LEXICOGRAPHIC RESEARCH
ON AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES 1968–1993

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1. INTRODUCTION

O’Grady (1971:779) began his landmark review of lexicography on Australian Aboriginal languages with the rueful observation that in terms of quantity “lexicographic output...has shown a falling off since the turn of the century”. He further observed that if the term ‘dictionary’ were to be confined to compendia of 5,000-plus richly detailed lexical entries, then “the state of lexicographic research on Australian (and Tasmanian) languages...can be stated very simply: no such work yet exists”. Even after lowering his sights to extend the term to reasonably sophisticated assemblages of 1,000-plus lexical entries, O’Grady could list no more than eight published dictionaries of Aboriginal languages.

In other words, as of 1968 (the final year considered in O’Grady’s article) the vast bulk of lexicographic research done in the twentieth century remained unpublished. In his paper O’Grady sought to sketch the history of lexicographic research on Australian languages, to evaluate the principal contributions, and to highlight research opportunities in the hope of helping ‘break the stalemate’ in the making and, especially, the publishing of Australian Aboriginal language dictionaries.

What then is the state of Australian Aboriginal language lexicography now, some twenty-five years later? How have changes in linguistic research techniques and in the sociopolitical landscape affected the making of dictionaries of Australian Aboriginal languages? What are the prospects as the twenty-first century draws to a close? In this paper, we will address these questions following, with some elaboration, the organisation of O’Grady’s original article: §2 will update the history of lexicographic research and publishing; §3 will evaluate aspects of the new works, considering orthographic issues, scope and organisation, and questions to do with definition; and §4 will briefly look to the future of lexicography on Australian Aboriginal languages.

We adopt the following terminology, which differs somewhat from that of O’Grady. By ‘wordlist’ we mean any list of Aboriginal language words with brief translation equivalents, often consisting of a single English word. Wordlists may be of any length, though most have fewer than 1,000 Aboriginal words. We reserve the term ‘dictionary’ for a compendium of 2,000 or more lexical entries which includes detailed semantic information (either as specified ‘senses’ or implicitly in the form of varied examples of usage), and information on...

1 We would like to thank Peter Austin, Gavan Breen, Carolyn Coleman, Bob Dixon, Nicholas Evans, John Henderson, Robert Hoogezaad, Mary Laughead, David Nash, Nick Reid, Julie Waddy, Anna Worobetzka and David Wilkins for information and comments which helped improve an earlier version of this paper. The remaining errors are of our own responsibility.

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the derivational relationships between words. Once a certain threshold size is reached, in other words, the distinguishing characteristic of a dictionary, as we see it, is the sophistication of the information it contains. Dictionaries, thus defined, usually also give at least basic grammatical information about individual words, along with facts about their dialectal affiliation, pronunciation variants, etymology and cultural significance, and include illustrative phrases or sentences.

We use the expression 'small dictionary' as an intermediate category between wordlist and dictionary proper: that is, for assemblages of dictionary-standard, or near dictionary-standard, information on fewer than 2,000 lexical entries. Most small dictionaries have between 1,000 and 2,000 entries, but they may be smaller if they are for a specialised purpose, for example, for primary school use, or for a single domain such as botany.

One type of modern lexicographic compendium escapes the terminology laid out so far, namely, lexical files on computer. Due largely to the AIAS National Lexicography Project (Nash & Simpson 1989) there are many of these which, though unpublished, are in the public domain through having been deposited in the AIATSIS Aboriginal Studies Electronic Data Archive (ASEDA). They will be referred to, in the current jargon, as 'electronic data files'.

2 DEVELOPMENTS IN ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE LEXICOGRAPHY 1968–1993

Diverse purposes have motivated the production of Aboriginal dictionaries over the past twenty-five years, some quite different to those which animated earlier generations of Aboriginal language lexicographers. Since the nature of a dictionary is partly dictated by its purposes, it can be expected that recent dictionaries and wordlists differ considerably from their predecessors (as well as from each other). Before moving to these matters, it will be helpful to step back and take an overview of some factors which have brought changes in almost all the component aspects of Aboriginal language lexicography, including the kind of people doing it, their aims, their methods, and the sources of support available to them.

2.1 TRENDS AND INFLUENCES

One significant development has been the rise of linguistics as an academic discipline and its expansion in Australian universities. This is not the place to relate this history, but notable turning points would include the establishment of the first Department of Linguistics in 1965 at Monash University, and the arrival at the Australian National University in 1970 of R.M.W. (Bob) Dixon, who was to become a dynamic force in Australian linguistics. Most

2 Actually, it is no simple matter to index the size of a dictionary. Should one count the number of headwords, the total number of lexical entries, or the number of distinct senses identified?

3 Abbreviations used in this paper are as follows: AIAS Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies; AIATSIS Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies; ALS Australian Linguistic Society; ANU Australian National University; Language Initiatives programme; IAD Institute for Aboriginal Development; Alice Springs; MIT Massachusetts Institute of Technology; NT Northern Territory; PL Pacific Linguistics; SAL School of Summer Institute of Linguistics, Australian Aborigines and Islanders Branch; WA Western Australia.

lexicographers since the 1970s have received at least some academic training in linguistics, and have therefore been better able to cope with the phonological and syntactic peculiarities of Aboriginal languages than their predecessors. As O'Grady (1971:781) noted, many of the workers in the 1930s and 1940s spent decades compiling dictionary material without being au fait with the "phonemic facts of life."

Two other factors whose importance can hardly be underestimated are the changed standing of Aboriginal people in Australian life generally, and the rise of government-supported bilingual Aboriginal education in the Northern Territory and South Australia. At the time of O'Grady's 1971 article, Aboriginal people had had citizenship rights for a mere three years, the reforming Whitlam Labour government had not yet been elected, and 'land rights' and 'self-determination' were idealistic slogans. To all but the most visionary it would have been inconceivable that, in little more than twenty years, native land title would be recognised by the High Court or that an Aboriginal rock group (Yothu Yindi) would be ambassadors of Australian culture to the world, to mention only two signs of the profound change which has taken place in the status of Aboriginality.

