



Minerva Access is the Institutional Repository of The University of Melbourne

Author/s:

THIEBERGER, N

Title:

Language is like a carpet: Carl-Georg von Brandenstein and Australian languages

Date:

2008

Citation:

THIEBERGER, N. (2008). Language is like a carpet: Carl-Georg von Brandenstein and Australian languages. McGregor, W (Ed.). Encountering Aboriginal languages, Encountering Aboriginal languages: studies in the history of Australian linguistics, (2008), Pacific Linguistics Research School of Pacific and Asian Stu.

Persistent Link:

<https://hdl.handle.net/11343/34254>

## Language is like a carpet. Carl Georg von Brandenstein and Australian languages<sup>1</sup>

Nick Thieberger

University of Melbourne

Born in 1909 in Hannover, Germany, Carl Georg Christoph Freiherr<sup>2</sup> von Brandenstein (Carl) entered the Australian linguistic scene in the 1960s with recordings and analysis of languages of Western Australia, mainly from the Pilbara. Over the next thirty years he also recorded information about Ngadjumaya<sup>3</sup> from the south-east of WA and Noongar in the south-west. His idiosyncratic style didn't help his reputation in a linguistic scene which became increasingly monocultural in its approach during his research career. He was never part of the mainstream of linguistics in Australia, but followed his own path, and has left a legacy of records of languages for which little else is known. He was always generous in providing material when requested, as much to champion his theories as to engage in academic openness.

Carl was a public intellectual<sup>4</sup>, using his work to explore the complexity of Aboriginal culture through representing oral tradition and poetry and also supporting the rights of Aboriginal people in Western Australia, a state built on mining wealth and not known for its benevolence towards the original landowners. His book *Taruru* was co-authored with a journalist (Anthony Thomas) who wrote the introductory notes. In its presentation the book was clearly aimed at a broad readership, placing the analytical

---

<sup>1</sup> Thanks for reminiscences and other help to Catherine Ellis, Pat Engberg, Jacquie Lambert, Merrin Mason, Anthony McCardell, Bill McGregor, Kirsty Murray, David Nash, Ursula Oehme, Frank Rijavec, John Stanton, Peter Sutton, Dina and Henry Thieberger (for translations), and Anthony Thomas.

<sup>2</sup> The aristocratic title *Freiherr* seems to be best translated as 'Baron'.

<sup>3</sup> I will use more commonly found versions of language names throughout this chapter, so rather than Carl's spelling of *Ngadjumaja* I will use *Ngadju* or *Ngadjumaya*, and *Noongar* rather than *Nyungar*.

<sup>4</sup> The term applies to academics who grapple with issues of public importance in a style that engages the public at large, as used in the discussion of John Mulvaney's life in Bonyhady and Griffiths (1996:1).

discussion in the endnotes that make up almost half of the book. Carl also provided interpretive notes for a new edition of the play *Brumby Innes*, written in the late 1920s by the communist author Katherine Susannah Prichard. She had used songs and words from ‘Ngaala-warngga’ (South Banyjima) in the play which was a provocative work exploring racism and inter-racial relationships, well before these themes were being addressed more broadly in the community. In his contribution, Carl commented on the beauty of the *tabi* poetry and of the skill of the performers ‘whose art is doomed to extinction if the short-sighted aim of integration into a “one culture, one language” uniformity is continued.’ (1974:104)

There is much in Carl’s approach to the study of language that would have been more at home in the nineteenth century. His insistence on correlating each form with a separate meaning ignored or perhaps simply predated structuralist notions of free variation contrasted with meaningful difference (as in the phonemic/allophonic distinction). His desire to find an overarching proto-language that diffused around the world similarly reflects an earlier tradition in anthropology and philology. When I have asked his contemporaries about him a story that recurs is his comparison of the world’s languages to a carpet in which the original pattern can only be discerned in the corners, under the furniture, while it has been effaced in the centre where most of the traffic apparently occurs. These corners of the world are his targets – the places where the pattern can still be discovered. Australia is thus a logical location for his effort, as he notes in regard to his interest in totemism: ‘The fifth continent was spared the historical upheavals most and therefore could preserve the social part of the totemic heritage the purest.’ (Brandenstein 1978:143).

#### Plate 1 to go hereabouts

Determined to show similarities between words in Australian languages and in Finno-Ugric (e.g. Brandenstein 1970e) as part of his grand vision of locating the first language, he recorded lexical correspondences on hundreds of filecards that fill metres of filing boxes. Further themes that recur in his work are: the meaning of sections in the system of kinship relations; phonosemantics, the meaning of sounds; and the influence of Portuguese on the Aboriginal people of coastal northern Western Australia. To make

use of Carl's work today we need to set aside much of what was clearly for him the main motivation for doing the work. But, while these themes appear to portray Carl and his work in a nineteenth century frame, he was ahead of his time in providing timed references to audio files and a 45 rpm record with his book of narratives (Brandenstein 1970d).

His approach differed from the mainly utilitarian and structuralist view of language that predominated in Australian linguistics in the 1960s and 1970s (he characterised the linguistic establishment of the 1960s as being the 'Sydney School' (Brandenstein 1970f:80)) and he was concerned to portray the poetic side of Aboriginal languages. He suggested that, 'in a hunting society, not interested in material(istic) manifestation of its culture, the creative energy will naturally concentrate more on spirituality and lingomagic ... the effort to tackle the Australian Vocabulary by the mechanistic application of 100 or 1000-word lists à la Swadesh for computerizing (sic), might be in vain.' (Brandenstein 1970f:93) Accordingly, his work usually included a large number of texts and a lexicon as part of his description of a language. Reminiscing about his work thirty years earlier he wrote, 'Scenes and thoughts galore from my fieldwork days came up and began to haunt me. I could not help comparing them with the present situation. Dictated by a rapidly dying-off older Aboriginal generation, still full of knowledge, I felt the need to obtain factual information about their Aboriginal ways before it was too late. So I collected material. Through all these early years my pulse beat: tex – tex- text- texts.' (Brandenstein 1991).

