Rob Amery, University of Adelaide

One Too Many Firsts? A history of Aboriginal languages and linguistics at the University of Adelaide

The University of Adelaide may legitimately lay claim to a number of pioneering efforts in the research and teaching of Aboriginal languages from the studies of Aboriginal songs by E.H. Davies in the 1920s, the teaching of an Aboriginal language (Pitjantjatjara) in a tertiary institution, revival linguistics beginning with Kaurna linguistics, through to the establishment of the Mobile Language Team in 2009 and a number of other important initiatives in between. Intriguingly, along the way, the University of Adelaide seems to have forgotten its own history. In 1970 TGH Strehlow was appointed Professor of Australian Linguistics and Emeritus Professor on his retirement in 1974. Twenty years later, the University of Adelaide appointed Professor Peter Mühlhäusler as Foundation Professor of Linguistics, seemingly oblivious to its previous appointment in this area.

The institution has a history of letting some important initiatives go or not following through and building on the past. Despite this the University of Adelaide has made a major contribution to the study, teaching and support of Aboriginal languages at different times over the last century through a relatively small band of individuals located in different areas of the University.

Zulfadli Aziz, University of Adelaide

Documentation of Languages in Aceh, Indonesia

There are at least nine languages spoken in the Province of Aceh, Indonesia. None of these are well-documented. Acehnese, the language of the majority speakers in the region, is probably the best documented language among the others. This paper examines the development of stages of language documentation of the local languages found in the Province. Previous research and published sources on these languages will
be analysed from the earliest attempts onwards. The main purpose of the paper is to evaluate the quality of extant published scholarly works and identify needs for further work on the indigenous languages of Aceh.

**Mark Clendon, University of Adelaide**

*Thuradha’s Partu Wangka vocabularies*

In 1911 on Rottnest Island Daisy Bates recorded vocabulary and elicited sentences from Thuradha, an Aboriginal prisoner from north-east of Laverton, WA. Thuradha’s vocabulary is one of three important Western Desert wordlists Bates recorded from the northern Goldfields area. Collectively they offer a rare window into linguistic geography in this region around the time of contact. Bates noted that Thuradha’s tribe was Barduwonga, and his country included three water sources called Burduradha, Inolu and Yilurn. Yilurn is 50 km east of Cosmo Newberry, where some of Thuradha’s descendents still live, and almost exactly half-way between Kalgoorlie in the south-west, and Warburton in the north-east. Two Western Desert communilects predominate in this region: Ngaanatharra at Warburton, and Wangkatha in the Kalgoorlie goldfields. Analysis of Thuradha’s material shows that a third of it is shared with both Ngaanatharra and Wangkatha, 10% is shared only with Wangkatha and another 10% only with Ngaanatharra. Half of Thuradha’s material is found in neither Wangkatha nor Ngaanatharra lexical sources. To account for this anomaly I propose that (i) Thuradha’s vocabulary is representative of the language of the greater Goldfields region at contact – it is by this reckoning best described as ‘Old Wangkatha,’ and (ii) the modern Wangkatha lexicon is the result of dialect shift towards Ngaanatharra, that has occurred over the past century.

**Mary-Anne Gale, University of Adelaide**

*The linguistic legacy of H.A.E. Meyer: missionary of the Evangelical Lutheran Society at Dresden*

Heinrich Eduard Meyer, missionary to the Ramindjeri and Ngarrindjeri people of Encounter Bay, and surrounding regions, wrote in a letter home to Dresden, Germany on March 13, 1843: “I must request that you pray for us, beloved friends, that the Lord might grant us wisdom to behave in a way pleasing to Him and most beneficial to His Kingdom.” This request was made after he had submitted for printing his remarkable Grammar and Vocabulary, which very adequately describes the local Aboriginal language, and its “slight variations... extending along the coast to the eastward around Lake Alexandrina and for some distance up the River Murray” (Meyer, 1843, cover).
At a cost of 35 pounds a considerable number of copies were printed for distribution in the new colony, in the hope that his succinct volume “would be found useful to such as may be desirous of forming some acquaintance with the Aboriginal Dialects, and that they will be interesting to the philosopher and philologist” (Meyer, 1843, p vii). Meyer also points out the interest shown by His Excellency, Governor Grey, particularly “by reason of its great difference, not only in grammatical forms, but also in the radicals of the words, from the language spoken by the natives in the vicinity of Adelaide.” (p vi)

