

Section from N.B. Tindale, 'Tribal boundaries in Australia' (1974).
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THREE LINGUISTIC STUDIES
FROM FAR SOUTH-WESTERN NSW

Luise Hercus

1. **The Kulin Languages of the Far South-West of NSW**
 - 1a. Introduction
 - 1b. The characteristics of Mathimathi
2. **Who were the Berri-ait**
 - 2a. the Paakantji dialects
 - 2b. The Berri-ait
 - 2c. The language of the Berri-ait
 - 2d. The Place-name Paringi
 - 2e. Note on the Place-name Arumpo
3. **Twenty words from Prungle**
 - 3a. Comments on individual words from Prungle
 - 3b. The Yitayita language and Yitayita people
 - 3c. Conclusions

1. **The Kulin Languages of the Far South-West of NSW**
 - 1a. **Introduction**

It may seem an empty exercise to compare old wordlists and try to work out who said what in the far south-west of NSW over one hundred years ago. This is far from the truth: the area is of great archaeological and historical importance and furthermore there are many families of Aboriginal people that have strong links with this region. Who said what in the far south-west of NSW still has some significance. Large groups of people once lived there, and it is tragic that in some cases all that is left of their history and their traditions is a name on a tribal map. Through recent work on the history of the area by J. Hope (MS) new information has come to light. A study of the linguistic aspects of this material will help to elucidate the general language distribution in South-eastern Australia and give some hints of the movement of people that took place before the disruption of Aboriginal Society.

During the sixties and early seventies I tried to record all I could of the languages of the far south-west of NSW with the help of the last speakers of Wembawemba and of Paakantji. Considerable help also came from Jack Long,¹ the last speaker of Mathimathi, who lived far away at Pt Pearce in South Australia. He had left Balranald as a young man late last century but his memory was remarkable and he could even recall small fragments of two neighbouring languages, Narinari and Yitayita. All other languages in the far south-west of NSW were already totally extinct at that time.

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¹ Hercus 1978.

On the basis of this information from Aboriginal people combined with the data published last century as well as from a few manuscript sources, there emerges the following relationship between the languages of the area:

The languages belong to three groups:

1. Kulin (R.M.W.Dixon calls it 'H')²
2. Paakantji (Dixon's Z) from the Darling River
3. Yitayita (Dixon's E) from the lower Lachlan and around Robinvale.

1b. **The Characteristics of Mathimathi**

The term 'Kulin' was not used by Aboriginal people as a language name it was employed by scholars, for instance, Schmidt to serve as a convenient label for a group of languages centered on Victoria. The word *kuli* is known from Wembawemba, WeRkaya and related languages where it means 'a crowd of people'. It was sometimes even introduced into English: 'who's that *kuli* over there?'

There are a number of subdivisions of Kulin, but only the languages that were spoken in south-western New South Wales are considered here. These belong to two different subgroups:

Mathimathi subgroup

Mathimathi

Watiwati

Letjiletji

Wembawemba subgroup

Wembawemba and PeRepapeRepa

Narinari

Reasons for this classification

Schmidt³ sensed that Mathimathi - which he called Piangil, after the township on the Murray northwest of Swan Hill- differed considerably from the other Kulin languages. He therefore listed it separately and even called it a 'mixed' language. The most obvious of the features that distinguish the Mathimathi group are as follows:

Mathimathi nouns differ from their Wembawemba and other Kulin counterparts by having a suffix *-i* following nominal bases that end in a consonant, and a suffix *-ngi* following nominals that end in vowels, as in

English	Wembawemba	Mathimathi
Man	wúthu	wuthúngi
Camp	lár	léngi
Fire	wánap	wanápi

There are therefore no monosyllabic nouns in Mathimathi. This difference in the length of nouns is reflected in the accentuation system and there are in fact a number of circumstances in which polysyllabic nouns have their main accent on the second syllable. This makes Mathimathi speech sound more like Paakantji and very different from Wembawemba and other Kulin languages: the phonotactic rules resemble those of Paakantji. There are old

² R.M.W.Dixon 1980:241.

³ Schmidt 1919:88.

THREE LINGUISTIC STUDIES

vocabularies of Watiwati, given by P. Beveridge,⁴ J. Beveridge⁵ and Cameron.⁶ Less is known of Letjiletji.⁷

These old sources indicate that Watiwati and Letjiletji shared with Mathimathi the same characteristic final *i / ngi*.

In grammar one of the most conspicuous features of Mathimathi is the use of free pronoun subjects in preference to pronoun subject incorporation. Thus Mathimathi people said *taka yiti* 'I hit', while Wembawemba people said *taka-nda*. Moreover there are considerable differences from Wembawemba and associated languages in the pronoun system, e.g. *yiti* is the pronoun subject of the first person. This is attested also for Watiwati and Letjiletji whereas the Wembawemba form is *yandin..*

Information on Narinari is limited, but there are clear indications that this language was close to Wembawemba, and not to Mathimathi.⁸

Wembawemba people were quite explicit that Perepaperepa (called Bureba by Mathews⁹ 1902) was identical with their own language except for a very few words, the most obvious was that they said *peRepa* 'no', instead of *wemba*. The word *peRepa* is in fact used in one of the Wembawemba songs and there is a Wembawemba word *peRepothen* 'lost, forgotten', which incorporates the same word for 'no'. *PeRepa*, Narinari and Wembawemba can thus be regarded as a closely-knit group, quite distinct from Mathimathi.

