actually no need to go further in order to be understood. It is simply a question of the value attached to 'speaking properly' (we may recall the remark of the member of this generation who sometimes feels she never learnt either Ngiyampaa or English 'properly'). She is however one of a group of peers who all speak Ngiyampaa in this respect in the same way, so that what may seem to be not speaking properly when judged by outside standards (those of the older Ngiyampaa speakers) is in a sense proper (and intimate) for these people within their age-group. It is worth noting also that the older speakers do not chide them or correct these forms, although they are quick, when teaching me, to assert their own forms as the ones which should appear in my record. When the issue eventually had to be raised with people of all ages, including non-speakers, in connection with the production of elementary story books in the language, no-one argued for using anything but the oldest speakers' forms, although they knew they would be more

¹⁵ Donaldson 1980. Its orthography predates the practical orthography developed for Johnson et al. 1982 and used in this paper, including for the occasional words from other languages. Hence *bs* in the title.

complicated for beginners to learn. (Compare this with the situation as regards English, where there are sometimes quite painful intergenerational confrontations in which school-children attempt to correct their elders.)

The following examples illustrate the process of simplifying formal grammatical choices. One involves verb-endings and one noun-endings.¹⁶ There is a small set of verbs (sixteen are known) which have a special imperative ending all of their own. If you want to order someone to do something designated by one of these verbs, you add *-ka* to the verb stem. For example the stem for 'drink' is *ngaru-*. So if you want to tell someone 'Drink!' you say '*Ngaruka!*' This set of verbs includes *all* the verbs whose stems end in *u*, plus a handful of verbs whose stems end in either *i* or *a*, like all other verbs in the language. Members of the Carowra Tank generation have created a simple rule for identifying which verbs need this *-ka* ending: they put it on all the verbs ending in *u*, but on *none* whose stems end in *i* or *a*. They treat the latter like the in other respects most similar larger set of verbs with stems ending in *i* and *a*, and give them *their* imperative endings, *-tya* and *-tha* respectively. So while the oldest speakers use '*Kiilika!*' for 'Piss!' and '*Wanaka!*' for 'Throw!', this generation say '*Kiilitiya!*' and '*Wanatha!*' In so doing they have both regularised and reduced the set of verbs which takes the imperative ending *-ka*.

In English, when a noun is the subject of a transitive sentence, that is, when it refers to a person (or creature) who does something to someone or something, it comes at the beginning of the sentence. In 'A dog bit the woman' we know that the dog did the biting, not the woman, or else she would be mentioned first. In Ngiyampaa this is not indicated by word-order, but by putting an 'ergative' ending on the subject. Thus in a translation of this sentence, *mirri* 'dog' would have *-ku* attached to it, allowing the words of the sentence to be put together in any order, e.g. '*Mirriku winarr kathiya*' (literally, 'Dog woman bit'). *-ku* is the form of the ergative ending appropriate for words ending in a vowel. There are other forms for words ending in a consonant, or a group of consonants, *-tyu*, *-thu*, *-tu*, *-u*, depending on which. But the Carowra Tank generation simply add the commonest form, *-ku*, to *all* words needing an ergative ending. Thus, if it is a question of a mosquito, *kamukin*, rather than a dog biting a woman, the oldest speakers will say '*Kamukintu winarr kathiya*', while this generation will say '*Kamukinku winarr kathiya*'. (The ending marking possession is also *-ku*, on all words, for both generations.)

The second way in which the Carowra Tank generation's Ngiyampaa differs grammatically from the *ngurrampaa* generation's is of a piece with the first, in that it involves simplifying the business of speaking the language, but less spectacular in that it does not involve changes to frequently necessary forms like verb- and noun-endings.. Anyone who has spent time amongst people whose language they do not know well will have realised what a lot of mileage they can get out of the few constructions they do know. Imagine travelling in France on a little school French for instance. If you need to say the equivalent of 'I don't know whether the train has gone' but do not feel up to it, you can perhaps say the equivalent of 'Has the train gone? I don't know.', or failing that of 'The train has gone?' with a questioning intonation. Variable amounts of this sort of thing go on in the Ngiyampaa of the

¹⁶ For further linguistic details, and the full range of related phenomena, see Donaldson 1980:152-3 and 156-60, especially 157 for the simplification of the verbal system; and 81-5, especially 85 for all simplified nominal inflections. For comparable changes observed in other Australian languages see Schmidt, 1985:54 and 85.