This paper confirms that Meyer did indeed show wisdom in the compilation of his quality Wordlist and Grammar, and time has shown that his efforts have been of great benefit to many, for varied reasons. In my paper I summarise and discuss the work of HEA Meyer, and focus in particular on the insights to be gained from a close evaluation of his quite remarkable linguistic and ethnographic legacy. To name just one, is Meyer’s analysis of an Antipassive construction, which he calls the “Duplex form of the Verb” (Meyer, 1843, p 38-39). Meyer has received commendations from key linguists in modern times for his analysis. RMW Dixon writes (in McDonald, 2002, p 7) “Meyer’s grammar is full of wonderful insights; for example he clearly recognises an antipassive (although of course the name was not coined until more than a hundred years later)”. I hope to show that the Meyer’s legacy continues to impress.

Helen Gardner, Deakin University and Patrick McConvell, Australian National University

Forms of kinship: Lorimer Fison’s journey from the Pacific to Australia

Lorimer Fison (1832-1907) after emigrating from England converted first to Wesleyanism while working on the Australian goldfields, then to the study of kinship as proof of the unity of the human species following his encounter with American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan’s kinship studies. He threw himself into the collection of kinship terminology in the Pacific using Morgan’s ‘schedule’ and was amazed to find strong similarities between Pacific island kinship systems and those of south India and North America (later known as Dravidian/Iroquois). When he moved from Fiji to Australia in 1871 he sought evidence on Australian kinship from missionaries, colonial administrators and settlers. He again encountered similar systems, with cross-cousin marriage and a strong distinction between cross and parallel relatives. In 1873 he linked up with William Howitt, a magistrate in Gippsland, Victoria, and together, and with close collaboration with indigenous people, they modified the schedule and developed new fieldwork methods, better attuned to semantics of the local systems. The Kurnai of Gippsland had a system quite different from the Dravidian kinds of system elsewhere in Australia and Fiji/Tonga and this proved difficult to fit into Morgan's unilinear evolutionary kinship scheme. One feature of Fison’s approach was the perspicuous pinpointing of apparent contradictions in the data and the subsequent
interrogation of correspondents more familiar with local situations to try to explain these, either as ‘mistakes’ or in some other way. On occasion though, Fison would fall back on patterns in Fijian and Tongan as a template for Australian data, overestimating the detailed fit between the Pacific Islands and Australian systems.

Jennifer Green, University of Melbourne

_Observing silent conversations: documentation of Australian Indigenous sign languages_

Early reports of the sign languages of Aboriginal Australia stretch back to the mid 19th and early 20th centuries. On several of his expeditions to the interior (1859-60) the explorer John McDouall Stuart described encounters with groups of Aboriginal people during which they exchanged what Stuart thought were Masonic signs (Hardman 1865). In the report on the Horn scientific expedition to Central Australia, Stirling wrote that ‘more or less continuous’ and ‘intelligible silent conversation was being carried on’ (Spencer 1896). Frank Gillen is reported as saying that the ‘gesture language’ was both ‘copious’ and ‘convenient’ (Gillen 1898). A decade or so later the Lutheran missionary Carl Strehlow included extensive descriptions of sign language in his treatises on the Hermannsburg Arrernte (Strehlow 1915).

As well as providing written descriptions of the signs they observed, several of these early ethnographers also included visual representations. Roth made 168 detailed line drawings of the signs he observed in Queensland (Roth 1897). In an appendix to _The Arunta_, Spencer and Gillen (1927) provide 64 diagrams of hand signs, based on the original sketches that appear in Spencer’s notebooks. After this initial burst of interest in sign there was little research on the sign languages of Australia until the late 1970s. Adam Kendon’s 1988 publication, _Sign languages of Aboriginal Australia_, broke this hiatus and refocused attention on this important part of the communicative repertoire of Indigenous peoples.