Because the differences between the Mathimathi group on the one hand, and the Wembawemba group on the other are so clear-cut, they can be noticed even in place-names, despite all the usual problems of spelling. A series of names reflect the characteristic final *i / ngi* of the Mathimathi group. The final is variously spelt as 'i', 'ie', 'ay', 'ey', 'y', 'ee', 'ae', and even 'eigh' as in Tori, Manie, Ganaway, Marimley, Canally, Benanee, Warwaegae and Koraleigh. There is a concentration of such names near the Murray River between Swan Hill and almost to Robinvale. Koorakee (Mathimathi *kuraki* 'sand') is the north-westernmost of these names and it must have been close to the border of Yitayita country, as will be shown by the study of the vocabulary from Prungle.

2. Who were the Berri-Ait

2a Note on the Paakantji Dialects

The relationship between the various dialects of Paakantji has been discussed in *The Bagandji Language*.¹⁰ Three Paakantji dialects were spoken in the far south-west. They were:

i. Marawara, sometimes called Wimbaia, which was spoken around Wentworth and along the river as far as Avoca,¹¹

ii. Parintji, from the dry area to the east of the Darling,

iii. Southern Paakantji, which was spoken along the Darling north from Avoca.¹²

4 Brough Smyth 1876:II.73.

5 Curr 1887: 439-445.

6 Cameron 1885:367.

7 McLeod in Curr 1887:438 and P. Beveridge *loc.cit.*

8 See Hercus 1978.

9 Mathews 1902.

10 Hercus 1982.

11 Tindale 1974:196, Hercus 1984:56.

12 Tindale 1974 :192.

The name Paakantji means 'the River people'. The suffix *-ntji* implies 'belonging to', 'associated with' and can be used with ordinary nouns in the language; thus *yara* means 'tree' and *yarantji* is 'possum' (lit. 'belonging to trees'). The word *paaka* means 'river', therefore *Paakantji* means literally 'belonging to the river'. Similarly *PaRuntji* means 'belonging to the PaRu, the Paroo river', and *Parintji* means 'belonging to *pari*, scrub'.

The term Paakantji tends to be used in two meanings:

- a. as a term for the whole language group
- b. as a term for the dialect originally spoken in the area from Avoca to Wilcannia.

In order to avoid confusion it seems best to refer to the dialect once spoken from Avoca to Wilcannia as 'Southern Paakantji' as distinct from just 'Paakantji' which can then be used to refer to the whole group.

2b. The Berri-Ait

The area just east of the Darling is so important and well-known in the field of prehistory that it seems particularly sad that we know so little of the Aboriginal people who occupied the region at the time of the first European contact. Most of the early information comes from A.L.P. Cameron, who stayed at one time at 'Mulurulu', north of Mungo. From his evidence¹³ it seems that at least a major part of the area was occupied by the people he called 'Berri-ait' or sometimes 'Beri-ait'. He says :

Between the Barkinji, the Wiradjuri, and these tribes along the Murrumbidgee and Murray, of which the Ta-ta-thi is one, I find another large tribe, or perhaps nation, called *Berri-ait*, of which at present I know little beyond this, that it is composed of the following sub-divisions: Lagerung, Mirro, Milparo, Boanjilla, Pularli, Nielyi-gulli, Kurki-gulli and Kamdükul.

In a footnote he adds:

The vocabulary given at p. 366 shows a great resemblance between the languages of the Barkinji and Beri-ait. I suggested to my informants that they were parts of the same tribe, but they would not hear of it. I suggested that before the whites came the Beri-ait blacks must have been forced to go into the rivers in summer time. They said that now and then they did so, but went in a sufficiently strong party to fight any section of the river tribes they might meet, and when they had no water they lived on what they obtained from the roots of the Mallee and a species of *Hakia*. I was told that a proof of their being totally distinct was that any old Barkinji black could swim, but that *no* Beri-ait could.

Although the talk about swimming may appear to trivialise the situation there can be no doubt from these statements and from the vocabulary that the Berri-ait were a Paakantji group, very close to Southern Paakantji.

The Berri-ait were in fact those very same people who were usually called *Parintji*, 'belonging to the scrub'. Tindale made this identification without any hesitation.¹⁴ Yet there remains a query. Cameron was a careful observer, and took a great interest in the people of the far south-west of NSW. He wrote about the Berri-ait not only in the 1884 paper, which was edited by A.W.Howitt, but also in numerous long letters to Howitt.¹⁵ It

¹³ Cameron 1885:346.

¹⁴ Tindale 1974.

¹⁵ I am indebted to Diane Barwick for referring me to the Howitt papers.

is puzzling why he should consistently call the people 'Berri-ait' or 'Beri-ait' in contradiction to all other sources. I am convinced that the answer lies in the fact that Cameron, as is evident from his work, must have spent some time with Yitayita people and that 'Berri-ait' was the name by which the Yitayita referred to Parintji people. The transcription 'Berri-ait' probably stands for what would now be written as *Pari-aitj*. Of all the languages in the immediate area only those of the Yitayita group permitted final *t* and *tj* (note 'bait', 'moon' in the vocabulary from Prungle listed below). Other early references to Parintji people are by Newland¹⁶ who calls them 'Barrengée, East Back Country Tribe'. Tindale¹⁷ in his edition of the Eaglehawk and Crow story in Marawara, the southernmost of the Paakantji dialects relates how:

Ka:nau, as a leading man of the [Barindji] people (literally "the people of the trees" in contrast to [Ba:kindji] the people of the [Ba:ka] or Darling River) had the two girls under his care. The Barindji folk had lived on the Manara Range, away from the Darling River, for a long time. They were friendly with the River folk.

He then¹⁸ discusses the 'southward movement of the story' and implies that there has also been a southward movement of people.

2c. The Language of the Berri-Ait

By 1963 there was not a single person who thought of himself as 'Beri-ait', i.e. *Parintji*. The oldest speaker of Southern Paakantji, 'Grannie' Kate Bugmy could however recall that there had once been a group of people called *Parintji*, and she was conscious of the fact that they were 'really all part of Paakantji'.