Though such general societal trends have indirectly affected Aboriginal language lexicography in many ways, one very direct and obvious factor was the Federal government decision in 1973 to support the development of bilingual education in the Northern Territory. This created a new educational application for linguistic studies of Aboriginal languages, and, ultimately, a generation of Aboriginal people literate in their own languages. Increasingly, dictionary makers have wanted to serve the needs of Aboriginal users, as well as to document Aboriginal languages for scientific purposes. For many linguists, a dictionary is now seen as a way of getting the results of their research back to the people who provided it and in a form which is, to some extent at least, familiar and expected. A good dictionary is a basic multipurpose resource, not the least of its benefits being its capacity to 'free' the community from the linguist by providing a spelling resource they can use themselves. Aside from being the primary end-users, Aboriginal people literate in their own languages now play a crucial role as co-workers on many, perhaps most, contemporary dictionary projects.

A more mundane, but still important, change over the past twenty-five years has been improved transport and communication. As O'Grady (1971:780) observed, twenty century linguists it seems, have generally had to travel far from their city homes to undertake lexicographic fieldwork on an Aboriginal language, which for most of the century has been a costly, arduous and time-consuming exercise. Though it still is to some extent, there can be little doubt that getting to a remote location is easier now than ever before, and that working and living conditions in the field are generally more conducive to productive research.

Sources of material support, never particularly healthy, have fluctuated greatly. From the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, funds from universities and from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (AIAS, now AIATSIS) flowed fairly freely, but linguistic research over this period favoured grammatical, rather than lexicographic, work. Ironically, as fashions in linguistic theorising have moved to reinvigorate interest in the lexicon, funding for original linguistic research from Australian universities and from AIATSIS has tended to dry up. In the Northern Territory, the Department of Education has funded some lexicography. Another source has been the Australian branch of the missionary organisation Summer Institute of
Linguistics (SIL-AAIL). Overseas institutions, such as the US National Science Foundation and Systems Development Foundation, have helped support the work on Warlpiri by the Strait Islander Languages Initiatives Programme (ATSILIP) has assisted the establishment of language centres, most of which do some lexicographic work. On underfunded.

2.2 OUTPUT

Coming to the published output of the past twenty-five years, we can observe at once that Heath (1982:25) could still fairly remark "...the number of published dictionaries is a single published dictionary which makes any pretensions of being comprehensive". The hundred words in a wordlist at the end.

Over the 1980s, this situation improved. An increasing number of small dictionaries and wordlists began to be published, and much more work became accessible as manuscript or electronic data files. A substantial, but not exhaustive, annotated list of such materials appears as Appendices 1 and 2. Much of it reflects a trend, made possible by the availability and additions later, and to make work-in-progress available in small print runs or in O'Grady (1971:735ff.) as then in progress, with comments on their current state. Nevertheless, it would be fair to say, with Austin (1991), that dictionary making largely remained the 'poor cousin of grammatical description'.

It was not until the 1990s that reasonably large and comprehensive dictionaries of Aboriginal languages began to appear in any numbers.5 Table I below lists all such materials available or in press at the time of writing. From a publishing point of view, one notable houses. The only (partial) exceptions are academic publishers such as the University of published mainly by universities, schools, SIL-AAIL, AIAL, Aboriginal Language Centres, and by the publishing arm of the Institute for Aboriginal Development (IAD).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dictionary</th>
<th>Publication Details</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yir-Yoront lexicon: sketch and dictionary of an Australian language</td>
<td>1991, Alpher, Barry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngarinyin—English dictionary</td>
<td>1974, Coate, Howard and A.P. Elkin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 Aside from Hansen and Hansen (first edition 1974), mentioned above, the main exception is Heath's (1982) Nunggubuyu dictionary, in which every word is indexed against a large published text corpus.


Goddard, Cliff, 1992, Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara to English dictionary (2nd edn). Alice Springs, NT: IAD.

Green, Jenny, 1992, Alyawarr to English dictionary. Alice Springs, NT: IAD.


Heath, Jeffrey, 1982, Nunggubuyu dictionary. Canberra: AIAS.


the wordlists of Pilbara languages produced by Wangka Maya (1989–90). Such products represent a change from the earlier academic work which was not designed for use by the speakers of the language or by the general public.

Of medium size are the recently published dictionaries listed in Table 1. These contain between 2,000 and 5,000 lexical entries, with reasonably detailed semantic, grammatical and serving language learners, Aboriginal schoolchildren in bilingual education, Aboriginal Yoront dictionary has perhaps the broadest scope of the published works listed in Table 1, and includes information about etymology, language variety (respect vocabulary) and totemic affiliation in addition to semantic information, example sentences, and so on.6

The only large dictionary which has been published at the time of writing is the Eastern and Central Arrernte to English dictionary (Henderson & Dobson 1994) though the Warlpiri--very rich exemplification and encyclopedic information. The Warlpiri Dictionary Project (cf. 1983) is truly remarkable for its scope, longevity and ambivalence, as brought to bear upon it. Its primary purpose is scientific, viz. the most complete possible abridged versions are planned to serve the needs of bilingual education and Warlpiri adult scope, and attempts to combine scientific and practical purposes. Even so, the publication is so large (almost 800 pages) that an abridged ‘junior’ edition is envisaged for schools.

A trend in recent years has been the renewed interest in the collation and reworking of early records of Aboriginal languages. For instance, Jane Simpson and Rob Amery (1994) have reconstituted parts of the vocabulary of Kaurna (Adelaide), and there will no doubt be more such work as interest develops among Aboriginal people who mainly through the ATSILP program. The same funding has assisted the reworking of more Wangka Maya (Port Hedland) and reworked Ken Hales’s Ngarluma material from an electronic data file, and the Kimberley Languages Resource Centre (Halls Creek) is keyboarding Tasak Tsunoda’s large Jaru wordlist.

Finally, it should be noted that there is evidence that in various Language Centres, schools and community council offices, Aboriginal people are increasingly doing lexicographic work "were said to be able to read and write Warungmu. One young woman (Doreen Noonan, 1974). This dictionary has since gone missing.

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6 In general, published Aboriginal language dictionaries tend not to include any great detail on etymologies the practical relevance to Aboriginal users, the partial or speculative nature of the information and the data files, if not in published 'hard copy' dictionaries.