In this paper I discuss approaches to the linguistic documentation of ‘non-verbal’ aspects of Indigenous languages in Australia, including sign, gesture and some forms of drawing. I begin with an overview of early work and conclude with some examples from a recent sign language documentation project from Central Australia (Green, Woods, & Foley 2011), which includes the use of sign in other forms of verbal art, such as sand stories (Green 2009).

References


**Philip Jones, South Australian Museum**

*Francis Gillen, linguist*

A reassessment of the fieldwork undertaken by Baldwin Spencer and Francis Gillen during the 1890s has revealed that Gillen as the primary author of Native Tribes of Central Australia. Gillen had at least a basic grasp of Arrernte, giving him a clear advantage over Spencer in pursuing anthropological enquiries and in comprehending the great Engwura ceremonial cycle performed at Alice Springs under his sponsorship during 1896. Gillen’s experience with documenting Arrernte language terms began with his first journey from Adelaide as a young telegraph station officer, during 1875. He contributed to Curr’s 1886-1887 compendium of vocabularies.

But the Spencer-Gillen Expedition of 1901-1902 moved north from Arrernte country, and by the time they reached Barrow Creek during June 1901 (passing into Kytiche and Anmatyere country), Gillen’s linguistic advantage had diminished. Effective interpreters became crucial, and one might expect the frequency of language and kinship terms, place-names, etc. (let alone observations on grammar) to diminish in both Spencer’s and Gillen’s field-notes. In fact, Gillen continued to document language terms and grammar assiduously as the expedition moved north, through Chingilli, Gnanji, Binbinga, and Anula country to the final destination at Borroloola.

My paper will examine and compare Gillen’s and Spencer’s respective field techniques during this expedition, and I will argue that Gillen emerges as the expedition’s linguist. He not only recorded vocabularies and grammatical forms for each of the language
groups encountered, but gathered language terms to illuminate kin relationships and terms of address, lists of totems and totemic foods. His careful documentation of place names helped to make Spencer’s and Gillen’s accounts of mythology and ceremony foundational documents for Australian field anthropology. Gillen can be regarded as a pioneer Australian linguist.

Patrick McConvell and Steff Spronck, Australian National University

Kaberry and Kimberley kinship: linguistic puzzles

In the 1930s Phyllis Kaberry was a pioneer in ethnographic fieldwork among Australian Aborigines in the east Kimberley region. At this time traditional languages were still widely used and the Indigenous people she worked with had no knowledge of standard English. Despite Kaberry’s anthropological training and the absence of professional linguistic research on the languages available at the time, she did make considerable fieldnotes on linguistic forms in several languages. These include Worrorran language groups in the Forrest River region, bands with a core of ‘Lunga’ speakers (Kija, Jarragan family, non-Pama-Nyungan), Jaru (Pama-Nyungan) and a language group she calls ‘Wolmeri’.

‘Wolmeri’ is no doubt Walmayarri, obscure in identity but possibly a dialect of Walmajarri, a well-known Pama-Nyungan group farther west. However, Kaberry’s published notes on ‘Wolmeri’ reveal a set of pronouns, which are not at all like Walmajarri or other Pama-Nyungan languages, and have limited correspondence with neighbouring non-Pama-Nyungan languages. This is contradicts Kaberry’s statement identifying ‘Wolmeri’ with ‘Walmadjerr’ (Walmajarri) as pronounced by Nyikina and Kija speakers. The correspondence j:y is a common lenition change in some parts of the Kimberley, which both some Nyulnyulan languages and southern Jarragan languages have undergone. On this interpretation Walmajarri is an exonym for Walmajarri.

By examining her fieldnotes we try to resolve this contradiction with particular reference to social organisation and kinship terminology. Comparing the social terminology we present possible explanations for the puzzling idiosyncrasies of ‘Wolmeri’.