Cameron¹⁹ has given a vocabulary comparing 'Beri-ait' with 'Barkinji'. He himself was conscious of the fact that this list brought out the close relationship between the two languages. Nevertheless it appears at first sight as if there were quite a few cases where Berri-ait (*Parintji*) differs from Barkinji (*Paakantji*). A detailed analysis shows however that these apparent distinctions are illusory. For example in the following entry

English	Barkinji	Berri-ait
woman	kümbuka	nüungu

the Berri-ait word 'kümbuka' is clearly the well-known Paakantji word *kumpaka* 'wife', whereas 'nüungu' i.e. *nhuungku* is the Southern Paakantji word for 'female'. The apparent difference is caused by the fact that Cameron is comparing words that are not exactly, but only approximately synonymous.

The word for 'girl' is given as 'wüngu' in Berri-ait. This is no doubt the same Southern Paakantji word *nhuungku* 'female' which Cameron has listed under 'woman'.

Other near synonyms:

The word for 'boy' is given as Berri-ait 'birillo' and Barkinji 'kununda'. Cameron is consistent in writing 'i' for 'a' before all retroflex consonants. There can thus be no doubt that 'birillo' represents southern Paakantji *parlu* 'child', and 'kununda' is *kunundu* 'uninitiated youth'.

¹⁶ 1889:32.

¹⁷ Tindale 1939:245.

¹⁸ 1939:259.

¹⁹ 1884:366.

'Baby' is rendered by Berri-ait 'katchaluka' and Barkinji 'moatpu'. These are in fact both Southern Paakantji words, the first is *katjiluku* 'little' the second is *muurpa* 'small child': the lightly tapped preconsonantal 'r' can easily be misheard as a 't'.

The words for 'throat' and 'neck' have simply been reversed between the two vocabularies: both Berri-ait 'berinbah' and Barkinji 'birbah' stand for the frequently recorded Southern Paakantji word *parnpa* 'neck', 'throat'.

'Grass' is listed as 'muttu' for Berri-ait and 'kulthu' for Barkinji. Both words occur in southern Paakantji, as well as in the other Paakantji dialects: *muthu* means 'grass' (and forms part of the well-known place-name Mootwingee, *muthu-wintji* 'fresh grass'), *kulta* is a more general term for 'ground-vegetation'.

'Sleep' is rendered by Berri-ait 'bumpara' and Barkinji 'emau'. Both these entries represent Southern Paakantji words:

pumpara meaning 'to sleep, to rest'

(*ng*)*ima* meaning 'to lie down' (the initial *ng* is sometimes dropped and in any case Europeans often had difficulty in hearing it).

In all these cases the differences between Barkinji (Southern Paakantji) and Berri-ait (Parintji) are only apparent.

Probable mistakes

The word for 'brain' over much of south-eastern Australia is equivalent to 'head-egg'. The Paakantji word therefore is *thartu parti*. This is rendered by Cameron as follows:

Tartoo birti is listed in the Berri-ait column

Tartoo bira is listed in the Barkinji column

hartu pardi was heard a number of times from southern Paakantji speakers, never 'tartoo bira'. The word for 'egg' is given by Cameron as 'birti' for both Berri-ait and Barkinji, so 'bira' must be a mistake, and the Parintji and Paakantji words are identical.

'bulki' is given for 'hair' in both columns, but there is a difference between the two columns in the word for 'beard':

Berri-ait 'waku bulki'

Barkinji 'bulki'.

waka pulki (lit. 'chin hair') was heard many times from Paakantji speakers. The difference between the two columns is simply that Cameron presumably pointed at his beard and the Paakantji speaker thought that he was just indicating hair in general and he said 'bulki'.

The words given for 'feathers', Berri-ait 'ülki' and Barkinji 'purliki' represent the same word *pulki*, 'hair' which could also refer to 'fur' and 'down-feathers'.

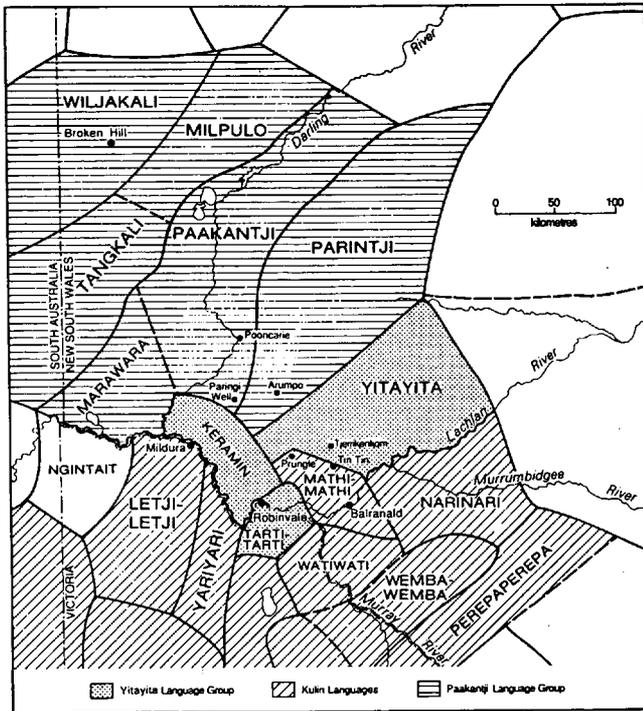
Again there is little doubt that there was no difference between the two dialects with regard to this word.