After high school (Gymnasium) in Gera and Weimar, Carl went to study at Berlin University (1928-1934) where he trained as an orientalist and historian of religion. He then studied at Leipzig (1938-1939), where his PhD, granted in 1940, was a study of the iconography of Hittite gods (Brandenstein 1943). He worked at the Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin from 1934-1938 and continued to publish in this area (Brandenstein 1934, 1937, 1939a, 1939b, 1939c, 1940). He learned in 1949 that his research material had been water-damaged in the Pergamon museum and was ruined. His hoped-for major research project (the German 'habilitation', a post-doctoral thesis), together with six years of work, had thus to be abandoned. The break with the old world was made easier by this loss, but on a later return visit to Germany he was to learn that the material had not been destroyed but was (he claimed) being used by others for their own benefit.

When the Second World War broke out, Carl became a corporal in the army and served in France and on the Russian front before going to Persia in 1941. There are several conflicting accounts of his activities at this time in his own papers, depending on the context for which they were being written. These variously have him acting as an interpreter, as a representative of a pharmaceutical company<sup>5</sup>, or as an agent of the *Canaris Gruppe*, a counter-intelligence unit. The last is the most likely of the stories, and is supported by a marginal note in his record as an internee by the Australian intelligence authorities<sup>6</sup>. In 1941 he was captured by the British in Basra and his wife, Ellen, returned to what was to become East Germany with their young daughter, Bettina. They were not to see each other again for some years and the marriage ended in 1954 in divorce. Carl was interned as a prisoner of war in Australia, first at Loveday camp in South Australia and then, in 1945, at Tatura camp in Victoria. He says he passed the time in these camps with art and music, and by teaching Latin and Greek in the camp school (Brandenstein 1995:1).

There is little information about Carl's life immediately following the war and through the 1950s. After release from internment in 1946 in Melbourne, Carl's notes suggest he worked as a potter and spent some time in the studio of Arthur Boyd<sup>7</sup>. Over the next fifteen years he worked as a farmhand and in high schools and also in the Melbourne General Post Office on the afternoon shift, giving him time to pursue his studies in the daytime. At some point he says he visited Arnhem Land and taught pottery to local Aboriginal people, which triggered his interest in their languages. In his application for funds in 1964 he says he conducted fieldwork with Aranda in 1959 and with Western Desert languages in 1962 and 1963. No record of this work has yet been located. He also claimed to be instrumental in the establishment of the Australian

---

<sup>5</sup> This was his story in a statement to the Australian authorities when they were determining his eligibility to stay in Australia (1/2/1946, National Archives series A367 C74240).

<sup>6</sup> The marginal note in one of Carl's personnel files reads: 'Very active Nazi and Secret Service agent' (15/5/1946, National Archives series A1838 1451/2/47).

<sup>7</sup> My attempts to confirm this with several of Arthur Boyd's contemporaries were fruitless.

Institute of Aboriginal Studies (AIAS) (Brandenstein 1995:1), but there is no mention of him in the substantial report of the first AIAS conference, published as Stanner and Shiels (1963), nor in the relevant chapter on 'Languages' by S. A. Wurm (1963:127) with a commentary by A. Capell (1963:149).

In the mid-1950s the German consulate allocated some lodgers to move into Carl's house. Carola Zanke and her husband Klaus and son Christian all lived with Carl until Klaus and Christian were killed in a car accident in 1957. Carola continued living with Carl and in the early 1960s they drove their VW beetle from Melbourne via Perth, Ceylon, Bombay, Delhi, Kashmir, Iran, Greece and on to Germany. They were married in 1962 and they moved to Wellington, New Zealand, where Carola was transferred by the German embassy. In June 1964 Carl received funding from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (AIAS, now AIATSIS) to work in Western Australia<sup>8</sup>. He and Carola (his 'unpaid assistant') then left for the west in their VW on July 14<sup>th</sup>. Between 1964 and 1968 Carl and Carola spent 4-6 months annually in the Pilbara in a caravan with two dogs. At one point, Carola's adopted son Bjorn Stein also accompanied them, working on the 'Herbarium Stein' (Brandenstein 1966g). The rest of each year Carl had an office at the Department of Anthropology at the University of Western Australia. As an example of the hardships faced during this time, his field reports (listed below) include the following misadventures: 'I got bitten by a snake at Millstream. Application of a tourniquet and intense sucking of the wound by my wife and strong coffee at the neighbouring farm must have prevented any ill effects except strong pain ... I stepped with my snakebitten foot into an iron rod and needed hospital attention. Car broke down 6 times with starter cable trouble....Without the help of my wife I could not have continued.' (Brandenstein report to AIAS December 1965:1)

During the 1960s he was recording a number of languages but the main focus was on a publication of some sixty Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi texts with a glossary, titled *Narratives from the North-West of Western Australia* (Brandenstein 1970d). While at the time that Carl was doing this work there were still a number of speakers of both of

---

<sup>8</sup> The salary was £2400 plus expenses.

these languages<sup>9</sup>, the subsequent generation would no longer use Ngarluma for most interactions, its place being taken by Yindjibarndi.