Carowra Tank generation. If one of them records a story, it will be likely to have fewer subordinate constructions in it than an older speaker's, though when they do occur they are formally just the same. (Here the analogy with survival French reveals one of its many limitations)

The fact that Ngiyampaa is in competition with English sometimes affords other ways of avoiding the grammatically complex. There is one Ngiyampaa construction which is complicated because there is no other at all like it. There is no verb in Ngiyampaa meaning 'to want' or 'to need'. Saying that you want something is achieved by adding a special suffix *-nginta*, which means roughly 'in-need-of' to the word for the thing you want, and using the verb 'to be', saying something like, for instance: 'Water-in-need-of I am' or 'To dance-in-need-of I am.'¹⁷ What the Carowra Tank generation have done is to form a regular Ngiyampaa verb 'to want' on the basis of the English one, so that they can say: '*Ngathu wantitmara kali*.' 'I want water.' or '*Ngathu wantitmara wakakirri*.' 'I want to dance.'. Older speakers too were using this stratagem in the early seventies. When I asked some of them how you would talk about 'wanting' without putting any English in they revived the *-nginta* construction, and have stuck with it since. But it has not caught on with the Carowra Tank generation.

What about the Ngiyampaa grammar of the generation who grew up at Menindee, who heard the language spoken around them by their elders, but for whom English was the *lingua franca* and the language increasingly of everyday life? Most seem able to follow stories told by people of the generations above them, judging by their spontaneous laughter in appropriate places when invited by the latter to listen to tape-recordings. But they habitually disclaim speaking knowledge of the language and would not attempt to retell such stories, or others of their own. They will sometimes use formulaic phrases once common in everyday speech, such as the equivalents of 'Come here!' 'Let's go' and the like. When they do, they vary the verb endings and so on appropriately in the context, within the limits of what they choose to say.

Those who have grown up at Murrin Bridge from the early 1950s do not have any grammatical understanding of the language. They may recognise odd familiar words in taped stories, without being able to follow them. They may know a few set phrases as well as odd words, but they are unlikely to be able to analyse the phrases into their constituent parts, so as to recombine them in other ways to say other things. There is for instance a phrase, '*Yama-karra pityarr!*' which people of this generation sometimes use instead of an English greeting to say hello to me, in recognition of my interest in the language (I am often referred to as 'that Ngiyampaa *waatyin*' ('white woman')).

In this phrase, which is very hard to translate neatly, *yama*¹⁸ means something like 'Yes or no?', 'Well?'. And *-karra*¹⁹ means something like 'by the sound/look/taste/feel/smell' 'according to the sensory evidence' (by contrast to reliance on the hearsay evidence of what someone has said, which is marked differently). '*Yama-karra!*' is used by the oldest generation as a way of making contact on meeting, without requiring any particular response, as a sort of 'How's things?' or 'How d'you do?'. It is also used while people are together to secure cooperation in some joint activity, say in lifting something, going hunting or whatever. Here

¹⁷ Donaldson 1980:113-16.

¹⁸ *ibid.*:241-2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*:275.

the functional equivalent in English would be something like 'OK then?', 'Well?' 'Ready?'. It may be used as well by someone on the point of leaving others rather as someone might say 'OK . . .' or 'Well . . .' in English as a prelude to saying 'See you!' ('Might see you again' is the literal translation of the Ngiyampaa farewell too.) And the oldest speakers use both *yama* and *-karra* separately in a host of other contexts. If asked themselves to translate *yama-karra*, they will settle on its function as a greeting as the most important one and say it means 'How are you going?'