There are two curious entries, some lines apart, in Cameron's word list:

day	Berri-ait yuku	Barkinji yuku or kalkui
evening	" kalkui	" tunkunka

In the extensive Southern Paakantji material recorded over the last 22 years the word *yuku* was always used to mean 'sun, daylight, daytime', *thungka* was used for 'night' and the locative form was *thungkana* 'at night'. There was also a very commonly used adverb *kaljpu* 'now, directly, very soon', which could easily have been misheard as 'kalkui'. So what presumably occurred is that Cameron happened to be speaking to the Parintji person in the evening hence he got the term 'kalkui' for evening, and to the Paakantji person in the daytime, hence he got 'kalkui', i.e. *kaljpu* 'now' as an alternative form for 'day'; there is no doubt that both were speaking pretty much the same language.

THREE LINGUISTIC STUDIES



'Tribal boundaries in Australia' as amended [David Windle, Cartographic Unit, RSPacS]

The word given for 'thumb' is 'uma murra' for Barkinji and 'utu-tu murra' in Berri-ait. This would appear to be a mistake: (ng)uma maRa means 'your hand', and (ng)urtana maRa means 'your (pl.) hands'.

Uncertainties

There are some instances where Southern Paakantji speakers have invariably used the term given by Cameron as Berri-ait, and I fail to recognise the word given by him for Barkinji, thus *yantantji* was used for 'whirlwind' (Cameron's 'yandanki'); 'pinpah' listed as the Berri-ait word for 'pine tree' is the wide-spread word *pinpa* found throughout the Paakantji dialects and as far west as Arabana. 'würkira', the word given by Cameron for 'pine tree' in Barkinji is reminiscent only of *wurkiri*, the Mathimathi word for 'black'. Similarly Berri-ait 'windhya', for 'mud' represents Southern Paakantji *wiindja*, 'mud' and the word given for Barkinji is unrecognisable. There can be no question about it, Berri-ait, i.e. Parintji as described by Cameron is very close to, if not actually identical with Southern Paakantji as it was recorded in the nineteen sixties from river people who originated from Pooncarie. There are four instances where Cameron's entries for Berri-ait go against the rules of Paakantji by having a final consonant, but they are recognisable as slight mishearings or misspellings of ordinary Southern Paakantji words:

- 'ilpabrind' for 'wrist' is uncertain, but the last part of the word is *pirna* 'bone'
- 'kop' for 'elbow' is *kupu*
- 'burthedd' for 'kidney' is *paarthingki*
- 'dhalk' for 'lungs' is *thalka*.
- 'karapur' for 'sky' is *karapira* 'far away'

The Marawara vocabulary and sentences gathered at Yelta by Bulmer²⁰ and Holden²¹ have been analysed recently by Hercus.²² Marawara is the southernmost of the Paakantji dialects. We have the great advantage for Marawara that Tindale has published a text in this language.²³ But even without this text it would be easy to see from the old vocabularies that Marawara differed from southern Paakantji in a systematic way: Southern Paakantji intervocalic *-tj-* corresponds to *-y-* in Marawara,

Southern Paakantji	Marawara
<i>wimpatja</i> 'man'	<i>wimpaya</i>
<i>kumpatja</i> 'big'	<i>kumpaya</i>
<i>kampitja</i> 'father'	<i>kampiya</i>

There are also certain grammatical differences : these have been summarised in diagrams in *The Bâgandji Language* (205-6). There is nothing of this kind to distinguish Parintji as described by Cameron, it is simply a form of Southern Paakantji.

Not every single word in Cameron's vocabulary has been listed here, because the findings would simply fall into one of the categories of illusory distinctions described above. There are only three instances where the Berri-ait word given by Cameron does not correspond to Southern Paakantji as recorded from Pooncarie speakers. This may be because the word has fallen out of use, or because I somehow failed to record it, or it may be due to some other pitfall. There is certainly every possibility of pitfalls as can be shown by the following entry, in which Berri-ait and 'Barkinji' happen to be identically spelt:

	Berri-ait	Parinji
stars	purti	purti

The Southern Paakantji word for star is *purli* and this is indeed a very widespread word found as far west as Kuyani and Parnkala in the north of South Australia. A cognate form is certainly indicated by Cameron in his entry 'berril' for Keramin, on the same line. What has happened is that someone, perhaps Cameron himself, has misread a handwritten 'l' for a 't' - maybe Cameron did not always cross his t's - and as a result of the confusion 'purti' appears for *purli*.

The only comparative word-lists that are truly satisfactory are those which are based on a depth study of both languages involved. There are rare exceptions even when there is no depth study. These exceptions are lists made with the help of two speakers in the same environment, preferably knowing each other's language. This means that they both get the same message and are not tempted to render different nuances of the same English words, and they are therefore not using vaguely synonymous words in their respective languages. A fine example of such a list is Tindale's manuscript of a comparative vocabulary of Marawara, the southernmost Paakantji dialect, and Yuyu (Ngintait) from the Murray below Ned's Corner. Tindale made the list with both speakers present, Frank Fletcher for Marawara and Bob McKinley for Yuyu and it is clear from the background information that they knew each other's language. Cameron evidently did not have the same favourable situation, nor did he have detailed knowledge of either language. The appearance of near synonyms and of other sources of error was therefore to be expected.

²⁰ Bulmer (Brough Smyth II 33-37).