Carl envisaged the publication of these texts as being the first of two parts, the second was to be a similar work ‘in the Njijapali language’ which was only produced in manuscript version and rejected by the AIAS. This rejection reflects a change in the AIAS from Capell’s view<sup>10</sup> to a more narrowly focussed view of what constitutes linguistic enquiry. The linguistic research committee at the AIAS had changed with the arrival in 1973 of R.M.W. Dixon as the new chair, bringing with him a confidence in the value of his own approach to the study of Australian languages<sup>11</sup>, at the expense of

---

<sup>9</sup> See for example Capell (1971:140) who notes that ‘They are among the languages still in daily use for a sizable number of Aboriginal people.’

<sup>10</sup> Capell (1971:141-142) said these texts were, ‘A work of very great permanent value for all students of life in this part of Australia, and for students of literature as well. Continued over Australia, it would be a monumental work.’ Had Capell remained on the Linguistics Committee of the AIAS he would no doubt have supported the publication of the Nyiyaparli work as a second set of volumes. Indeed, Capell went on to observe that ‘Even when one does not agree with the linguistics involved, there is always something to discuss and something to think about in the ideas and analysis put forward by the author.’ One suspects that this ecumenical statement specifically targeted the narrower definition of linguistics that was subsequently to become dominant in Australia.

<sup>11</sup> As an example of the direction in which Australian linguistics was heading, see Dixon’s comment concerning Australia in the early 1960s that ignores those working to record Australian languages, including Carl, a number of SIL teams, and Howard Coate, and others continuing study outside the country like Ken Hale and Geoffrey O’Grady: ‘During my period in the field, there was just one other linguist at work – the Sanskrit scholar Luise Hercus.’ (Dixon 1983). It is clear from correspondence (e.g. CGVB to R.M.W. Dixon 6/3/1973, R.M.W. Dixon to CGVB 15/3/1973) that Dixon used Carl’s field materials for his comparative work, but the only reference to Carl in Dixon’s (1980) overview work is to von Brandenstein 1967d.

other approaches, like Carl's, that nevertheless resulted in recordings being made of otherwise little recorded or indeed unrecorded languages.

In the Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi texts and associated work (e.g. Brandenstein 1967d) Carl developed his notion of the Active/Passive Verbal Concept (AVC/PVC) corresponding to the more widely used terms Nominative/Accusative and Ergative/Absolutive. He observed that the group of languages that include Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi display the Active Verbal Concept and so differ from most other Australian languages. However, he suggested that Portuguese contact was responsible for the switch to a Nominative/Accusative system (Brandenstein 1967d:10) based on the presence of what could well be a Portuguese word (*tartaruga* for 'turtle') in Ngarluma, a coastal Pilbara language. But one turtle name does not provide the evidence of extensive Portuguese contact, which would have been needed for the group of local Aboriginal languages to develop away from the Ergative case marking they would formerly have borne. As an example of his approach, he went on to identify the change from PVC to AVC as 'the result of a change to more individualistic thinking' (Brandenstein 1967d:4) and went further to speculate that 'growing interest in or actual trend back to PVC could be a lingopsychic indicator of a looming social reversion' (Brandenstein 1967d:5) without giving examples of where this reversion might have been occurring. He interpreted the PVC as being an earlier form, present in all proto-languages, and pointed to Basque as a relic of the European PVC proto-language.

Brandenstein (1970e) lists 60 'north-west' words which he claims derive from Portuguese. If we attempt to locate the same forms in other wordlists of Ngarluma (e.g. Hale 1985), or Yindjibarndi (e.g. Wordick 1982) we can find, with a generous interpretation of similarity, only 23 and, even then, there would need to be some explanation of semantic shifts that have taken place (e.g. Portuguese 'angle' to NW 'elbow'), or of why he considered there to be a relationship at all (e.g. Portuguese *mortal*, NW *marlba*). Most importantly there are terms included in this list that are widespread in Australia. They are unlikely to have originated in the north-west and can only be regarded as coincidentally similar (e.g. Portuguese *mão*, NW *mará*).

Carl was convinced that the Portuguese had established longterm settlements on the northern coast of WA, but none of the physical evidence he had mustered was able to be corroborated. His theory caught the public imagination, as such claims tend to do,

and he received some publicity (e.g. Derriman 1990, 1992; Haynes 1993). He thought (Brandenstein 1972f, 1989:5) that spherical rocks near Depuch Island were cannonballs, but later admitted that they were local rock that could not have been used in cannons. He suggested (Brandenstein n.d.c) that stone housing in the east Kimberley could not have been made by Aboriginal people without outside influence, but the archaeological evidence suggests otherwise (O'Connor 1992). His later paper on the Yawuji-bara/Yawuji-baia (Brandenstein n.d.c, most likely from 1991) is breathtaking in the way he builds supposition on speculation. After all, it is known that there has been contact from what is now Indonesia with the north coast of Australia for some hundreds of years (Mulvaney and Kamminga 1999:411) and it may be that evidence of Portuguese contact will be found, but the argumentation given in Carl's papers is extremely unconvincing.