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Such work is easily lost because the Aboriginal people doing it often do not know how to take it past the collection stage. For example, Robert Hoogenraad (pers. comm. and forthcoming) found some 150 pages of handwritten wordlists on the floor of the Garunga (Elliott) Council office. There were mostly parallel lists in Mudburra, Jingulu and Wambaya for plants and animals, body parts, and meteorological terms, entered onto locally designed photocopied forms with ruled columns for each language. The Mudburra material has since been entered into a lexical database and checked against the existing Mudburra dictionary file: it contained over 500 entries, 280 of them not previously in the database. Mary Laughren (pers. comm.) reports having found spontaneous Warlpiri lexicography, usually in notebooks left in school 'language rooms' or literature production centres. Examples include lists of kin terms organised according to Warlpiri classificatory principles like senior versus junior/same generation, and lists of plant names, giving their parts and products.

More sophisticated work is also being done, as Aboriginal people become more involved in compiling wordlists and in writing definitions, both English and vernacular. In 1985, for example, Patric Jangala began writing monolingual Warlpiri definitions for use by pupils in the upper grades of the bilingual program at Lajamanu School. Jangala’s work (see Jangala 1986) was supported by the Warlpiri Dictionary Project and incorporated into the project’s data files. Perhaps the most accomplished Aboriginal lexicographer is Veronica Dobson, co-author of the Eastern and Central Arrernte to English dictionary, to which she has devoted five years full-time work. Also of note is Jeannie Bell’s work on historical materials on Gubbi Gubbi and Butchulla (Batjala), the languages spoken by her grandparents.

2.3 NEW METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

The new methods and techniques used by lexicographers over the past twenty-five years fall under two broad headings: new ways of gathering data and new ways of manipulating data.

At the time of O’Grady’s 1971 review, the most widely used data gathering method was elicitation, assisted by standard wordlists. O’Grady mentions Capell’s use in the 1930s of a 600-item lexical list to compile information on over ninety languages of northern Australia (cf. Capell 1945), his own use of a 100-item list in the northern part of Western Australia in the 1950s, and Stephen Wurm’s work in eastern Australia at about the same time (cf. Wurm 1967), among others. All this was essentially survey work, with a comparative orientation. Later, AIAS published its own widely used standard elicitation wordlist organised by semantic fields (AIAS & Capell n.d.; Sutton & Walsh 1979, 1987). Usually the elicitation would be done through (Aboriginal) English, a variety of Kriol, or sometimes through a traditional Aboriginal lingua franca. In any case, there are obvious limitations on the richness of the information which can be obtained by elicitation.

More substantial recent dictionary work has relied on working methods better suited to producing in-depth data on individual languages. These include intensive language-learning by the linguist, participant observation, extensive use of tape-recorded and transcribed texts, and, increasingly, collaboration with literate Aboriginal speakers of the language in question.

For the purposes of data manipulation and analysis, lexicography is today unthinkable without the computer. In place of boxes of file-sips, lexical information is now stored in some kind of structured database, which can be manipulated to produce different types of
formatted dictionary (e.g. alphabetically ordered, thesaurus, special purpose). The computer allows much greater speed, accuracy and consistency. Increasingly, vernacular source making it possible for the lexicographer to compile textual examples using ‘concordance’ software.

The earliest computer-aided lexicography, such as O’Grady’s 1966 comparison of wordlists of Australian languages, the Research dictionary of the Western Desert language of Australia (Raa & Woonen 1970–1973), and the comparative Pitjban Dictionaries Project (cf. almost all contemporary projects use personal computers and existing software. Current formating and data management. Free Text, Mico-OCF, Shoebox, TACT, and Cone (text-browsers and concordancers), and MacLex (dedicated dictionary maker).

Much day-to-day lexicography is done without special purpose software, however. Instead, data is compiled as structured text within a standard word-processor, using declarative mark-up to make the structure of the information explicit. The marked information described below. The most widely used mark-up system is based on conventions developed by SIE, and promoted by the IAAS Lexicongraphy Project (cf. Nash & Simpson 1989) and its successor ASED, It employs a backslash followed by a letter-code to identify different types (or ‘fields’) of information within the lexical entry. This is known as a ‘field-oriented standard format’ or SOSF file. The key advantage of a mark-up format is that it frees the text be current within an entire research community. In future we can expect to be using (SGML), for which software and conventions for use in dictionary construction are now available.

Database programs, such as Paradox or FileMaker, are also popular as a means of entering data in a structured framework, allowing it to be exported as tab-delimited text files of languages, as in the use of Oracle by Peter Austin for storing and locating data from a number of Pitjban languages.

To give something of the flavour of current, computer-assisted lexicography, we will work through some of the stages involved in transforming a lexical database into final to prepare the second edition of the Pitjbanjadjara/Tunkanyinyanja to English dictionary. The ‘sensitive language’), 1, a definition, 1, a thesaurus classification, and 1 an example. Layering of definitions and examples is provided for by numerical codes which identify the field which they precede. Thus 1 preceding a definition field indicates that this is the

It should be noted that FOSS has been criticized as a violation of certain principles of dictionary linguistic knowledge encapsulated within it rather than being designed for processing convenience; they on) are integral to the dictionary, so too should they be integral to the design and computer representation

second distinct ‘sense’ of the lexical unit. Derivational relationships are provided for through the codes 1, 1, and 1, which identify a ‘sub-headword’ and fixed expression (idiom or phrase). Symbols such as *, @, and < > within the definition fields mark English words for the purpose of making a reversed (English–Pitjbanjadjara) listing.