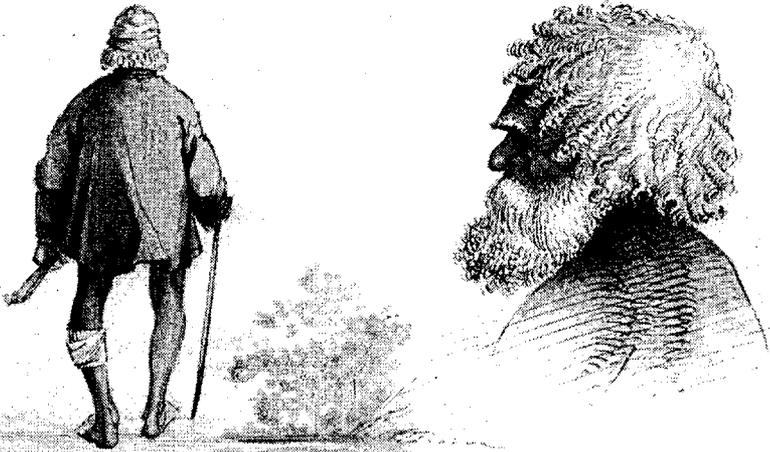
²¹ Holden (Taplin 1879).

²² Hercus 1985.

²³ Tindale 1939:245.

THREE LINGUISTIC STUDIES

no 9.



*Watpipa the "Old Man",
our guide on Sep. 24. 68*

L. Becker.

L. Becker, 'Watpipa the Old Man', [reproduced from M. Tipping. *Ludwig Becker*, Melbourne, 1982:68, by permission of the Library Council of Victoria]

Cameron has nevertheless performed a great service by enabling us to understand the position of Parintji within the framework of the Paakantji dialects. It was evidently very closely akin to Southern Paakantji, 'nearly the same', as he himself suggested, and as was confirmed some ninety years later by the Southern Paakantji speaker, Mrs Kate Bugmy. If it were not for his careful word-list we could not be so sure that the Berri-ait, i.e the Parintji, really were so close to Southern Paakantji.

2d. The Placename 'Paringi'

In the Arumpo area is a well named 'Paringi well', and there is also a 'Paringi tank'. This cannot but refer to Parintji people. It is a mere surmise, but the chances are that places which refer to a tribal name may well be near the border of that group's country or else there would not be any need to point out the affiliation. An example of this is Mt Areebunna, near the border of Arabana country by the Macumba. This consideration confirms the southernmost point of Tindale's boundaries for Parintji, where Paringi well is not far from the border.

2e. **Note on the Placename Arumpo**

None of the languages in the whole area permit initial vowels, yet it is not at all unusual for place-names (and even words in word-lists) to be wrongly written with an initial vowel. The explanation is invariably that the transcriber has failed to hear an initial *-ng*. This is the case with Arumpo, which is most likely to represent **Ngarampu*. In his diary Wills calls the place Nerromboo: he was conscious of an initial *n*-sound. As Yitayita has a preference for final consonants the name Arumpo is almost certainly Parintji and this is further confirmation of the southern boundary of Parintji as given by Tindale.²⁴

3. **Twenty Words from Prungle**

There is little known about the extent of territory once occupied by Yitayita people, and still less about the detail of their boundaries with other groups. It is therefore particularly fortunate that during recent work on the Willandra Lakes, Jeanette Hope discovered the report of the surveyor Neumayer who in 1860 followed the early part of the Burke and Wills expedition. This report contains valuable linguistic information in the form of twenty words from Prungle.

Neumayer writes (p.12):

At 10 in the morning we had to cross a low range of hills extending about two miles from N. by W. to S. by W; the natives call them Prangal or Wrangkal (461); reached a good camping place by noon termed Mungin, 180 feet below the summit of the hills, the afternoon and evening being employed in making astronomical and magnetic observations. I was very much pleased by some of the Blacks showing considerable intelligence while explaining to me their way of living and giving me an idea of their language. The following are a few specimens of their words:- star, tingi; sun, nong; moon, bait; cloud, nun, spango; sky, terail; fire, arreng; tree, mann; cart, carning'; white fellow, weifellow, lang; hair, trad; throat, nei; nose, kap; eye, laong; leg, kapul; grass, dellum; saltbush, dolra; night, ran; day, nung.

From the point of view of a true linguistic study this list may appear pathetically short, moreover only seventeen out of these twenty words can be taken into consideration for the following reasons:

1. The word 'nung' is listed twice, once as 'nong', 'sun' and once as 'day'. There should be only one word for 'day', 'daylight' and 'sun'.
2. 'weifellow' is an unassimilated borrowing
3. 'carning' is presumably also a borrowing but it is not as patent: it presumably goes back to English 'cart'.

Short as the remaining list may be, there is no doubt about its linguistic affiliations: the words are Yitayita. This becomes evident when we compare the words from Prungle with other Yitayita vocabularies. Our knowledge of Yitayita and the apparently identical Tartitarti is extremely limited. I was able to record only a few words in 1963 even from the legendary old Charlie Kirby who was generally acclaimed as the last Yitayita. Our knowledge comes mainly from four sources:

1. A short wordlist by Cameron, (1984:367) and some comments on the kinship system, contained in the same article.
2. J.A. Macdonald's contribution to Curr (1886:285).
3. R. Brough Smyth's wordlist entitled 'Junction of Morcovia Creek and River Murray'.