In his recording of Aboriginal languages he was concerned to use a spelling system based on his view of the etymology of the word ('the current notation ... seems to obscure etymology'<sup>12</sup>) with the result that the form of a word in his work can not be expected to be a phonemic representation. Further, he used voiced symbols, for example, to contrast their morphological position, thus voiced morpheme-medially but voiceless morpheme-initially, and suggested that 'Readers should find this combination only confusing if they are unwilling to get out of the rut of their rigid descriptive and – let us name it – dead-end training.'<sup>13</sup> In his description of Ngadjumaja, he explicitly challenged the 'conformists' of Australianist linguistics with his 'geographical-etymological' and 'phonosemantic' approaches (for a critical discussion see McConvell 1983:193, 1985; Nash 1982:273). Phonosemes are, Carl maintained, elementary units (phones) which themselves bear a meaning (Brandenstein 1970f). Thus, for example, *k* is the phonoseme of 'aggression', *m* of 'finite distance' while *w* is 'infinite distance', all of which are displayed in several examples (suffixes or words) in this article. Carl suggested that these meanings were present not only within one language, but across all languages.

---

<sup>12</sup> AIATSIS MS5547.

<sup>13</sup> Carl Georg von Brandenstein to R.M.W. Dixon, Linguistics Committee Chairman, AIAS 6/3/1973.

The value of the texts and vocabulary he presented is reduced by the need to decipher his etymological spelling system and they need to be read with caution. Nevertheless, the Ngadjumaya work includes an outline grammar, a set of eight texts, with interlinear glosses, and a dictionary which attributes each headword to its source speaker. It has been possible to convert the spelling system of the Ngadjumaya material, reworked by the AIATSIS Dictionaries Project in 1994<sup>14</sup> and used by Wangkanyi Ngurra Tjurta, the Aboriginal language centre in Kalgoorlie in a project in 2004. As David Nash notes in a review: ‘The author’s idiosyncrasies do not prevent his work from being a useful reference’ for Ngadjumaya (1982:274). Wangka Maya, the Aboriginal language centre in Port Hedland, has incorporated his material in popular editions of the Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi dictionary. Allison Kohn (1994) wrote a sketch grammar based on Brandenstein and Hale’s work on Ngarluma and is working with the Nyiyaparli (Njijapali) material for her PhD dissertation.

On being challenged by an ‘east-coast’ colleague to deal first with ‘facts’ and then with his interpretation, Carl responded with the observation that phonological representation is an interpretation derived by the analyst and so is not ‘fact’, but interpretation. ‘Metaphorically speaking, it produces “line conversions” from a photograph, being neither a photo nor a piece of art.’<sup>15</sup> Carl’s tenacity, some might say stubbornness, led to several disputes with leading anthropologists and linguists of the day. The correspondence indicates that he felt isolated and, at times, besieged by an established order that he was not part of, but which he felt he pre-dated. His wife, constant companion and secretary, Carola, wrote that he was ‘Always a lonely wolf and untamed by the service in the establishment, he never had a lobby and his contributions to the advancement of Australianistics have been swept under the carpet of “deliberate desinterest” (sic) more than once.’ (Carola von Brandenstein 1981:2)

---

<sup>14</sup> The wordlist was converted into a practical, Western Desert type, orthography by the Aboriginal Dictionaries Project in the early 1990s and is locatable as [aseda.aiatsis.gov.au:0552](http://aseda.aiatsis.gov.au:0552). Some issues of correspondences between the practical orthography and the original remain.

<sup>15</sup> Carl Georg von Brandenstein to R.M.W. Dixon, Linguistics Committee Chairman, AIAS 15/4/1973.

By the early 1970s Carl was clearly frustrated by his reception in the linguistics community in Australia. Writing to the AIAS on hearing of the rejection of a manuscript for publication, Carl said that, ‘forces, ill-informed about my person and work and correspondingly ill-disposed towards my linguistic approach and, in addition, utterly intolerant of my “heresy”, have been omnipotent in the linguistic policy-making within the Institute.’<sup>16</sup> In a similar vein, in the foreword to the Ngatjumaja book he says that he hopes that ‘even the conformist in matters of current linguistics will derive enough relevant information from the presentation of Ngadjumaja to appreciate. ... the great achievement of the Aboriginal power of oral communication.’

In a review of the *Narratives from the North-West of Western Australia* (Brandenstein 1970), Arthur Capell (one of the major Australian linguists of the time) notes ‘a feature which has not been included previously in the work published by the Institute [of Aboriginal Studies]: a 45 rpm record on which a few of the texts are published and issued with the volumes. This is a very commendable practice and one hopes it may occur again!’ (Capell 1971 :141) In fact, aside from Coate’s (1970) inclusion of a tape in his analysis of prosody in Ngarinyin, the practice of any publisher of Australianist grammars, texts or dictionaries providing audio documentation together with a collection of texts did not occur again until the 1990s (e.g. the audio cassettes in Read & Read 1991) and then became a greater possibility when computers provided the means for linking audio to text (e.g. the CD in Read & Read 1993). Carl said that in his opinion, ‘it is essential for a modern comprehensive linguistic work that a small record ... should be attached to each copy of the book.’<sup>17</sup> Capell, writing a review of Carl’s funding application said, ‘The material presented is of the highest interest and shows much promise of providing a valuable contribution to our knowledge of the languages of this area. The presentation and theory behind it is often new and sometimes provocative, being concerned with classification and development as well as actual synchronic information. Some of it will provoke argument when published but is worthy of consideration.’<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Carl Georg von Brandenstein letter to the Principal, AIAS, 20/11/1973.

<sup>17</sup> Carl Georg von Brandenstein letter to publications editor at AIAS, 4/4/1970.

<sup>18</sup> Capell 2/ 4/1965, AIATSIS Registry file 64/4.