FIGURE 1: EXTRACT FROM DATABASE FOR PITJANJADJARA/TUNKANYINJADJARA TO ENGLISH DICTIONARY (GODDARD 1992)

The schema shown in Figure 1 had various defects. For instance, having the example glosses appear within the 1 field, identified by framing in single inverted commas, led to problems in subsequent processing, as did the many inconsistencies in punctuation. But although it is impossible to achieve fully automatic conversion from data files to final formatted text, a great deal of the re-formatting can be done automatically. At IAD the initial re-formatting is done within the Nibus word processor, using the regular expression (GREP) and macro facilities, which allow users to write customised programmes for manipulating text. Figure 2 shows part of such a macro devised by John Henderson. Current IAD practice is to use macros to convert an edited version of underlying database into ‘style-tagged text’ in which unique symbols enclose every stretch of characters destined for a particular final style (font/size/face combination). As well as tagging each field with the appropriate styling information, it adds any text or symbols needed to introduce the field in the published version.
Eagle: white breast eagle
Kangaroo: ornate kangaroo tick
Kangaroo tick: ornate kangaroo tick
White breast eagle:

Whether working on FOSF files or from a database, it is important to design and use automatic reversal procedures carefully (cf. Nathan & Austen 1992) otherwise the resulting lists can be bizarre and impractical. An unfortunate example of this is the finderlist in the third edition of the Pintupi/Luritja dictionary (Hansen & Hansen 1992:222), in which, for instance, the following series of 15 entries appears under the English word ‘did’:

did here, did miracles, did not bury, did not eat (it), did not forget, did not inform another, did not win, did nothing, did signs and wonders, did supernatural things or acts, did that which was displeasing, did there, did up hill.

Reversals can be converted, by extensive editing, into English-Aboriginal language ‘finderlists’, but it is advisable to check any finderlist against a suitably sized list of common English vocabulary. This is because a finderlist serves a person who wishes to find Aboriginal equivalents for English words, but many common English words will not have found their way into the definitions for Aboriginal language words in the main dictionary. Such lists are available in electronic form from ASEAED.

3. ISSUES IN LEXICOGRAPHIC PRACTICE

3.1 ORTHOGRAPHY

When O’Grady (1971:792) wrote, it was still feasible for him to call for a standardisation of orthographic symbols, primarily to avoid “a major and unnecessary burden to the comparativist”. For the stop series, O’Grady himself favoured [p, t, t̪, c, k], and for the nasals [n, n̪, Ṉ, n̪, ñ, ɳ, ŋ, N]. These suggestions have been overthrown by the times. It is now generally accepted that an Aboriginal language dictionary must employ a “practical orthography” based on Roman alphabet letters, and bearing as straightforward a relationship as possible to the English spelling system. This is for the convenience of non-linguists, Aboriginal and otherwise, who are now recognised as the primary users of the dictionaries.

Even the principle of phonemic spelling is no longer sacrosanct, if for one reason or another, it conflicts sharply with the priorities of the Aboriginal community. After all, a mild amount of under-differentiation in the spelling system presents no problems for native speakers. Sometimes, too, a community already literate in English may prefer an orthography closely based on English, even at the cost of a less than maximally efficient system. For example, the Yidiny community has adopted an orthography in which the name of their language is spelt Gungiyanji, rather than Kuniyanti as it would have been in the standard ‘linguist’s notation’: this system both under- and over-differentiates phonemes (McGregor 1986, 1990:25–28). Less commonly, local tradition has sanctioned the retention of letter symbols alien to the typewriter keyboard. This is the case with the hooked ‘eng’ symbol of the Yolŋu languages of north-eastern Arnhem Land, which also employ ã to indicate the long vowel usually shown as aa.
3.2 ORGANISATION

Most published Aboriginal language dictionaries employ listing by alphabetical sequence of lexical stems, sometimes supplemented with an English 'finderlist'. The sequence is based either on the initial letter, as is done in English dictionaries, or, more commonly, on the initial 'orthographic symbol' where digraphs (i.e. sequences of two letters standing for a single phoneme) are regarded as single symbols. An example of the latter ordering principle is shown below from the Pintupi/Luritja dictionary.

a, i, k, l, jy, m, n, ng, ny, p, r, rr, t, tj, w, y

The rationale is to make it easier for Aboriginal users to locate words, assuming that they will do so directly on a phonemic basis. A listing like the one shown above prevents words beginning with 'n', 'ng', and 'ny' becoming interspersed.

The argument in favour of the competing letter-based sequence is that almost all Aboriginal users today go or have gone to school, where they learn the conventional digraphs. It can also be argued that experienced readers tend not to operate on a direct phonemic basis, but to 'see' words in a graphic form (so that a word like nganytya, for instance, is seen as beginning with the letter 'n'). Research is needed into the relative merits of the two competing systems.

A less common alternative to alphabetical listing is thesaurus-style organisation, either as the primary format, as in McKeon (1989), Dixon (1991), and Groote Eylandt Linguistics, or as a supplement to a conventional alphabetical listing, as in Evans (1992). An extent this can (or should) be based on the Aboriginal language itself, rather than on people, living things and artefacts, making it relatively simple to organise at least some of the nominal vocabulary into a 'thematic thesaurus'. But the semantic organisation of other lexical domains may be obscure even to native speakers, and require detailed analytical work. Aside language, there has been little published on this, though some practising lexicographers have devised quite elaborate semantically based schemes to help with collecting lexical data. Nonetheless, it would be fair to say that semantically organised dictionaries continue to rely in large measure on categories derived from European lexicography.

8 Among dictionaries which list by initial digraph, there is variation as to whether the same ordering for instance, punu 'hit' comes after puru 'tree'. Most others, such as the Kanyuridji dictionary and Thesaurus (Evans 1992), use conventional alphabetical order inside the word.

Like most writing on Aboriginal language lexicography, the discussion above has been biased in assuming that the typical Australian language is of the agglutinative, predominantly suffixing, Pama-Nyungan type. In fact, perhaps one-third of all Australian languages still spoken today are non-Pama-Nyungan (nonPN). Just as the complex and diverse nonPN tongues—generally prefixing and tending toward polysynthesis—pose special problems for grammatical analysis, so do they for lexicography. No more than a handful of nonPN language dictionaries have appeared (e.g. Heath 1982; Merlan 1982; Kimberley Language Resource Centre and Gedda Akil 1993; Groote Eylandt Linguistics 1994).