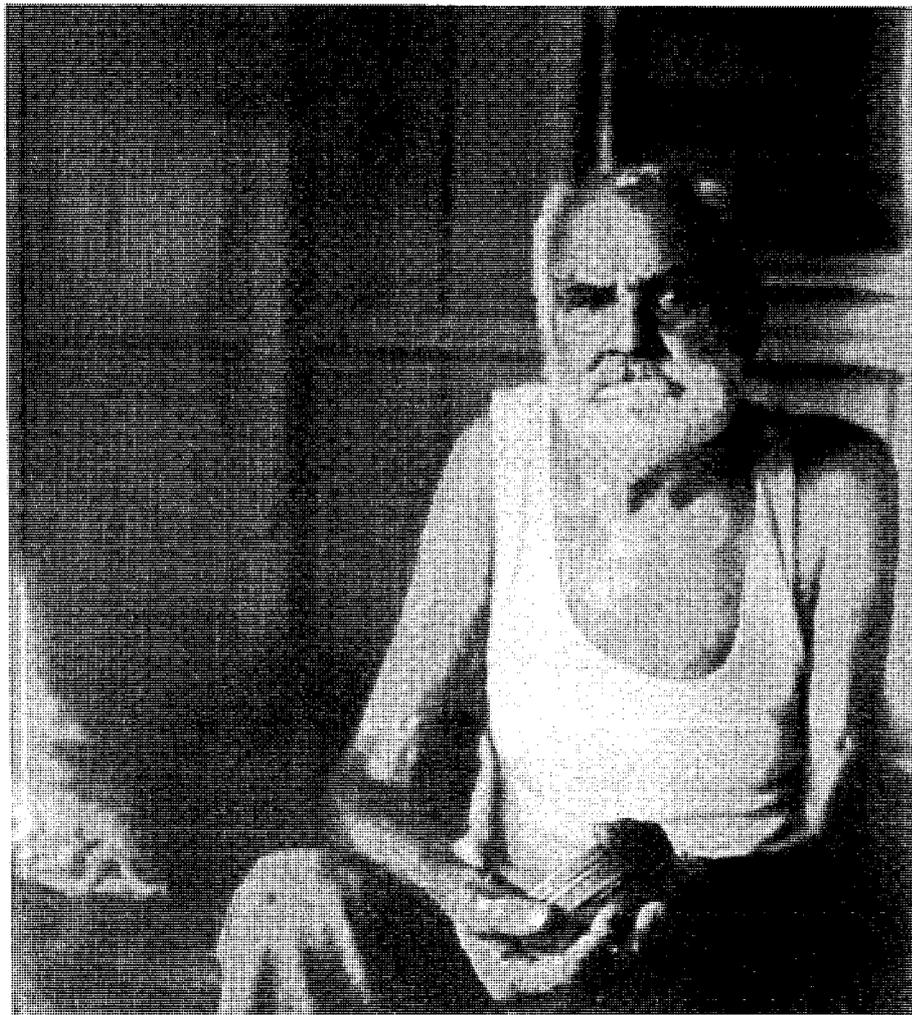
²⁴ Tindale 1974: Maps.

THREE LINGUISTIC STUDIES

4. R.H.Mathews, the Yithayitha Language (MS).

There is also a limited vocabulary by Cameron²⁵ of the related Keramin language, a short list of words from Mildura (also in Keramin) by Jamieson²⁶ and a list 'in the Kemendok tongue' by a Mr McFarlane, the owner of Mallee Cliffs Station. The vocabulary given under the heading 'Upper Murray' in the Exposition Internationale (1866) is too unreliable to be considered.

The following table contains a list of the words from Prungle next to the corresponding words from the old Yitayita vocabularies, with some additional entries from the other related languages.



Charlie Kirby, Balranald, 1963 [photograph by Professor R.G. Debray]

25 Cameron 1884:366-7.

26 Smyth 1878:II.74.

ABORIGINAL HISTORY 1989 13:1

English	Prungle	Cameron	Macdonald	Smyth	Kemendok etc
star	tingi	tinka	dingi	dingée	
sun	<nong	nüing	nunk	nung	nunk (Mildura)
moon	bait	batchi	baidjh	bite	py'te (Mildura) baitch
cloud	<nun, spango				
sky	<terail	*wa-angor		wango	
	teriel (Keramin)		nurmt (Mildura)		
fire	arreg	mürüng	ngaroong	arronge	
tree	mann			murr (pine)	
cart	carning				
white					
fellow	weifellow, lang				
hair	trad	*yüyü	derart	dreut	
		dirirt kitch Keramin)		dirik kitch	
throat	nei	*gooramil			
			*neit (chin)		
nose	kap	kup			cup
eye	laong	lanung		laong, laank	langur
leg	kapul	ngun			cuppum
			kuppul (thigh)	nunt (thigh)	ngunt (thigh)
grass	dellum	tulum	thelim	thurlum	thellum (Keramin)
saltbush	dolra				
night	ran		roin	reun	wangoran

The symbol * is used to indicate Yitayita words found in the manuscript letters from Cameron to Howitt and not printed in the published article.
The last column refers to Kemendok, unless otherwise stated.

THREE LINGUISTIC STUDIES

3a. Comments on individual words from Prungle

'bait', 'moon'

The various ways in which this word is rendered in the word-lists makes it appear likely that there was a final tj, and that the phonemic transcription would be *patj*. The word is related to Paakantji *patjurka* 'moon'.

'spango', 'cloud'

As is well known there is no -s- sound in any Aboriginal language, but Europeans sometimes imagined they could hear it and inserted it in all kinds of unexpected situations: occasionally it indicated that they could hear a fricative. This would point towards a pronunciation 'wango' which is identical to the word given by Cameron and Smyth for 'sky'. As in those early days a lot of communication must have been conducted by pointing, it is not surprising that 'cloud' and 'sky' could be confused. The word 'wangoran', listed twice for Kemendok by McFarlane, once for 'night' and once for 'darkness' is very probably a combination of this same word 'wango', 'sky' and 'ran', dark'.

This analysis is to some extent confirmed by the fact that Cameron lists for Keramin:

Waing-gruimitch	morning
waingrui	dark

'waingrui' is too close to 'wangoran' for this to be a coincidence, and it seems highly likely that both words correspond to 'sky-dark'.