Carl was fortunate to have benefited from Capell's ecumenical and inclusive approach, and this was to change once Capell was no longer as influential with the main funding body, the AIAS and its Linguistic Research Committee<sup>19</sup>. Another example of the recognition of the need for a variety of approaches is Ronald Berndt's letter to the Principal of the AIAS (22/2/1965) in which he notes that Carl is 'not structurally oriented and is philologically focussed ... this is not intended to detract from the valuable work he is presumably undertaking. There is a place for both kinds of person, and he is certainly enthusiastic and diligent in the collection of linguistic material.'

During the 1960s Carl was also recording songs of the Pilbara and published eighty song texts in *Taruru* (Brandenstein and Thomas 1974). This work presents the song texts with poetic translations to appeal to the European reader<sup>20</sup>. More detailed notes on each song text include an interlinear gloss and explanation of the often necessarily obscure lyrics. His co-author, journalist Anthony Thomas, who wrote the introduction to *Taruru*, observes (pers. comm.) that Carl would carry his guitar to play music in exchange for that offered by his Aboriginal colleagues. Thomas recalls Carl's enthusiasm for publicising Aboriginal languages, but also remarks (pers. comm.) that Carl had a sense of paranoia, that he felt he was being conspired against, and that he thought his mail was being intercepted.

---

<sup>19</sup> An example of Carl's sentiments are found in a letter to the new Chairman of the AIAS Linguistics Committee in which Carl says 'In all seven years before you became chairman my work for the Institute was accepted by the chairman in charge ... with appreciation and friendly terms. The same appreciation has been expressed by colleagues from abroad, most of them your seniors. I was happy in my work because of the tolerant and democratic attitude of the Institute and its men in charge.' And later he requests that the Chairman speed up his 'unduly delayed publication' of the Nyiyaparli narratives 'for which conditions and arrangements had been approved by the Institute prior to your commencement of office.' (Carl Georg von Brandenstein to AIAS Linguistics Committee Chairman, 15/4/1973).

<sup>20</sup> So successful was this that Carl discovered that Les Murray (1986) published several of these poems without Carl's knowledge.

In several publications (Brandenstein 1970, 1972, 1977, 1978, 1982) Carl presented his view that subsections (the divisions, one of which one is born into in many Aboriginal societies) represent cultural categories, in a set of oppositions of warm/cold, quick/slow, and round/flat. He also reconstructed a western section system (around Kariyarra in the west) that spread out to meet the subsection system in the east. While this linguistic reconstruction is not generally accepted, especially following McConvell's (1985a) convincing location of the origin of the subsection system in the Daly River region, the anthropological basis of the argument was better received. Reviews by Jorion (1983) and Yengoyan (1984) both praise Carl's book, the latter for its emphasis on cultural relativism which he suggests is a required antidote to structuralist universalism. While conceding that 'von Brandenstein's reconstructions of the ethnography are quite rash', Jorion (1983:794) nevertheless acknowledges the need for a diversity of opinions in the discipline, noting that, 'It is reassuring for our profession that a book of such an esoteric nature has found its way into print'. Similarly, Heath's (1984:467) review finds the relationship between subsections and temperaments to be 'plausible', and he goes on to recommend the book. McConvell's (1985b) critique of Carl's methods and argumentation is thoroughgoing and convincing, it takes the work seriously and addresses it point by point noting that he 'repeats many of the mistakes of nineteenth-century speculation and adds a few of his own.' (ibid:54-55)

In 1969 Osmar White published a travelogue based in the Pilbara in which he describes two Germans whom he names Dr Otto and Dr Gerda Brandenstein. Otto is an 'etymologist' and Gerda a social anthropologist, and their spoken English is stereotypically germanised (White 1969:148-149). Carl clearly took exception to this portrayal but responded with some humour in a letter to White in which he says: 'Recently had I a look into the new book of yours *Under the Rainbow* and was very pleased in it my wife and me mentioned to find. Your description took my wife not favourably up, as she a genuine woman is and resents, a square woman called to be and I bald headed described to be [...] Also is it perhaps a bit unethical for a reputed writer who you to be like, and not very polite, personality names beyond recognition not to alter, nicht? [...] if you ever to Perth come, call you at our place for again a schnapps to

drink. I promise you, not about the etymology of your work or anything else unpleasant to talk’.

An application for funds from the AIAS in 1973 had failed so the Brandensteins moved to Canberra in 1974 when Carl was 65. He attended the AIAS Biennial Conference which focussed on grammatical categories in Aboriginal languages (Dixon 1976), and from the mid-1970s to 1981 they were in Europe, living in Stubai, Austria, where Carola owned a house, and Carl taught at Innsbruck University. They also lived in Germany at Burg Brandenstein and in Carl’s cousin’s castle Girsberg which had formerly also been the residence of Count Zeppelin (of dirigible fame).

Returning to Australia in 1982 and supported by grants from the DAAD<sup>21</sup> and the University of Basel, Carl and Carola bought a VW Kombi to travel across to Western Australia carrying all their possessions. Carola became ill in the late 1980s and required Carl’s attention until her death in 1991. Carl then became senile in the late 1990s and was unable to care for himself. He was admitted into a nursing home in Albany in 1997 and passed away in January 2005.

In 1974 the AIAS Linguistic Research Officer<sup>22</sup> noted in correspondence with Carl the arrival of copies of his diaries, together with a query that the data on the southern languages (Ngatjumaya and Noongar in particular) was not included. Sadly, while his field recordings and notes up to the late 1960s are held at AIATSIS, the location of his subsequent fieldnotes dealing with Noongar and Ngadjumaya is still currently unknown.