Identifying a citation form may be no easier matter in a prefixing language, where most verbs may never appear without an appropriate person-number prefix. Even if it is possible to isolate an underlying root, it will often be the case that its initial segment is modified in most surface forms. In some nonPN languages, nominals also bear obligatory prefixes showing noun-class. Another common problem is widespread supplementation in verbal paradigms, which calls for extensive and complex cross-referencing. The problems that linguistic features like these create for practical lexicography can be illustrated by the case of Ndjëbbana (Kunibidi), on which dictionary work has been ongoing for over 15 years.

McKay (1983) relates that in the early 1980s the then newly-literate Kunibidji speakers would not accept verbal roots as citation forms. The decision was therefore made to cite verbs with a third person singular masculine subject prefix, although this had the effect that almost all verbs appeared under the letter 'k' in an alphabetical listing. The situation with verbs was further complicated by the existence of numerous semi-productive derivational prefixes. Literate speakers originally expressed a preference for verb stems derived in this way to be listed as separate lexemes, rather than grouping them under the root.

Over fifteen years, however, the literate community has matured in its skills and its understanding of language matters. The linguist currently working on the project, Carolyn Coleman, reports (pers. comm.) that Ndjébbana consultants now accept the verbal root as citation form. The third person singular masculine prefix is retained, but with the root highlighted in bold within the inflected word; the main entries for verbs appear in alphabetical order according to the first segment of the highlighted root (a similar convention is used in the alphabetical sections of the draft Anindilyakwa–English dictionary). This is a typographical 'solution' which was not practical prior to the advent of computer-assisted desktop publishing. As well, the consultants now want the main entries for the derivational variants to be listed along with the 'head word' (head root), provided the derived forms are listed separately with a cross-reference to the main entry. This example shows that the optimal organisation of a practical dictionary is not determined solely by linguistic facts.

Green and Reid (1993) discuss the severe problems which arise with languages of the Daly River region, such as Ngan'gilyerri and Marrithiyel. These are 'verb-classifying' languages. That is, verbs normally occur bearing one of a set of prefixed auxiliary elements which characterise the nature of the activity being depicted. For instance, one set of auxiliary prefixes classifies transitive actions according to the manner in and/or type of instrument with which they are carried out; another set classifies according to the active involvement of certain parts of the body, such as the hands, feet and mouth. Often the auxiliaries occur as portmanteau forms incorporating person and number marking of the subject. Alphabetic listing by initial segment is not a practical proposition for these languages, and the complex cross-referencing that seems to be required will create great difficulties for newly literate users. Green and Reid are developing a computerised dictionary using FileMaker Pro which
should be more practical for community use. Lexical information will be accessible by initial segment of verb root, by auxiliary, or by thesaurus classification. The FileMaker Pro format ‘backslash code’ system.

Regardless of the organisational framework, example sentences or phrases are an important part of any bilingual dictionary, though their role can be construed in various complex examples can be a vehicle for implicit grammatical information. Example sentences may also contain ethno-encyclopaedic information, or take the form of vernacular definitions.

Some dictionary makers insist that ‘naturally occurring text’ is the only or ideal source for examples, even though this may mean that many are grammatically complex and poorly context-embedded. Others prefer text-based material but allow that it may be edited for sentences; so long as they are written by experienced Aboriginal language workers. In any case, one difficulty to be faced is that tape-recorded text corpora are almost always unrepresentative of ordinary speech, because they tend to be dominated by monologues (especially narrative).

3.3 DEFINITIONAL PRACTICE

Questions of definition are at the heart of dictionary making. In 1971, O’Grady (1971: 795) remarked of the then published dictionaries: “[Their] definitions leave much to be desired. There would be no point, however, in deriding the earlier works... [The] compilers operated within the limitations imposed by the state of lexicography of their respective era”.

It is not clear that the future will be able to judge contemporary practice in the same charitable light. The problem, which we hasten to point out is not confined to the Australian Aboriginal arena, is that there is a wide gulf between semantic theory and lexicographic practice. Comparatively few Australian lexicographers over the past twenty-five years have been well trained in semantics, and most have developed their definitions on a fairly ad hoc basis. This is particularly noticeable in two respects: first, descriptive inadequacy and inexplicitness; second, lack of criteria for distinguishing between polysemic and semantic generality.

On the issue of semantic adequacy, we can observe that most Australian language dictionaries make little effort to explicitly capture the precise meaning of the words being defined. Rather than attempt a precise explanatory paraphrase, they more commonly list a series of possible English translation equivalents, as in the examples below, which come from the Alyawarr to English dictionary (Green 1992:219), an early draft of the Warlpiri dictionary (cited in Wierzbicka 1983:141), and the Pitjantjarra/Yankunytjatjara to English dictionary (Goddard 1992:112), respectively.

- rilwayej, Iwaneyel
- nyuruyuri-jari-mi
- pikajara

Listing possible translation equivalents does not meet one of the prime requirements of a good lexicographic definition, namely, that it should make the meaning fully explicit. The reader may fairly assume that the meaning being defined contains some components in common with each of the English words offered, while not being completely identical with any of them, so it would be wrong to reject the listing approach as wholly uninformative. But the listing simply leaves to the reader the task which properly belongs to the lexicographer, that is, of isolating the invariant meaning and specifying it in a testable form. This is a particularly unfortunate failing when it concerns culturally important words which lack close equivalents in English.

Of course, most dictionaries do at times attempt explicit explanatory paraphrases, in addition to listing translation equivalents. The examples below are from the same three dictionaries as cited above (Green 1992:146; Warlpiri Lexicography Group 1986a:63; Goddard 1992:43). It would be good if this practice were to become more consistent.

 interlebalay be confused, become mixed up, go off your head, not think straight, be in a hurry, be unable to think of something

mirriny/ (pa) very rapid involuntary movements of the body; shaking, shakes, trembling, twitching, shivering

kinta respectful, embarrassed, ‘shame’. Discomfort at being observed by someone because of the type of person they are, because of worrying that you might do something on account of which they might think badly of you

Australian lexicographic practice could also improve its handling of the distinction between a lexical unit having several distinct but-related senses, as opposed to it having a single general meaning—that is, the distinction between polysemic and semantic generality. Many Australian lexicographers seem to think this distinction is arbitrary or unimportant, giving an unstructured string of glosses where others would identify separate (polysemic) senses. The entries below exemplify the contrast in approach; they deal with the same verb nyina-.