We conclude by hypothesising which of these linguistic puzzles are due to methodological and situational constraints on Kaberry’s research and which have actual consequences for the interpretation of kinship systems and the linguistic situation in the 1930s. In doing so, we suggest pathways to correctly interpreting language data in early anthropological studies in a highly multilingual environment.
James McElvenny, University of Sydney

Altenburg’s Adelaide Emissaries: Hans Conon von der Gabelentz, Christian Teichelmann and Clamor Schürmann

Hans Conon von der Gabelentz (1807-1874), a nobleman from the small independent duchy of Sachsen-Altenburg, was a typical German post-Enlightenment figure. Like his idol Wilhelm von Humboldt, Gabelentz worked as a minister in his state’s government and in private indulged his passion for languages. He wrote grammars of several non-European languages, including Manchu (1832) and Dakota (1852), as well as what would now be considered typological and areal studies, such as Über das Passivum (1860) and Die melanesischen Sprachen (1861), always pursuing the ‘Humboldtian’ program of trying to understand the world’s languages in terms of their diverse structures. Also like Humboldt, Gabelentz never travelled to the lands where the languages he described were spoken – he relied instead on grammars and travellers’ reports. He must therefore have been particularly pleased in 1838 to learn of the ordination in Altenburg of the two missionaries Christian Teichelmann and Clamor Schürmann, who were being sent to South Australia to found a mission to the Aborigines. Once in South Australia, the missionaries maintained a correspondence with Gabelentz and the Naturforschende Gesellschaft des Osterlandes, the natural history society of Altenburg. In this talk, we will look at Gabelentz and his nineteenth century intellectual milieu, as well as his contact with Teichelmann and Schürmann.

William B. McGregor, Aarhus University

Daisy Bates’ documentations of Kimberley languages: secondary corpora

McGregor (in press) overviews the range and extent of Daisy Bates’ documentations of Kimberley languages, contained in MS 365, Australian National Library. These include both primary documentations based on her fieldwork from 1900-1902, and secondary documentations provided by others. That article discusses in some detail Bates’ own documentation of one language, Jukun, evaluating its reliability and usefulness. It suggests that the information provided was basically reliable, and is consistent with expectations for a Nyulnyulan language of its geographical location.

The present article is concerned with the secondary documentations of Nyikina, Jawi, Gooniyandi, and Kija contained in MS 365. These take the form of more or less completely filled-out standard questionnaires of around 1800 words and a number of sentences. The questionnaires were presumably sent out around 1904, when Bates began her massive project on the Aborigines of Western Australia for the government of that state, to a range of individuals working in proximity with Aboriginal people in Western Australia, including to pastoralists, postmen, teachers, and missionaries in the
Kimberley region. I describe, discuss, and evaluate the materials she received and to some extent collated. I conclude generally that Bates’ secondary materials — like her primary ones — can be considered to be sufficiently reliable to warrant further more detailed examination, and that they are likely to be useful (given suitable cautions) for the documentations of now moribund languages.

Reference


David Moore, University of Western Australia

Uniform orthographies and early linguistic research in Australia

A knowledge of early orthographic conventions is necessary for interpreting early sources. Early researchers of Australian languages were more likely to represent sounds consistently if they used a uniform orthography, avoiding the problems of English spelling. Uniform orthographies began with concerns for correct transliteration of literary languages in the late eighteenth century and were later developed for linguistic description of previously unwritten languages. The Royal Geographical Society (RGS) orthography was the most widely adopted uniform orthography in Australia from the 1830s. This paper traces the history of the RGS orthography in Australian linguistic research and assesses the pioneering role of the early linguists who were the first to identify and record the sounds of Australian languages.

Peter Mühlhäusler, University of Adelaide and Linacre College, Oxford

Dogs that did not bark in the night: A history of non-research into the Pitkern-Norf’k language

The story of the mutiny on the Bounty, the conversion of the Pitcairners to fundamental Christianity, the emergence of a new society, the biological degradation of Pitcairn Island and the social experiment of resettling the Pitcairners on Norfolk Island were all important 19th century discourses, which have featured in several thousands of publications.