'nun', 'cloud'

The word 'nurnt', 'sky' in the Mildura list is suspiciously like the Prungle word 'nun', 'cloud', and it is probable that Jamieson made a mistake and that 'nurnt' should be interpreted as 'cloud', not 'sky'.

'terail', 'sky'

The existence in the Yitayita language group of the word 'terail' sky is confirmed by Keramin 'tereil'. It is the only word in the list where there is a close resemblance to the Kulin languages. In Kulin tiril 'sky' is wide-spread, the placename Lake Tyrell is derived from this word, and it is likely that it was borrowed from Kulin into the Yitayita group.

'arrong', 'fire'

As indicated above (2e) early writers had problems in hearing initial ng and it happens quite frequently that it is simply not written. Because of the absence of initial vowels throughout the area, we can safely assume that the word was ngarrung. This is in fact what is implied by the form 'ngaroong' given by J.A. Macdonald.

'trad', 'hair'

'derrart' is given as 'head' by Macdonald, this is obviously the same word as 'derart' which he lists for 'hair'. All these words show a similarity to the word thartu, which is found in all the Paakantji dialects in the meaning of 'head'; this includes Cameron's Barkinji and Berri-ait: he lists 'tartoo', 'head' for both.

The Paakantji word for 'hair' (see above) is thartu-pulki 'head hair': and the Keramin word seems to have been formed on a similar pattern, as we read in Cameron's list:

English	Keramin
Head	Dirirt
Hair	Dirirt Kitch

The Kemendok word given by McFarlane is very similar, 'dirirt kitch'.

It is therefore highly likely that 'trad' heard at Prungle by Neumayer actually means 'head' rather than 'hair', a confusion that could arise very easily if people are communicating by pointing. The confusion is further facilitated by the fact that the languages in the area use the expression 'head-hair' for 'hair'.

'kap', 'nose'

This word is one of a number that show links between Yitayita and the language of the lower Murray: 'kap' is obviously related to Yaralde kobe 'nose'.

kapul 'leg'

Just as there is confusion in the vocabularies between 'cloud' and 'sky', the same type of lack of communication has led to confusions between 'leg' and 'thigh'. The fact that Neumayer was right was confirmed by Charlie Kirby who over one hundred years later (in 1964) recorded *kapim* 'leg'.

3b The Yitayita Language and Yitayita People

It is clear from the limited data collected last century that Yitayita and Tartitarti are closely connected: the languages we were told were identical. There is one other language that belongs to this group and that is Keramin, called Keringma by Bulmer (MS) and called Kureinji by Tindale.²⁷ This was once spoken on the north side of the Murray from near Robinvale down to Wentworth. Keramin had various subdivisions, Kemendok from Mallee Cliffs and Yerre-yerre from Mildura. There is therefore a group:

Yitayita-Tartitarti

Keramin (including Kemendok and Yerre-yerre)

As these languages are so very different from all others surrounding them, I made quite particularly determined efforts to find out whatever I could from 1963 onward. My main hope lay with Charlie Kirby of Balranald, a very aged man of part Yitayita descent, but he knew only a few words: he had spent most of his adult life with Ngiyampaa people away to the north at the Carowra tank.²⁸

Long after Charlie Kirby's death Jack Long recalled how in his youth he had heard Tartitarti and Yitayita spoken around him and could understand the language though not speak it. He recalled some vocabulary. He had been friendly with Angus Myers who had given information on the language to R.H.Mathews and with Angus' younger brother Dinny Myers who had subsequently lived around Balranald and Deniliquin mainly associating with Hubert Day (Wembawemba) and his family. Apart from Dinny there was

²⁷ Tindale 1974.

²⁸ Tindale 1974:194 refers to a 'survivor' of the Yitayita who took part in a radio broadcast of the re-enactment of the Sturt Expedition in 1950, and he gives the man's name as 'Clayton'. The Claytons however were of Wiradjuri descent. I met Tommy Clayton (who was certainly the person involved) in 1964 as a very old man shortly before his death. He was a handsome white-haired man, proud of his acting ability. He told me how he had been 'on the air', and how more recently he had acted in a film which he obviously considered silly. He had to spear an unfortunate kangaroo which had already been incapacitated, and he had to speak in broken English and generally pretend to be a 'savage'. His English was excellent and he knew only a few words of Wiradjuri, no Yitayita.

THREE LINGUISTIC STUDIES

one other Yitayita speaker who had survived till the forties. She was 'Queen Caroline of Oxley'. She died without anyone ever recording her speaking the language.

The Yitayita language group is of unique linguistic interest. In general phonotactic appearance Yitayita, with its large number of monosyllabic words, consonant finals and consonant clusters does bear some resemblance to languages further downstream on the Murray. Particularly interesting is the presence in Yitayita of initial *r*, which is found on the one hand in Gippsland and on the other hand further down the Murray in Yuyu and in the Yaraldi dialects of the Murray mouth. This and some similarities in vocabulary have convinced me that there is an ancient link between the people of Gippsland and the Murray.

Yitayita does not have pronoun subject incorporation: this is clear both from the material contributed by J. A. Macdonald to Curr²⁹ and from R.H. Mathews (MS). It is tempting to think that the similar situation in the languages of the neighbouring Mathimathi group, as opposed to the other Kulin languages, is due to Yitayita-Tartitarti influence.

3c. Notes on placenames mentioned by Neumayer

The name 'Tin' is certainly Yitayita: being monosyllabic it cannot be anything else, moreover it is a common word in Yitayita meaning 'foot'. The use of words for parts of the body in placenames is very usual: such names often refer to an incident in mythology. The word for 'foot' can imply that here an Ancestor made a track, and it is tempting to think that 'Tin' could refer to the myth of the Giant Kangaroo.³⁰ There is however no proof of it.