The film maker, Frank Rijavec recalls reintroducing Carl’s recordings to the Aboriginal communities in Roebourne, Western Australia, during the course of making the film ‘Exile and the Kingdom’ (Rijavec et al 1992) in the late 1980s. ‘The value of Carl’s records, tapes and slides never strike you as much as when you have the privilege of seeing them reintroduced to the community where they were recorded. We got about 21 tapes out of AIATSIS – most of them Carl’s – and played them back during 1989-1991 to the elders. Being in a room with them as the tapes played was an absolute joy

---

<sup>21</sup> Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst (German Academic Exchange Service).

<sup>22</sup> Peter Sutton, AIAS Research Officer, Linguistics, letter 12/2/1974 (AIATSIS Registry 64/4).

and revelation. People clapped and sang along. It brought up a stream of memories about the singer or storyteller. They gave their versions of the stories or embellishments. I was able to follow up material that was uncovered from the tapes with particular elders who were contributing to the film.’ (Frank Rijavec, pers. com.).

Carl was generous with his work which has been acknowledged by others who have followed him in the Pilbara. For example, in several publications on languages of the region, Peter Austin and Alan Dench both credit him for sharing his material, and his recordings have been used by speakers of the languages he recorded or by their descendants.

Carl’s contribution to Australianist linguistics has not only been the body of work he has left behind, including his publications, unpublished manuscripts and twenty or so hours of field recordings and associated annotations for languages no longer spoken. He also reminds us that there are many ways to do linguistic work and of the value of pursuing our goals regardless of the fashion of the moment or the attempted dominating influence of particular individuals or funding bodies.

## **Bibliography**

### **Carl Georg von Brandenstein’s Australianist field reports**

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1965a, General report on linguistic fieldwork, ts. (Ms)

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1965b, Report [to AIAS] on fieldwork in north-west Western Australia, 15 June-15 July 1965. (Ms)

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1965c, Interim report [to A.I.A.S.] on field work in north-west Western Australia 15th July-15th August, 1965. (Ms)

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1965d, Interim report (3) [to AIAS] on fieldwork in north-west Western Australia, 15 August-15 September 1965. (Ms)

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1965e, Interim report (4) [to AIAS] on fieldwork in north-west Western Australia, 15 September-15 October 1965. (Ms)

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1965f, Interim report (5) [to AIAS] on fieldwork in north-west Western Australia, 15 October-15 November 1965. (Ms)

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1966a, Interim report (1) [to AIAS] on fieldwork in north-west Western Australia, 6-30 June 1966. (Ms)

- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1966b, Malkana vocabulary and sentences (audiotape, 30 minutes). (Ms)
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1966c, Report [to AIAS] on fieldwork 1-31 July 1966. (Ms)
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1966d, Report [to AIAS] on fieldwork in north-west Western Australia, 1-29 September, 1966. (Ms)
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1966e, Report [to AIAS] on fieldwork in north-west Western Australia, 1-31 August, 1966. (Ms)
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1966f, Report [to AIAS] on fieldwork northwest Western Australia, 1st - 29th September 1966. (Ms)
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1967a, Interim report, 17 July-10 October 1967. (Ms)
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1967b, The language situation in the Pilbara - past and present. Papers in Australian linguistics No. 2, Pacific Linguistics, A-11. 1-20.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1967c, Linguistic routine report, September 1967. (Ms)
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1968a, Field audiotapes nos. 3-13: contents. (Ms)
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1968b, Interim report, 1968, no. 1 (July-August). (Ms)
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1968c, Interim report, 1968, no. 2 (September-December). (Ms)
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1968d, Linguistic routine report, October 1968. (Ms)
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1969a, Interim report on linguistic fieldwork, June-September 1969, ts. (Ms)
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1969b, Linguistic routine report, December 1969. (Ms)
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1969c, Linguistic routine report, January 1969. (Ms)
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1969d, Report on fieldwork, 1969. (Ms)
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1970a, Interim report on linguistic fieldwork, July-August 1970, ts. (Ms)
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1970b, Report [to AIAS] on fieldwork conducted July-August 1970 as part of the 1969-70 project Western Desert Fringe study, Nedland, WA. (Ms)
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1971a, Report on research carried out for the AIAS. (Ms)
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1971b, Report to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal

Studies on fieldwork conducted September-December 1970 as part of the 1969-70 project Western Desert fringe study, Nedlands, WA. (Ms)

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1972a, Linguistic routine report, March 1972. (Ms)

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1972b, Linguistic routine report, January 1972. (Ms)

### **Carl Georg von Brandenstein's Australianist Publications**

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1965g, Ein Abessiv im gemein-Australischen. *Anthropos* 60:646-662.

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1967d, The language situation in the Pilbara – past and present. *Papers in Australian linguistics* No. 2, Pacific Linguistics, A-11: 1-20.

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1969e, Tabi songs of the Aborigines. *Hemisphere*. 13.11:28-33.

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1970c, Linguistic salvage work on the Eastern Goldfields and the South Coast of Western Australia. *Bulletin of the International Committee on Urgent Anthropological and Ethnological Research*. 12:45-59.

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1970d, *Narratives from the North-West of Western Australia in the Ngarluma and Jindjiparndi languages*. (Volumes 1-3 +audio-disc.) Canberra: AIAS.