19th century philology among other issues was interested in the question of ‘Urschöpfung’ and desert island experiments (Hermann Paul 1880 : 175). Given that the story of the Pitcairners was well known and widely discussed in educated circles, one would have expected that philologists would have been interested in the question of what new language developed on Pitcairn Island.
Two other topics of interest to 19th century philologists ‘Sprachspaltung’ and ‘Sprachmischung’ again could have profited from insights from Pitkern-Norf’k.

The philologist Codrington who resided on Norfolk Island for about a decade and produced descriptions of more than 20 Melanesian languages and had regular dealings with the Pitcairners did not bother to make any record of their language; Schuchardt (the Father of creolistics) who corresponded with scholars and educated individuals all over the globe in his search of data from mixed languages, never inquired about this language. Reinecke, who wrote a comprehensive account of Marginal (mixed) languages in the 1930s makes no mention of Pitkern-Norfok and as late as 1966 (in Hall’s Pidgin and Creole Languages) the language is not mentioned.

This paper will document the non-treatment of Pitkern Norf’k by linguists who should have taken an interest and examine the reasons for such neglect. It will end by outlining the history of research post-1960, particularly after Reinecke et al.’s (1975: 390) pronouncement:

Pitcairn Island English with its offshoot on Norfolk Island is of extraordinary interest because it offers as near a laboratory case of Creole dialect formation as we are ever likely to have. The place, the time and sequence of events, and the provenance of each of the handful of original speakers are known, as are most of the subsequent influences upon the Pitcairnese community and, to a lesser extent, upon the one on Norfolk. Only two languages, English and Tahitian, were in contact. (p. 590)

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Joshua Nash, University of Adelaide

*Is Norf’k an Indigenous language?*

Notions of ‘Indigienity’ are important yet problematic for classifying and talking about Australian Indigenous languages. While there are more than 15 languages spoken day-to-day by Indigenous Australians none of these have reached official or even co-official status with English on the Australian political or linguistic stage. The Norf’k language is the contact language spoken by the descendants of the Bounty mutineers and their Tahitian counterparts on Norfolk Island, a territory of Australia. With the establishment of the Norfolk Island Language (Norf’k) Bill in 2004, it became the only language within Australia and its territories that is co-official with English. It has been spoken on Norfolk Island since 1856 after the entire population of Pitcairn Island was relocated.
Although only around 400 people speak Norf’k, its political importance has been recognised by UNESCO (2007). In parallel there has been a recent renaissance in language documentation and research into the legal and political status of Norf’k and its relationship to Australia. Norf’k is not related socially or typologically to any Indigenous languages. Its social and ecological history also means that it cannot be considered ‘Indigenous’ to Australia in any common sense of the word. Despite these facts, Norf’k has continued to be recognised by Australian authorities through the use of Norf’k in placenames and the teaching of Norf’k at the Norfolk Island Central School, which falls under New South Wales jurisdiction. This paper presents a diachronic and synchronic account on issues relating to the possible consideration of Norf’k as an Australian Indigenous language.

Petter Næssan, University of Adelaide

A view from the future: tracking traditional grammar and language retraction in O’Grady’s Wirangu fieldnotes

This paper presents findings from Geoff O’Grady’s fieldnotes from the far West Coast of South Australia in 1959. From O’Grady’s notes on Wirangu (a Thura-Yura language), two segments are identified that appear to be previously undescribed nominal inflections in the language, namely comitative and perlative suffixes. There are also indications of previously unrecorded phonologically conditioned PAST tense allomorphism. Finally, evidence of a transitional instrumentality along the Wirangu/Western Desert/English interface will be presented and analysed in terms of linguistic viability.

Laura Rademaker, Australian National University

Ahead of her time? Missionary Linguist Judith Stokes & 20th Century Australian Missionary Linguistics

This paper looks at the early missionary years of South Australian missionary linguist, Judith Stokes, who worked on the Anindilyakwa language of Groote Eylandt from the early 1950s until the late 1980s. While missions to Pacific fields concentrated on linguistics and Bible translation from the early nineteenth century, in Australia, few missionaries invested in learning Aboriginal languages. From the 1950s, however, Stokes pushed for bilingual education in Aboriginal schools and insisted that linguistic work should central to missionary endeavour.