What then of the final word of the phrase, *pityarr*? This means 'male' and is used by the old people most frequently in connection with sexing rabbits, birds and so on, where they would translate it 'buck' or 'cock'. One of them sometimes complains, 'This *yama-karra pityarr* business, now. That's only come in lately.' *Pityarr* was introduced amongst men at the end of the phrase *yama-karra* as a translation for 'mate', so as to create a Ngiyampaa equivalent for 'How are you going, mate?' (Could a play on 'Wotcha cock?' have been intended?) In any case younger people using the phrase now are usually unaware that *pityarr* referred traditionally to males only. If they are able to identify a separate meaning for it at all, they understand it to mean 'mate' in general, male or female, as in 'we're good mates'. So I can appropriately be greeted '*Yama-karra pityarr*', though a *waatyin*.

Their pronunciation of the phrase has also altered, reflecting the fact that they are basically monoglot English speakers. The *rr* of *-karra* is usually pronounced like an English *r* rather than tapped or trilled, and the final *rr* of *pityarr*, which has no analogue in Australian (as opposed to, say, Scottish) English, is often omitted altogether. Such anglicising changes contrast with pronunciation changes made by the Carowra Tank generation. The latter have tended to avoid the rarer consonant combinations within Ngiyampaa's own sound system,²⁰ but have not made pronunciation changes to Ngiyampaa sounds on the basis of their rarity or absence in English. Rather their pronunciation of English has continued to show signs of having developed among speakers of an Aboriginal language. Thus *p* or *b* for English *v*, especially in proper names.

GENERATION BY GENERATION CHANGES IN THE NATURE AND USE OF NGIYAMPAA VOCABULARY.

Although the *ngurrampaa* generation, as far as one can tell, did not inherit a significantly altered Ngiyampaa grammar from their own forebears, they did inherit a vocabulary which shows a lot of signs of the preceding years of colonisation and of contact with English.

Most urgently, Ngiyampaa speakers had had to modify the vocabulary of the language so as to name the new phenomena of their recent experience. One of the most obvious stratagems for doing this was to take over words from English, changing their pronunciation to make them fit the Ngiyampaa sound system. There is evidence of several different earlier generations' borrowings in the vocabulary of today's oldest Ngiyampaa speakers.

The first borrowings were completely assimilated into the sound system of Ngiyampaa, so that without the historical knowledge that they refer to introductions to prompt a search for an English source, one would not spot them as foreign in origin at all. Very early for instance, Ngiyampaa people must have been introduced to the idea of nakedness. The Ngiyampaa word for 'naked' is *nhiikin*. The initial *n* has become *nh*, the closest nasal sound permissible

²⁰ Donaldson 1980:125.

at the beginning of Ngiyampaa words. The first vowel has become *ii*, the second *i*. The only final consonants allowed in Ngiyampaa are *n*, *l*, *rr*, and *y*. The final *d* is replaced by *n*, made with the same configuration of the mouth. So in Ngiyampaa, if you are naked, you are *nhiikin*. Nakedness is something to be covered — in this case with something of more immediate interest to the Ngiyampaa, a *bulayngkin* or 'blanket'. (Blankets appear to have been a chief point of articulation in early negotiations between newcomers and Aboriginal people in some parts of New South Wales.)²¹

There is another later set of loans including such words as *yurraapat* 'rabbit', *puthukat* 'pussycat' and *purrayipit* 'breakfast'. One can assume that these entered the language later because the rigour of the assimilation process has been relaxed. Their final *ts*, unlike that of 'blanket' have not been changed to *n*. The entry of some of these at least can be fairly precisely dated, that of *yurraapat* for instance to almost exactly a hundred years ago. Rabbits were introduced in 1870 to Balranald on the Murrumbidgee, at the junction with the Lachlan. By 1879 they had reached the junction with Willandra Creek, the southern boundary of the Ngiyampaa *ngurrampaa*, and by 1884 they were at Cobar, beyond it on the northern side. As for the pussycats, they arrived in force after 'considerable numbers', like the four hundred railed to Bourke in 1886, were deliberately released, in a vain attempt to control the rabbits.²²