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1970e, Portuguese loan-words in Aboriginal languages of north-western Australia (a problem of Indo-European and Finno-Ugrian comparative linguistics). Laycock, D.C. and S.A. Wurm eds, *Pacific linguistic studies in honour of Arthur Capell*. 617-650. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics.

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1970f, Some new aspects of Australian Aboriginal language. Linguistic trends in Australia. Wurm, S.A. and D.C. Laycock, eds. *Linguistic trends in Australia* 75-95. Canberra: AIAS.

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1970g, The meaning of section and section names. *Oceania*. 41:39-49.

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1970h, What next in Australian Aboriginal linguistics? *Etruscan*. (Sydney) 19:11-15.

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1972c, The Phoenix 'Totemism'. *Anthropos* 67:586-594.

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1972d, The symbolism of the north-western Australian zigzag design. *Oceania*. 42, 3:223-238.

- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1973a, Place names of the north-west. *WA Naturalist*. 12,5:97-107.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1974a, Die Weltordnung der Frühzeit nach den vier Wesensarten (Neuentdeckungen auf dem Gebiet des Totemismus). *Zeitschrift für Religions und Geistesgeschichte* 26:211-221.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1974b, Notes on the Aborigines. In Prichard, Katharine Susannah (ed), *Brumby Innes*. 101-107. Sydney: The Currency Press.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1977, Aboriginal ecological order in the south-west of Australia – meaning and examples. *Oceania* 47, 3:169-186
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1978, Identical principles behind Australian totemism and Empedoclean ‘philosophy’. In L.R. Hiatt ed. *Australian Aboriginal concepts*, 134-145. Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1980, *Ngadjumaja: an Aboriginal language of south-east Western Australia*. Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachwissenschaft der Universität Innsbruck.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1982, *Names and substance of the Australian subsection system*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1982, The secret respect language of the Pilbara. *Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft* 50:33-52.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von & Miidhu, 1986, War dance [occasional song, Pilbara region]. In Murray, L.A. ed. *The new Oxford book of Australian verse*, 237-238. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von & Tjinapirrgarri, 1986, Emu shot [occasional song]. In Murray, L.A. ed. *The new Oxford book of Australian verse*, 296. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von & S. Narnutjarri, 1986, The witch doctor’s magic flight [occasional song], translated by C.G. von Brandenstein. In Murray, L.A. ed. *The new Oxford book of Australian verse*, 238. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von & Pambardu, 1986, Windmill at Mandanthanunguna [occasional song]. In Murray, L.A. ed. *The new Oxford book of Australian verse*, 303-304. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von & Pudjipangu, 1986, Aeroplane [occasional song],

translated by C. G. von Brandenstein. In Murray, L.A. (ed), *The new Oxford book of Australian verse*, 238. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1988, *Nyungar anew: phonology, text samples and etymological and historical 1500-word vocabulary of an artificially re-created Aboriginal language in the south-west of Australia*. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, C-99.

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1990, The First Europeans on Australia's West Coast. *Boletim do Museu e Centro de Estudos Maritimos de Macau* 3:195-206.

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1990, Os primeiros europeus a chegar à costa ocidental da Australia. *Boletim do Museu e Centro de Estudos Maritimos de Macau* 3:171-188.

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von & Anthony P. Thomas, 1974, *Taruru: Aboriginal song poetry from the Pilbara*. Adelaide: Rigby.

Hall, H. A. & C. G. von Brandenstein, 1971, *A partial vocabulary of the Ngalooma Aboriginal tribe*. Canberra: AIAS.

### **Carl Georg von Brandenstein's Australianist Manuscript material**

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1966g, Herbarium Stein: 25 medicinal or poisonous plants. Typescript.

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1966h, Statistical evaluation of a list of native children born at Port Hedland between 1950-1965 compiled by the matron of the Native Hospital, Port Hedland, Mrs. A. Simpson. Typescript.

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1968, Some new aspects of Australian Aboriginal language based on fieldwork in north-west Western Australia, 1964-67, Paper read at the General Meeting of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (1968). Typescript.

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1969, The diaries of C. G. von Brandenstein, 1964-1969. Manuscript.

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1970, List of 124 Mirning words. Manuscript.

Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1972e, Narratives from the north-west of Western Australia in Njijapali, language of the Palygu, Vol. 1 - Narratives, Vol. 2 - Songs, Vol. 3 - Vocabulary (about 500 pages and an audio-disc). Manuscript.

- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1972f, The Kurruwa balls of Depuch Island : a preliminary report to the Western Australian Museum. Manuscript.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1973b, AIAS questionnaire. Manuscript.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1973c, The Padupadu or respect speech of Ngarluma and Jindjiparndi languages. Manuscript.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1974, Marduthunira. Manuscript.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1975a, Pilbara Aboriginal vocabulary. Typescript.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1975b, A Pilbara grammar of the AVC languages. Typescript.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1982, Eighty-eight grammar text sheets, exemplifying grammatical, lexical and phraseological diversities as well as links of 25 Aboriginal languages from Western Australia. Typescript.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1982, Tjururu. Typescript.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1985, Totemic affiliations to sections and subsections in the Fitzroy Basin. Manuscript.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1986, Nyungar as it was (Address of Nyungar People, Albany 21 July 1986). Manuscript.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1989, The first Europeans on Australia's West Coast. Typescript.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1994, Early history of Australia: the Portuguese colony in the Kimberley : exploration - occupation - dissolution – vacation. Typescript.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, n. d.a, Aboriginal bird names from the south-west of Australia. A contribution to Nyungar semasiology. Manuscript.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, n. d.b, Tjururu text material. Typescript.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, n. d.c, [?1990] The Yawuji-bara and Yawuji-Baia; Two intermarrying groups of an Afro-Australian Islander tribe. Typescript.