Through outlining Stokes’ missionary career and long-term struggle towards linguistic work, I will shed light on the conflicting views among missionaries regarding the
purpose and how this affected the use of languages. Considering the predominant assimilationist policies of governments and missions in the 1950s and 1960s, as many would say, Stokes was ahead of her time. Yet she can also be understood within a much longer evangelical tradition of evangelism though the power of ‘the Word in the mother tongue’ which, by the 1970s came to intersect with the new paradigm of self-determination.

Anne Scrimgeour, University of Adelaide

‘The tongue of England alone’: Opposition to the use of Kaurna as a language of instruction at Piltawodli

At the first Aboriginal school in Adelaide, begun at the end of 1839 by German Lutheran missionaries, the language of instruction was Kaurna, the language of the Adelaide plain. The policy of using the vernacular in the school was widely opposed within the colony. It was also opposed by the third governor, George Grey, despite his reputation as a man with interest and expertise in indigenous languages. This paper examines that opposition, which by 1845 was to result in Aboriginal children in Adelaide being taught only in English.

Steff Spronck, Australian National University

Unlocking Howard Coate’s Ungarinyin corpus

For almost seventy years missionary linguist Howard Coate worked on a range of languages of the Kimberley region, most extensively on the Worrorran (non-Pama-Nyungan) language Ungarinyin (McGregor, 1996). Apart from co-authoring a descriptive grammar of the language he also recorded and transcribed a collection of Ungarinyin texts that is among the largest corpora of any Australian Aboriginal language and which formed the basis of a dictionary with over 8500 entries.

In this paper I introduce Howard Coate’s Ungarinyin corpus and discuss why despite the wealth of the collection it has long been relatively inaccessible for both the Ngarinyin community and researchers. I show that overcoming these problems opens up a unique insight into the research practice of Howard Coate and his collaboration with speakers of Ungarinyin.

Delving into the corpus, I point to idiosyncrasies in the linguistic transcriptions of Howard Coate and trace the origin of several striking entries in the Ungarinyin dictionary to the texts, showing how the recordings and the situation in which they were made shaped the dictionary.
The paper is a first report on the ongoing research project Interpreting Howard Coate’s Ungarinyin recordings, supported by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

References

Clara Stockigt, University of Adelaide

   Where has all the Syntax gone? Theoretical challenges to the early description of Arandic Syntax

When C.W. Schürmann advised that the description of Australian languages required authors to “divest their minds as much as possible of preconceived ideas, particularly of those grammatical forms which they may have acquired by the study of ancient or modern languages” (1844:vi), he perceived a tension between newly discovered structures and the premises underlying accepted descriptive frameworks.

This paper is part of a broader investigation into the extent to which early descriptions of Arrernte, and some previously described South Australian languages, were constrained by the stronghold of Traditional Grammar. It details the struggle of early grammarians to expound syntactic structures alien to their classically trained minds. Pre-contemporary descriptions of Australian languages do not contain sections devoted to portraying the languages’ syntax and given that the strict employment of traditional schema will not capture the marking of clausal hierarchical, syntactic information is often scant. Yet the grammars belie a reasonable syntactic command of the languages as evidenced in the texts produced by the same authors. The paper examines the willingness to abandon established descriptive methodologies and theoretical frameworks and to describe the data at hand.

In making this analysis, attention is given to the authors’ attitude towards the relative sophistication of the described language and to the intelligence of its speakers.