Some of these newer loans coexisted alongside fully-assimilated borrowings of the same word. There is for instance another, presumably older loan for 'cat', *purркиyan*, still occasionally to be heard, from 'pusscat'. And who would recognise at first sight in *pakutha* that other predator of rabbits, the fox? The transformation is utterly logical, matching each sound with that closest to it in the Ngiyampaa system:

- f p (no fricatives, therefore a stop consonant)
- o a (no o)
- k k
- u (to avoid a pair of stop consonants)
- s th (no s)
- a (to avoid a final consonant)

When the words we have looked at so far were taken from English into Ngiyampaa their reference remained the same. But others have been reinterpreted. Such shifts of meaning are as likely to have purely formal origins as to reveal anything about cross-cultural differences of perception. For example *yurrayilway* for 'train' probably results quite simply from the assimilation of the first and most striking part of the phrase 'railway train'. However on the occasion of the official opening of the railway itself from Condobolin through to Trida in Ngiyampaa country in 1919, it was the arrival of the first train which made the impact, and called for the making of a celebratory Ngiyampaa song.²³ The already familiar rails themselves, like other objects made of iron, were called *muntupa* (etymology unknown). But sometimes shifts in the meanings of loans, particularly from times when few Ngiyampaa can be presumed to have had a thorough knowledge of English, are eloquent of historically significant fundamental differences in outlook. Take for example, the Ngiyampaa word

²¹ Reece 1967.

²² All information on animal introductions from Rolls 1969, especially pp.30,39,48,118.

²³ Tommy Williams 1980.

patik meaning 'fence'. When pastoralists first took over Ngiyampaa country, their aim of course was to create paddocks. In order to do so, they set about building fences. As far as the Ngiyampaa were concerned, the material signs of this activity, the fences themselves, were obvious enough. Indeed, they were to help put many of them up. But the purpose and value of the entities thus enclosed, indeed their very existence, were not so immediately perceptible. So the word 'paddock' entered Ngiyampaa as *patik*, to name the more obvious fences.²⁴

Another source for Ngiyampaa speakers to draw on for new words for new phenomena was the contact jargon, the New South Wales pidgin²⁵ which began to develop on the east coast in communication between colonisers and colonised. This in turn drew on a number of Aboriginal languages, especially Dharuk from Port Jackson, for its vocabulary, as well as various kinds of English. The Ngiyampaa word for 'white woman', *waatyin*, is a case in point, being formed from English 'white' and Dharuk *tiyin* 'woman', via the pidgin '(black) gin'. Many English words and some of the new words exclusive to the jargon would have entered Ngiyampaa after Ngiyampaa speakers heard them from white people arriving in their country. But news of some of their possessions travelled ahead along Aboriginal lines of communication beyond the early frontiers, together with words to name them by. The Ngiyampaa for 'horse' is *yarraaman*, taken from the contact jargon, whether ahead of their appearance and their riders' or not cannot be proven. But their westerly neighbours the Paakantji on the Darling River have a word first used by Aborigines in this sense at a more exploratory stage of linguistic relations between Aborigines and colonists. It is *kaangkurru*, formed from the English pronunciation of the Guugu Yimidhirr word *kanguru* for a large black kangaroo. Dharuk speakers with whom the British tried to use 'kangaroo' in the early days of the settlement at Port Jackson, not being familiar with the language of the Endeavour River where Sir Joseph Banks had recorded it, had taken it to be English and therefore to apply to imported animals.²⁶

A final outside source for new Ngiyampaa words to cope with the impact of colonisation was other neighbouring Aboriginal languages. The Ngiyampaa word for 'house, building' is *kunytyi*, probably borrowed from a Wiradjuri word meaning 'shelter', thus allowing the Ngiyampaa distinction between 'house' and their own shelter, *nganu*, which they translate into English as 'mia-mia'.