(a) nyina- vi. sit, to sit, to live, to be, to exist, to stay

[An introductory dictionary of the Western Desert language (Douglas 1988:55)]

(b) nyinanyi intrositive verb (G2)

1. sit, be sitting. 2. live, stay: Nyunyayku kintu nguru nguru nyinanyi? Where is your big brother staying/living? 3. be in a place: Tiilpnga nyinanyi? Is the Old Fella around? 4. be in, have or hold a temporary condition: Ngurra puikulpa nyinanyi. We were content. 5. (with serial verb, in the ‘way of life’ construction) do something generally, customarily, as a way of life: Kungka nguru nguru kintu katina nyina? Why do you bring your wife with you?

[Plitjantjarra/Yankunytjatjara to English dictionary (Goddard 1992:97)]

Australian dictionary makers would do well to draw on criteria identified by semantic and lexicographic theorists (e.g. Aprejan 1972, 1992 [1974]; Mel’čuk 1988; Wierzbicka 1992–1993) for establishing polysemic, such as the putative distinct meanings having different syntactic properties, or different antonyms, or only one of the senses participating in a derivational process. Importantly, whether for a generality analysis or a polysemic analysis the putative sense or senses must be testable in explicit and testable formulations.
Even dictionaries which recognise the polysemy versus generality distinction seldom implement it with consistency or supply any explicit discussion of their criteria. (An exception is Alpher 1991). Some examples of apparent inconsistency are given below. We assume that separating senses by numbers or semi-colons is intended to indicate polysemy, while a unitary sense is indicated by glosses separated by commas.

(a) maathhan (1) settle someone down after they have been angry or wild (2) tame or subdue someone or an animal
nga'nanathan hide (something or yourself); put inside (something)
gegeyan listen, understand, hear (and obey)

[Dictionary and source book of the Wuk-Mungkan language (Kilham et al. 1986:144, 142)]

(b) wardu 1. Corner, curve. 2. Small point on coastline
yiwiya Lie down, sleep, camp the night

[Kayardild dictionary and thesaurus (Evans 1992:143, 179)]

Most modern practical dictionaries frame their definitions in terms of relatively simple, common English words, if only to maximise their intelligibility for Aboriginal users. One of the few exceptions is the main version of the Warlpiri dictionary (i.e. the version intended for linguistic, rather than for general, use), which employs a rather technical, semi-standardised metalanguage. This has been the subject of one of the very few theoretically-oriented exchanges in the scant literature about Aboriginal language lexicography. The exchange, in Austin, ed. (1983), occurred between Anna Wierzbicka and Mary Laughren, and is sufficiently interesting to review here.

Wierzbicka (1983:136–137) criticised the style of definition shown below.

paka-ri — 'xERG produces concussion of surface of yABS, by coming into contact with y'
liri-ri — 'yABS increases in size, typically to assume abnormal dimensions'

Such definitions, she said, violated the requirement that a sound definition "must reduce what is complex to what is simple, what is obscure to what is clear, what is conceptually 'posterior' to what is conceptually 'prior'". The rather learned style of language used was an unnecessary barrier to understanding. Wierzbicka also claimed that by using the complex defining language one runs the risk of committing the lexicographic sin of circularity, if only in a hidden form. For instance, if a word close in meaning to 'hit' is defined in terms of 'conceision', there is implicit circularity because we understand the word 'conceision' in terms of 'hitting'.

Laughren (1983) defended the form of the definitions on the grounds that they bring out the natural semantic classes to be found in Warlpiri. She explained that the first of the definitions cited above is formulated so as to show that paka-ri falls into the class of 'contact/effect' verbs. whose core meaning is defined as 'xERG produces an effect on yABS by some entity coming into contact with y'. The other details of the definition distinguish paka-ri from other verbs of the same class (e.g. panti-ri 'pierce, poke, stick into, spear', yipi-ri 'squeeze out', palji-ri 'wash'). The differences are captured by specifications of the nature of the effect (e.g. concussion, pressure, cleaning, etc.); the nature of the entity (sharp pointed, hands, water, etc.); and the nature of the contact. Laughren also pointed out that the apparent simplicity of English words such as 'hit' may be misleading. For instance, there are several different senses for 'hit', only one of which could be translated using Warlpiri paka-

A final issue to do with the definitional side of dictionary making concerns encyclopaedic information. In general, the larger dictionaries tend to include liberal amounts of cultural knowledge in or along with their definitions or in the example sentences. The kind of facts often noted include the habits of animals, uses for plants and animals, procedures for making and using tools and implements, as well as social customs and beliefs.

From the viewpoint of semantic theory, the importance of cultural knowledge is being increasingly recognised, with richly detailed scenarios and cultural scripts now widely accepted as plausible representations of linguistic knowledge. Some semantic theorists, such as George Lakoff (1987) and Ronald Langacker (1987), reject the distinction between linguistic and real-world knowledge altogether, while others, such as Wierzbicka (1983, in press) would rather redraw the boundary so that some details about the habits of animal species and the functions of artefacts are seen as aspects of semantic knowledge. In any case, there can be no theoretical objection to the encyclopaedic dictionary, so long as the 'knowledge' being included is that of the indigenous culture, as opposed to Western 'scientific' knowledge. As pointed out by Evans (1992, this volume) and by Wilkins (1996), encyclopaedic information also often helps to make sense of polysemy and to identify pathways of semantic change. Finally, from a practical point of view, encyclopaedic dictionaries are often more interesting and more useful.

4. THE FUTURE FOR ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE LEXICOGRAPHY

Until recently, makers of Aboriginal language dictionaries have largely worked in isolation from one another. It is greatly to be hoped that the future will see more debate, discussion and exchange on theory and methodology as well as on data management.

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9 Work within Wierzbicka's Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) framework postis the existence of some 60 or so "semantic primitives", hypothesised to have lexical exponents (i.e. precise translation equivalents) in all languages (Wierzbicka 1996; Evans 1994; Goddeeris 1994). Here, a distinction should be drawn between knowledge which is linguistically encoded, as evidenced by lexical collocations, metaphorical interpretations and so on, and specialist encoded (as evidenced by lexical collocations, metaphorical interpretations and so on), and specialist encoded knowledge possessed only by the experts of the culture (cf. APKAM 1992; Wierzbicka in press, Wilkins this volume).