Peter Sutton, University of Adelaide and South Australian Museum

   Ursula McConnel and Sapir’s Linguistics, Yale 1931-33

The Australian anthropologist Ursula McConnel (1888-1957) spent 1931-33 on a Rockefeller Fellowship in the Anthropology Department at Yale. Since the dramatic discovery of her papers in a demolition site in the early 2000s, her time in the US can now be reconstructed in some detail. Her teachers at Yale included Edward Sapir, Clark Wissler, Richard Thurnwald, Jerzy Kuryłowicz, Charles Loram, Stanley Newman, and,
probably, Te Rangi Hīroa (Peter Buck). Between courses she spent two summers in a log cabin in the Klamath Valley recording texts in the now highly endangered Karuk. One of her mentors there, Phoebe Maddux, had formerly worked with Franz Boas. McConnel’s linguistic talent had shown itself at an early age. Her extensive field work in Cape York had been during the period 1928-34. In the field, one of her basic techniques was to approach aspects of the cultures through recording free monologues in the collaborator’s own language. Before Yale, she had already developed an analysis of Wik-Mungkan (Cape York Peninsula) that enabled her to publish texts in the language and draft a grammar. But, as she worked on her only purely linguistic work to ever reach print, ‘Wimunkan phonetics’ (1945), and even after taking linguistics courses while at Yale, she realised there had been a gap in her linguistic education, namely in the area of phonology. She was helped in this by TGH Strehlow, whose handwritten jottings on Aranda phonetics were found in her tin trunk some sixty years after they met up in Brisbane during World War II. Interestingly, when McConnel’s phonetics paper was published, she acknowledged Ted Strehlow’s help, but didn’t even mention the men of Yale.

Michael Walsh, University of Sydney and Mitchell Library

_left-footer linguists: the role of Catholic clergy in the documentation of Australian Languages_

Many Australianists would be aware of contributions to the study of Australian Languages by Catholic clergy like: Fr Angelo Confalonieri, SJ, who worked on languages in the Port Essington area around 1846; Dom Rosendo Salvado OSB (1814-1900), who documented some languages in Western Australia; and, more recently, Fr Anthony Peile SAC, responsible for some remarkable work on Kukatja. However they are less likely to know of Sister Theresa Ward OLSH or Fr William Flynn MSC.

Indeed it seems to me that this is an under-researched area of missionary linguistics. Non-Catholic clergy have made a substantial contribution to the study of Australian Languages as is evidenced in accounts like Carey (2009) or Wafer and Carey (2011). It therefore seems timely to provide an overview of the role of Catholic clergy in the documentation of Australian Languages. Such an account will attempt to assess the quality of their contribution and to compare it with that of non-Catholic clergy. In particular, it will be seen that the latter have often enough provided translations of Scripture whereas the former are more likely to have produced hymns, catechist texts and cribs for the confessional.

References

Michael Walsh, University of Sydney and Mitchell Library

Words and bowerbirds: the Rio Tinto/Mitchell Library Project – Re-discovering Australian languages

Since mid-2011 I have been engaged by Mitchell Library (which houses most of the manuscript collection within the State Library of New South Wales) to locate and identify any resources relevant to Australian languages within the collections. This 3-year project is being funded by Rio Tinto and this paper will focus on the first (research) phase. Results to date reveal that often enough resources under one person’s name may in fact have come from a variety of sources, for instance, Sir Thomas Mitchell (1792-1855), an early Surveyor-General of New South Wales, the Reverend James Dunmore Lang (1799-1878), Sir William Dixson (1870-1952).

Perhaps the most amazing example of these ‘bowerbirds’ was Dr Alan Carroll (c. 1823-1911), prominent in the Royal Anthropological Society of Australasia. His papers include all sorts of material sent in for possible inclusion in the Science of Man but occasionally there is material that is unexpected. For instance, a set of documents with minimal metadata turned out to contain a partial translation of the Gospel of Matthew by the Reverend Lancelot Edward Threlkeld (1788-1859), something that was known by experienced scholars to have existed but had remained hidden until late 2011.

Such resources can raise issues not only in attribution but also in establishing genealogies of manuscripts.

A second set of issues arises, for example, in the papers of Robert Brown (1773-1858) in what I think of as the ‘silo problem’. Some specialists in Yolngu studies have been aware of Brown’s 1803 wordlist for quite a while but some are not while most (?) all Australianists had never heard of his 1801 Nyungar list nor the Murray Island materials of 1802, all of which have been published since 2001.

More generally this relates to the issue of discoverability and is relevant to modern bowerbirds like – Bowern, Dixon, Walsh.