Loan words from various sources were not the only signs of the impact of English-speaking culture on the Ngiyampaa vocabulary. Analogies perceived between the familiar and the new could lead to the reference of existing words being extended to cover the new. *Kurrumin*, already used for the shadow of something on the ground, or its reflection in water, could be used for 'photograph', by virtue of the fact that all three are images. More clumsily, a stock explanatory phrase could develop for reference to the new object, such as *kurrumin mamarapa* '(that which) takes pictures', i.e. 'camera'.

²⁴ Semantic reinterpretations from contained to container, and vice versa, are common within as well as across languages. See for instance the O.E.D. entry for 'bourne'.

²⁵ For obstacles to the study of this pidgin, see Dutton 1983. Troy 1985 makes an initial compilation of the written sources.

²⁶ Accounts cited in Dixon 1980:9,478. There is relevant discussion in Reynolds 1981:11.

So far I have indicated ways in which the Ngiyampaa speakers, from long before the *ngurrampaa* generation were born, had had to enrich their vocabulary to cope with a spate of new phenomena stemming from the British invasion. But the changes to Ngiyampaa life during this period involved dramatic losses as well as accretions. By and large the additions are known or discoverable, and it is possible then to ask 'How did people talk about them?' Even so there is certainly room for error in assumptions about what is new, and the linguistic evidence can sometimes cast doubt on received opinion. For instance, can the common sow-thistle (*Sonchus oleraceus*) or 'wild cabbage' be an introduced plant, as the botanists claim,²⁷ if languages of western New South Wales (and western Victoria too) have words for it, none of them recognisably loans from English, and none of them known to apply to any other plant as well? Or did people stop eating, and naming, the plant to which it was preferred? When it comes to deducing changes leading to vocabulary losses the task is far harder. Loss means just that, and it is anyone's guess how many words have irretrievably dropped out of use.

It is however quite clear that many specific types of once-used vocabulary were not learnt by the *ngurrampaa* generation. The evidence is of many kinds. Enough is known about post-colonial ecological and environmental changes to know that Ngiyampaa people must once have been able to speak about species for which the language now lacks a word, because today's speakers lacked direct or even hearsay experience of the species as children. Rock art is an area of activity which must have had more associated vocabulary than is now known (a verb 'to paint', a word for 'white paint' and another for 'raddle'). There is even evidence that local rock art was added to during the oldest speakers' childhoods, after 1900.²⁸ But this was a form of ceremonial activity whose significance and even practice was not spoken of to children. Members of the generation who were children at the time of the last *purra* ceremony for 'making men' are very aware that they lack ceremonial knowledge. A pastoralist's son who grew up amongst another group of speakers of the language, mentioned in his reminiscences the existence of an 'inverted' secret language used amongst initiated men.²⁹ How otherwise should today's oldest speakers even have an inkling that it ever existed? It is fair also to assume there may have been some sort of respect register for talking to or in the presence of certain relatives, which may or may not have involved a special vocabulary. All that is now known is that various kin were once supposed to seat themselves in various ways according to their relationships with one another.

In some cases Ngiyampaa words whose range of reference had been extended were transmitted with the new reference only, previous references having become irrelevant. (*Muntupa*, now only 'iron' is one example.) The small amount of earlier written information about Ngiyampaa, hardly any of it from before this century, is rarely helpful here.³⁰ But occasionally the earlier and more extensive missionary records of cognate languages enable this process to be demonstrated. Whence for instance the Ngiyampaa word *karran* 'horn (of any introduced domestic animal)'? A missionary vocabulary of Wiradjuri collected around 1840 lists '*Gàrràn*