In his report Neumayer mentions a place further on - from his description it would appear to be a day's journey further, and this is called by him 'Cabul' or 'Cwall'. This seems to be the same as the word listed by him as 'capul', 'leg'. This name is of particular interest as it is likely to belong to the same myth as 'Tin', and because it indicates that Yitayita territory extended further west than had been indicated by Tindale's map. The words from Prungle prove Yitayita presence around Prungle. The placename 'Cabul' extends the range of Yitayita even further to the north-west, into an area that we might have thought otherwise was Parintji. The fact that the people in the Prungle area were Yitayita is confirmed by Wills,³¹ who wrote in his diary for September 19th, 1860 about the nearby place 'Tcherrikingkom':

The Blacks that are found here belong to the Murrumbidgee and Lachlan to which river they retire as soon as the water dries up on the plains.'

This is totally different from what we know of Parintji (Berri-ait) people, who always lived away from rivers. The lower Lachlan in particular was associated with Yitayita people, as Charlie Kirby used to state with pride: 'I am a Yitayita black and I come from the Lachlan where they talk backwards'. He said this to emphasise the distinctive nature of Yitayita.

There is however a statement by Tipping³² that Ludwig Becker saw two widowed women at 'Tjerikenkom', and that they were Mathimathi. Becker himself does not say anything about the women being Mathimathi, this is simply a surmise by Tipping. The placename 'Tjerikenkom', which Becker explained means 'a species of bream', has the phonotactic appearance of being Yitayita, not Mathimathi. Becker's notes therefore in no

29 J. A. Macdonald in Curr 1886: II. 285-289.

30 Cameron 1884:369.

31 Hope MS:78.

32 Tipping 1979:58.

way contradict the evidence of the twenty words from Prungle that the Tjerikenkom-Prungle area was in Yitayita country.

Becker supplied a further piece of information: he made a brilliant drawing of the old man who guided the expedition out from 'Gilalba', which he describes as being five miles from Prungle. This old man was called 'Watpipa' on the drawing, and in his fourth report Becker in talking about him says:

'Whitepeeper', 'the old man' as he, par excellence was called by the natives of the district.'

The name 'Watpipa' or 'Whitepeeper' does not at first sight link with anything known; yet it is clear from Becker's statements that it must have actually meant 'old man'. The Yitayita word given by Macdonald for 'old man' is 'beak', which looks irrelevant, until we find the clue in the vocabulary of the closely related Kemendok language from Mallee Cliffs, given to Curr by McFarlane:³³

An old man pikwaar
 An old woman pik-korump
 A white man thow-wur

It is clear that we have here a morpheme 'pik' (i.e. the same as the 'beak' of Macdonald's list) which means 'old'. To this can be added either 'korump' which means '(older) woman' (cf. Yitayita 'koram-koram', 'old woman'), or 'waar' which refers to a man, though it is not the ordinary word given for 'man'. As most Aboriginal languages have a number of words for 'man', according to age and status, this is not surprising. The word 'waar' (which is probably also found in 'thow-wur', 'white man') must be parallel to 'korump' and mean 'an older man'. We can then analyse 'Watpipa' or 'Whitepeeper' as 'war-pik-war', 'a really old man'. It is not uncommon for European transcriptions to use -t- instead of a preconsonantal tapped -r-, as for instance 'moatpu' for muurpa (see 2c above) So 'Warpikwar', 'Whitepeeper' was a Yitayita, and so were the 'natives of the district' referred to by Becker.

3d. Conclusions

The evidence from the Prungle district shows that the boundaries of Yitayita were further west than had been previously thought and we can conclude that Yitayita and the closely related Keramin or Kureinji group were in fact contiguous and not separated entirely from each other by Mathimathi country. This continuity had already been suggested by R.M.W. Dixon (pers. comm.) and the vocabulary from Prungle emphasises this point.

We can gain further and more general information from the early writers. From the evidence of Wills, Neumayer and Cameron there appear to have been two types of occupation in the far south-west of NSW. Mathimathi and Yitayita people occupied the dry areas of their country as long as surface water was still available; in bad seasons they fell back on their river country along the Lachlan and the Murrumbidgee. The Berri-ait, i.e. Parintji people occupied their own dry country permanently and in times of emergency they relied on water from roots. It is however an important fact that their language was almost if not completely identical with Southern Paakantji. This points to an inevitable conclusion: the high sandhill country east of the Darling originally formed part of the range of Southern Paakantji people. The Berri-ait, i.e. the Parintji, were a group of Southern Paakantji people who presumably split off from the main group to occupy on a permanent basis the dry country east of the Darling, and according to Tindale³⁴ there was also some movement of

³³ Curr II.: 282.

³⁴ Tindale 1939.

THREE LINGUISTIC STUDIES

people towards the south. This is in keeping with a situation that can be seen elsewhere in Australia where there has been a recent intensification of the occupation of the most arid areas. This applies to the Simpson Desert,³⁵ as well as to the Victorian Mallee,³⁶ and on the present linguistic evidence it would appear to apply also to *pari* 'the scrub', the area east of the Darling.

NOTES ON ORTHOGRAPHY

In this paper a practical orthography has been used for Paakantji: Plosives have been written as unvoiced, (k,p,th,t, rt), except in the nasal-plosive clusters mb, nb, rnd..

Retroflexes have been written as r plus consonant, i.e.

rl is retroflex l

rn is retroflex n

rt is retroflex t

Interdentals have been written as consonant plus h, hence nh, th.

ng has been used for velar n.

Long vowels are written as double vowels.

The symbol * has been used to indicate a hypothetical form.

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³⁶ Ross 1981, and Lourandos 1985.

ABORIGINAL HISTORY 1989 13:1

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