10 A further distinction could (and arguably should) be made between knowledge which is linguistically encoded, as evidenced by lexical collocations, metaphorical interpretations and so on, and specialist encoded knowledge possessed only by the experts of the culture (cf. APKAM 1992; Wierzbicka in press, Wilkins this volume).

11 The main exception to this statement was the 1982 ALS Workshop on Australian Aboriginal Lexicography convened by Peter Austin (cf. Austin ed. 1983).
techniques. There is an important role here for AUSTRALEX (the Australasian Association for Lexicography), formed in 1990.

In terms of language coverage, the main focus for future work in Australian lexicography must surely be non-Pama-Nyungan languages, which, as mentioned, have scarcely been Nyungan languages present the lexicographer with far greater analytical and organisational challenges, whose exploration will bear on many questions of interest to general linguistic theory.

A more radical departure from current practice, and one less likely to eventuate, except by bilingual dictionary. As noted by Crowley (1986), among others, a preponderance of (There have been some moves towards the development of monolingual Aboriginal language dictionaries for use in schools, such as Paddy Patrick Jangala’s monolingual Warlpiri ‘English-Aboriginal vernacular’ bilingual dictionary for any language.)

Advances in computer and video technology mean that dictionaries of the future will not necessarily take the form of books. Already, integrated ‘multimedia’ packages (e.g. sequences, and graphic displays, as well as printed matter. Such media offer to overcome the many of the organisational limitations of print dictionaries, such as the priority of the time). It becomes possible to ‘navigate’ through a richly structured information space, different levels or modes of data without needing advanced literacy skills. Against the background of multimedia dictionaries calls for new personnel and new types of collaboration on the

dictionaries from dictionary workers who are themselves native speakers. Likewise, there will be even quite new uses are in language revival (as with the Kaurna people of Adelaide and the Aboriginal languages (to be implemented from 1994 as a Higher School Certificate subject).

Linguists too are looking to Aboriginal language lexicography for new purposes; for detailed and specialised lexicostatistical investigation; With the ASED A dictionary collection now Australian dictionary, a project warrants serious consideration in the near future, the linguistic prehistory of Australia, is beginning to re-emerge after having fallen into the linguistic theory is increasingly interested in the detailed structuring of the lexicon, in

The largest English-Aboriginal vernacular list, not of the ‘finderlist’ variety, would be in McKelson (1989).


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APPENDIX 2: UNPUBLISHED WORDLISTS AND DICTIONARIES AVAILABLE AS MANUSCRIPT OR AS ELECTRONIC DATA FILE

CODES

r = available from ASEDA as electronic data file
→ = includes finderlist
k = reconstituted from historical materials
r = reviewed or included
W = topical list
w = work in progress

r = Anderson, Bruce, *Yindjibarndi dictionary.*
rk = Anonymous and Nicholas Thieberger, *Ngarrka vocabulary.*

r = Bell, Jeanie, *A dictionary of the Gubbi Gubbi and Buthula languages.*

k = Bishop, Ida, 1990, *Kuemparrukun language - lexicon letters K through to Y.*
r = Blake, Barry J., *Kalkatunga vocabulary.*
r = Pitta Pitta worldlist.*
r = Yalwarra worldlist.

rk = [Victorian languages].

r = Biundell, V J., 1976, *A dictionary of Ngarrindjeri terms for material culture, environmental features and related items, with Worora equivalents* / terms recorded by H. Petr. 1976, *A dictionary of Worora terms for material culture, environmental features and related items, with Ngarrindjeri equivalents* / terms recorded by J.R.B. Love.


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r = Bradley, John J. with Jean Kirtom and the Yanyuwa Community, 1992, *Yanyuwa wuwa: language from Yanyuwa country [Yanyuwa/English].*


r = [Nyiyapari worldlist].


r = Breen, Gavan, *Wurruluwa worldlist.*


r = Garawa/Wuyi machine-readable data files.

r = Innamincka talk machine-readable files.

r = Kayteyere vocabulary machine-readable files.

r = Kokatj grammar machine-readable files.

r = Mudburra graded worldlist.

r = Wakeya.


r = Coleman, Carolyn, *Ndjembu dictionary.*

 rk = Mbatkawu vocabulary.


r = Dean, Alan, *Kurrama.*

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APPENDIX 3: WORKS-IN-PROGRESS MENTIONED IN O'GRADY (1971)

The following is a summary of information about work mentioned in O'Grady (1971): 782-787 which has subsequently appeared, been deposited at AIATSIS, or been reworked.

The order of presentation, and the references, are as used by O'Grady.

Various Tasmanian vocabularies have been compiled and published in Plomley (1976). A larger version of Teichelmann and Schirrmann’s work on Pankalla and Karukin was found in Cape Town and has been keyboarded by Jane Simpson. Taplin’s Narrinyeri was keyboarded by Steve Johnson and Jane Simpson. Curr’s vocabularies have been widely quoted and incorporated into other work. They have now been keyboarded, but it should be noted that the printed version apparently differs from the manuscript, copies of which are in the possession of R.M.W. Dixon.

Moore’s (1884) dictionary of Wadjuk is subsumed into an encyclopaedic Nyungar dictionary by Alan Denech, as is the work of Lyon (1833), Nind (1831) and Salvado (1854).

H. H. H. Halé (1846) Gamilaraay and Wiradjuri have been reworked by Peter Austin, and Sally McNicol and Dianne Hosking, respectively. Ridley’s (1875) Gamilaraay has been reworked by Peter Austin. Brough-Smyth’s (1878) vocabularies appear in Barry Blake’s keyboarding of Victorian languages.

Some of Bates (1904) 5,000 typescipt pages of vocabularies have been keyboarded; those representing the south-east of Western Australia by Luise Hercus and Nicholas.
Thieberger (1993), and others from the Kimberley by McGregor (1992). Black’s (1920) vocabularies have been incorporated into Jane Simpson’s South Australian data.