27 Cunningham *et al.* 1981.

28 Gunn 1983:336.

29 Dunbar 1943-4:146.

30 Donaldson 1980:7,9-10.

— a little hook to take out grubs with'.³¹ Even the oldest Ngiyampaa speakers were brought up to call the implements they used for the purpose by the loan word *waya*, since they were by then invariably made of pieces of fence wire. In the same vocabulary I also found: '*Wannāl* — one that is under the restriction of tribal law with respect to food; a lad not yet fully initiated'. I asked my oldest Ngiyampaa teachers if they knew any word sounding like *wanaal* (my guess at the pronunciation Günther was representing), and if so, how they would use it. 'Yes' was the answer, 'I could say "*Ngathu yurraamuthi wanaal kara*, I'm *wanaal* for grog, I won't touch it.'" The word is now usable only in that one context, and provides a way of saying something equivalent to 'I'm temperance', or 'I'm teetotal'.

So much for the lexical inheritance of the oldest speakers: what have the Carowra Tank generation made of it? For a variety of reasons, presumably mainly to do with the change in life-style and therefore conversational preoccupations of their elders when settled at Carowra, and the smaller proportion of their lives in which Ngiyampaa has dominated, their vocabularies are in any case smaller. If they wish to speak Ngiyampaa now, they are faced more often with the need to improvise. For instance, although the Ngiyampaa are drylanders, the oldest speakers learnt that the canoes once used by river peoples were *marri*, and use this word for other types of boat too. Younger speakers, at a loss, take the word 'boat' and perhaps modify it in the most perfunctory way in the direction of Ngiyampaa pronunciation, say *puut*. (Ngiyampaa words as a rule have two syllables or more.) Or perhaps they simply insert 'boat' into the conversation, with a high likelihood of this triggering its continuation in English only. Neither generation regards English words they have modified themselves in recent times as 'real Ngiyampaa', even if they happen to conform perfectly to the Ngiyampaa sound system. The will to assimilate new vocabulary has gone. Someone who asked me in Ngiyampaa to fetch some Vicks (Vapour Rub) asked for *piks*, which is how she would have pronounced the word if talking English. By the loan-formation rules which converted 'fox' to *pakutha*, she should have asked for *pikutha*.

Whereas the loans already discussed are mostly nouns, a response to a changing world of things, the most obvious difference between Ngiyampaa verbs and English verbs is that they represent two different ways of structuring even the same activities and events. We have seen how the idiosyncratic Ngiyampaa construction to indicate 'wanting' was replaced by a loan verb *wantitma*-. The Carowra Tank generation replaces even quite regular verbs constructions with loans, often on a grand scale. Roughly a third of Ngiyampaa verbs are compounds involving joining a first part indicating some characteristic of the action to a second part indicating something about how it was done, often with which part of the body. *Karruun*-, for example, indicates that an action failed in its direction. *Karruun*- can be followed by *-ma* 'do with the hand', *-th*- 'do with mouth' or *-thi*- 'do with foot'. *Karruunma*- can translate 'throw (a spear) off target', *karruuntha*- 'make a fool of your mouth' as someone described what might happen while eating absentmindedly, and *karruunthi*- 'miss your footing', say when walking in burrowed country, or climbing steps. Younger speakers tend either to abandon the subtleties of body-part choice, and use the 'do with hand' form in all situations, or, more often, to simply use the one loan verb *mityitma*- from 'miss' in all these contexts. They have abandoned (or never mastered) the analytic system and are 'thinking in English' when English verbs have offered a single alternative notion. The same process can be seen at work in the preference of *kikitma*- 'kick' over the Ngiyampaa phrase '*thinangku puma*-' 'hit

³¹ Günther 1892:85.

with foot', and even of *wokitma*- 'work' over *waray-ngama*- 'stand-busy' or *wii-ngama* 'sit-busy', though *wokitma*- (with its unassimilated *o*, as in 'hot',) also suggests pay.

With the Menindee and Murrin Bridge generations, it is a question of which Ngiyampaa words have survived in their English. The overall number of words used is too small for pronunciation changes such as saying *rr* in the English way to cause ambiguities for them. Someone recording words for an educational tape kept saying *yuru* instead of *yurru* for 'rain', unaware till his older colleagues insisted that he try to change it that he was naming the shrike-thrush instead.