## References

- Bonyhady, Tim and Tom Griffiths, 1996, The Making of a Public Intellectual. In Bonyhady, Tim and Tom Griffiths, eds, *Prehistory to politics: John Mulvaney, the Humanities and the Public Intellectual*, 1-19. Melbourne: Melbourne University

Press.

- Brandenstein, Carola von, 1981 [Photocopied letter in Carl Georg von Brandenstein's papers].
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1934, Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi. *Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, Vorderasiatische Abteilung XXVII*.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1937, Zum Churrischen aus den Ras-Schamra-Texten. *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 91, 3: 555-76.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1939a, Zu den hethitischen Jahreszeiten. *Orientalia VIII*, Nova Series:68-81.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1939b, Zur Namensbedeutung der Stadt Paharrase. *Orientalia VIII*, Nova Series:82-86.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1939c, Ein arisches und ein semitisches Lehnwort im Churrischen. *Archiv für Orientforschung* 13:58-62.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1940, Zum churrischen Lexicon. *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*. Neue Folge, 12S:83-115.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1943, Hethitische Gotter nach Bildbeschreibungen in Keilschrifttexten. *Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatisch-Aegyptischen Gesellschaft* 46:2.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1991. [Letter to Nick Thieberger, 10 June 1991]. Manuscript.
- Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1995, [Letter, Carl-Georg Fhr von Brandenstein to Gerhard Trimborn, Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (German Academic Exchange office)]. Typescript.
- Capell, Arthur, 1963, Commentary. In Stanner, W.E.H. and Helen Shiels, eds *Australian Aboriginal studies: a symposium of papers presented at the 1961 Research Conference*, 149-158. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Derriman, Philip, 1990, Why Western Australia's Aborigines are speaking Portuguese. *Sydney Morning Herald* July 20, 1990:3.
- Derriman, Philip, 1992, Creole echoes from our past. *Sydney Morning Herald*. May 9, 1992:43.
- Dixon, R.M.W., 1976, *Grammatical categories in Australian languages*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.

- Dixon, R.M.W., 1980, *The languages of Australia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dixon, Bob, 1983, *Searching for Aboriginal languages: memoirs of a field worker*. St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press.
- Hale, Kenneth L., 1985, Ngarluma dictionary and sentences. Typescript.
- Haynes, Paul, 1993, WA Lost Colony Alleged. *Sunday Age* 30 May 1993:11
- Heath, Jeffrey G., 1984, [Review of Brandenstein, C G von, 1982 Names and substance of the Australian subsection system. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press. *Language* 60, 2:466-467.
- Jorion, Paul, 1983, [Review of Brandenstein, Carl Georg von, 1982. Names and substance of the Australian subsection system. ] *Man* 18, 4:793-794.
- Kohn, Allison, 1994, A morphological description of Ngarluma. Unpublished BA Hons Thesis, University of Western Australia.
- McConvell, Patrick, 1983, [Review of C. G. von Brandenstein. 1980. Ngadjumaja: an Aboriginal language of south-east Western Australia] *Oceania* 53:193.
- McConvell, Patrick, 1985a, The origin of subsections in Northern Australia. *Oceania* 56:1-33.
- McConvell, Patrick, 1985b, Time perspective in Aboriginal Australian culture: Two approaches to the origin of subsections. *Aboriginal History* 9, 1:53-80.
- Mulvaney, John and Johan Kamminga, 1999, *Prehistory of Australia*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Murray, Les A. ed., 1986, *The new Oxford book of Australian verse*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Nash, David G., 1982, [Review of C. G. von Brandenstein. 1980. Ngadjumaja: an Aboriginal language of south-east Western Australia]. *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 2, 2:270-276.
- O'Connor, Sue, 1992, The timing and nature of prehistoric island use in northern Australia. *Archaeology in Oceania* 27:49-60.
- Read, Peter & Jay Read, 1991, *Long time, olden time: Aboriginal accounts of Northern Territory history*. Alice Springs, N.T.: Institute for Aboriginal Development.
- Read, Peter & Jay Read, 1993, *Long time, olden time: Aboriginal accounts of Northern Territory history*. Penrith, N.S.W: Firmware publishing.

- Rijavec, Frank, Roger Solomon and Noelene Harrison, 1992, *Exile and the kingdom*. [videorecording] Ngurin Aboriginal Corporation. Lindfield, N.S.W.: Film Australia.
- Stanner, W.E.H. and Helen Shiels, eds, 1963, *Australian Aboriginal Studies: A Symposium of papers presented at the 1961 Research Conference*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Wangka Maya-Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre, 1990, *A wordlist of Ngarluma*. Port Hedland: Wangka Maya-Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre.
- White, Osmar, 1969, *Under the Iron Rainbow, Northwest Australia today*. Melbourne: Heinemann.
- Wordick, Frank J.F., 1982, *The Yindjibarndi language*. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, C-71.
- Wurm, Stephen A., 1963, Languages. In Stanner, W.E.H. and Helen Shiels, eds 1963. *Australian Aboriginal Studies: A Symposium of papers presented at the 1961 Research Conference*, 127-148. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Yengoyan, Aram A., 1984, [Review of Brandenstein, C G von, 1982 Names and substance of the Australian subsection system. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press. *Anthropological Linguistics* 26:345-349.