Capell’s 600-item wordlist in 40 Arnhem Land languages has been keyboarded and is held at the IAATIS library. T.G.H. Strehlow’s 40,000 word dictionary has not appeared, though a typescript copy of around 6,700 entries is held at IAATIS. Nekes and Worm’s work is being keyboarded by Bill McGregor.

O’Grady’s Nyangumarta, Yulpajaria, Walmajari, Payungu, Umipila dictionaries, and his 100-item lexical list of 142 communals are being keyboarded as part of O’Grady’s University of Hawaii project (1966-67). An electronic data file is available in ASED.


Kenneth Hale’s data have been reproduced or incorporated into later work. In particular, the Wambaya material has been checked and used by Nordlinger (1993), and the Yanyurru (Yanyuwa) material is in Bradley et al. (1992). The Gun-winggu dictionary is being incorporated into a comparative Gun-winggu dictionary in preparation by Nicholas Evans.

Petri’s Nyangumarta dictionary is in Germany; efforts are being made to have copies available in Australia. Von Brandenstein’s 10,000-entry Ngarulmu dictionary is now in IAATIS files. Schebecck’s Murinjin lexical work has not appeared, but he has produced a text-based dictionary of Adnyamathanha (1987). Dixon’s work on Dyirbal and Yidny is now well known.

La Mont West’s Dalabon dictionary typescript is in the IAATIS collection. Unsure about the Kuku Yala and Umpila material. Coate has material on several Kimberley languages (Coate & Elkin 1974). Holmer’s work on Dangindi has been incorporated into Lissarrague (1994). His survey of south-eastern Queensland (1983) has also been incorporated into Jane Cecchelli’s work; unsure about the Gadhad material.

The Table in O’Grady (1971:786) lists AIAA grants of the time. Work by the following is listed in Appendix 1 or Appendix 2 of the present paper: B. J. Blake; J. Boat; N. Chadwick; M. C. Cunningham (now Sharpe); A. H. Hall; L. Hercus; Charles Osborne; C. Yallop; J. de Zwaan.

Alpher’s Yir-Yoront dictionary is now available. Flett’s material on Wanyi and Yiddindji (Yidiny) has been deposited at IAATIS. Other work mentioned in O’Grady (1971:787) which has subsequently appeared is that of E. Hughes (Nunggubuyu); A. Pelie (Kukatja); L. Reece (Warlipirri); J. Stekes (Anindilyakwa); B. Lawe (Gupapuyngu); K. McKeelson (Nyangumarta, Yulpajaria, Mangala, Karajari); B. and H. Guyenbeck (Gidabul); B. Sommer (Karajari); B. Sayers and C. Kilian (Wil-Mungkan); H. and R. Hershberger and L. and W. Oates (Kuku-Yalanji); J. Kirtow (Yanyurru/Yanyuwa); K. and D. Glassow (Burarra); H. Hinch (Maung); J. and M. Marsh (Gardudjarra/Martu Wangka); K. and L. Hanséa (Pintupu); J. Hudson and E. Richards (Walmajari).

O’Grady (1971) does not mention William Davies’ information on Dhuruk/Eora, the language of Sydney (which has been reworked by Jacklin Troy), nor Gerhardt Laves, who produced extensive lexical and grammatical information about Nyungu languages of the south-west of Western Australia, the area around La Grange (Karajari). These works are available at IAATIS.

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A LINNGTIGHCH VOCABULARY

KEN HALE

Some twenty-five years ago, in the context of his general program of documenting the lexical and grammatical wealth of Pama-Nyungan, Geoff O’Grady invited me to work with him in Honolulu during June 1968. This was just one of the many times we worked together on aspects of Pama-Nyungan linguistics, always to my great benefit and delight. On this particular occasion, I promised Geoff that I would assemble some of the Pama-Nyungan vocabularies I had in my fieldnotes, including the short Linnngtighch vocabulary which I now deliver, somewhat shamefacedly, a full quarter century after making my promise.

Linnngtighch is a Northern Paman, initial-dropping language originally spoken in the vicinity of the Hey and Embley Rivers, in a region referred to as Winduwa by the speaker with whom I worked. This is north of the Watson River, in western Cape York Peninsula, North Queensland. The anthropological literature (with which I am personally familiar, at least) leaves rather ambiguous the precise location of the original Linnngtighch territory, due perhaps to certain characteristics inherent in the Aboriginal practices favoured in designating local communities in the area, practices which sometimes result in the circumstance that distinct groups have very similar names (e.g. Linnngtighch and Layngtigh, Ndara’ngith and Ndwa’ngith). Thomson (1972) places the Linnngtighch territory north of Pera Head, west of the Hey and south-west of the Embley, a region according reasonably well with my understanding of the location of Winduwa.

The lexical items set out below were taken down in 1960, during a period of approximately two weeks, at Aurukun, an important centre in the Wik linguistic area south of the Watson. The items were given to me by the late Sam Kerendun, who, though himself fully fluent in Linnngtighch, was one of the very last speakers of the language. He was a man of many and varied talents, with correspondingly many responsibilities at Aurukun, and I was extremely fortunate to be able to work with him, if only for a fortnight. I would like to dedicate this brief vocabulary both to Geoff O’Grady and to the memory of Sam Kerendun.

A brief sketch of the phonology and morphosyntax of Linnngtighch is to be found in O’Grady, Voegelin and Voegelin (1966), and a number of observations on the language are offered in Capell (1956). An excellent report on the grammar and lexicon of a closely related Northern Paman language is found in Crowley (1981).

The Linnngtighch items set out below are rendered in an orthography which is ‘practical’, in the sense that it avoids the use of diacritics and hence can be written on an ordinary typewriter. The voiceless obstruents are represented orthographically as follows: p, t, k, c, k. The peripherals (p, k) are lightly to heavily aspirated when fully stopped; they are occasionally articulated as fricatives. The lamino-dental (th) is lightly aspirated. The lamino-alveopalatal (written e) is more often a fricative than a stop, hence [s], though the stop

Darrell Tryon and Michael Walsh, eds Boundary rider: essays in honour of Geoffrey O’Grady, 229-246.


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