Some of the principles behind their forebears' borrowings of English words apply to their retention of Ngiyampaa ones. They have kept words for what the imported English-speaking culture had never had, in so far as what they refer to is still important. So Menindee generation people can name a number of different *wanta* (never translated, but literally 'ugly (beings)'), and no child can grow up at Murrin Bridge without being scared or scaring others with phrases like 'Might be *wanta*!'

Some words survive only in meanings which were originally extensions from the main sense, often pejorative or euphemistic. *Minyangkaa* basically means 'something or other', hence 'rubbish, rubbishy'. In English it is used only (and often) to say such things as 'Those are all *minyangkaa*.' i.e. 'rubbish, no good'. *Yingkalaa*, literally 'just like that' is known to English speakers only as a way of referring to a woman who is, according to the English euphemism, 'in a certain condition'. Likewise, Ngiyampaa words for private body parts are retained, or even Paakantji ones which originally entered Ngiyampaa as swear words or euphemisms themselves. (Young speakers of English only are in any case not well placed to distinguish which are which.)

It is often words from other Aboriginal languages which entered the language through the early pidgin that survive in preference to older Ngiyampaa ones, probably partly because they remained at home in people's 'English' as well until it became less and less pidgin-like. Whether originally judged to be 'English' or not, they are now seen as Ngiyampaa, if only because they are distinctively Aboriginal, not being in use in non-Aboriginal English. When the Murrin Bridge people were looking for a brand name for their handcrafted products, they settled on the word *putyirriwan* 'the good one'. It comes from the Dharuk, then pidgin, word often spelt '*boojery*', plus 'one'.³²

Most of the distinctive words retained by these generations in their English, particularly by the youngest people who know the smallest number, have to do with affirmation of one kind or another of their users' special identity, whether as relatives of Ngiyampaa descent, of mixed Ngiyampaa, Paakantji, Wiradjuri etc. descent, or simply as *mayi* or Kooris.³³ They offer a new, less threatening way than trying to 'speak the language right through' of practising the principle of talking for emotional comfort mentioned earlier. Thus words for characteristically Aboriginal foods are often kept in Ngiyampaa, as in 'I'm hungry for *kirrpatya*' (rather than 'kangaroo'). The shibboleths which have traditionally served to distinguish Ngiyampaa from neighbouring languages are also widely remembered, and so too are words which are particularly well distributed cross-linguistically, such as *mara* 'hand' and *waatyin* (in some languages *watyin*).

³² 'Budgerie' in the Macquarie Dictionary.

³³ The coastal term 'Koori' is often preferred to its Ngiyampaa equivalent *mayi* '(Aboriginal) person'. See Miller 1985:vii.

Many of the people of Ngiyampaa descent brought up at Murrin Bridge without even a passive understanding of Ngiyampaa grammar cannot, however, know, without being told, the extent to which their turns of phrase when talking English also reflect their inheritance. 'Are you a little blackfeller, are you a little blackfeller?' croons a young mother cuddling her baby. When I first heard this, I had just been approached for help in translating a Wiradjuri sentence by someone who remembered a relative cuddling babies with it half a century earlier: '*Burraaydjul-gaa-ndu wirraay*'.³⁴ 'Are you a little Wiradjuri kid?'. Fifty years ago in western New South Wales, babies were being welcomed into the world with the same gentle assurances of belonging, but in terms of an identity based on the language the welcome was spoken in.

A small girl asked me recently for something in Ngiyampaa that she could say to her great-great auntie in the morning. I suggested *yama-karra*. She wanted to know how she would reply, and I gave some alternatives. Next day she reappeared, saying 'It worked!'. Which is what language always does for people, whether its name is Ngiyampaa or English, or something on the way from one towards the other.

³⁴ Orthography as for the Wiradjuri alphabet book being prepared by the Peak Hill Local Aboriginal Research Group.

FROM NGIYAMPAA TO ENGLISH

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