Luise Hercus’ contribution to the historical linguistics of Australian languages

Harold Koch SHLP, Adelaide, 14 December 2018
Themes of this presentation

• Not focus on:
  • Research history: what languages, where, when
  • Products of documentation: grammars, dictionaries
  • Paralinguistic studies: mythology, placenames, etc.

• Themes discussed here
  • Philology: using and assessing early sources
  • Genetic classification: dialects, subgroup members
  • Areal features and diffusion
  • Posited changes
  • Etymology

Organised by 5 subgroups of Pama-Nyungan
KULIN subgroup

Main References


• Hercus, Luise A. 1992. *Wembawemba dictionary*. Canberra: Luise Hercus with the assistance of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.


• Hercus, Luise A. 1989. Three linguistic studies from far southwestern New South Wales. *Aboriginal History* 13(1), 44-62. [The Kulin languages of the far south-west of NSW]
NW Kulin varieties

2 groups:

• Wergaia, Wembawemba, Perəpaperəpa, Narinari
• Mathi-Mathi, Wati-Wati, Letji-Letji

1978 “The position of Narinari”:

• 18 words from Jack Long show LH
• Narinari is clearly Kulin (not Lower Murray or Paakantyi)
• more similar to Wergaia-Wemba than Mathi group
• Phon. features shared with Wemba

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wemba group</th>
<th>Narinari</th>
<th>Mathi group</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3SgPoss</td>
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<td>-u</td>
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<td>1SgPoss</td>
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<td>-ng increment</td>
<td>tyina</td>
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<td>‘foot’</td>
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<tr>
<td>-i increment</td>
<td>wanap</td>
<td>wanhap</td>
<td>wanhapi</td>
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<td>‘fire’</td>
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<td>stress</td>
<td>wanap</td>
<td>wanhap</td>
<td>wanhapi</td>
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<tr>
<td>1Sg free pn</td>
<td>yantin</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>yiti</td>
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Paakantyi [Darling River language]

- Based on own and Wurm’s fieldwork
- Relation to older sources: Interpret records of past
- Dialect names and locations
- Classification issues: which varieties belong, distinctiveness
- References
Map of dialects and neighbours
Unity of language

• Lexical
  • “A Lexico-statistical comparison based on old vocabularies from the two dialects that represent the geographical extremes of Bāgandji territory, Guṇu from the Bourke area and Marawara from near Wentworth...shows agreement in over 85 per cent of the items.” (Hercus 1980: 160)

• Mutual intelligibility
  • “In the sixties, speakers of Bandjigali, S. Bāgandji and Guṇu were still living on the reserve at Wilcannia...and were able to communicate with each other without any great difficulty, all speaking ‘Bāgandji’.” (1980: 164)

• Corrects Wurm’s classification of Marawara in Lower Murray group
  • “there can be no doubt, particularly from the evidence brought by Tindale [1939], that the now extinct Maraura (p. 134) belongs to the Darling River language group”. (Hercus 1974 [Review of Wurm 1972]: 392)

• “in 1963... the difference from Victorian languages was obvious even to a casual observer.” (Hercus 1982: ix)
Distinctiveness from other subgroups: lexical, phon’l

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direction</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Subgroup</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Malyangapa</td>
<td>Yarli</td>
<td>41</td>
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<tr>
<td>SW</td>
<td>Ngayawung</td>
<td>Lower Murray</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Wangaybuwan</td>
<td>CNSW</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Wangkumara</td>
<td>Karnic</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Mathimathi</td>
<td>Kulin</td>
<td>16</td>
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<th></th>
<th>Karnic</th>
<th>Yarli</th>
<th>Paak</th>
<th>LMurray</th>
<th>Kulin</th>
<th>CNSW</th>
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<td>Apical PoA</td>
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<td>Rhotics</td>
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<td>Final C</td>
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<td>many</td>
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<td>sonorants</td>
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<td>Long V</td>
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<td>all</td>
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<td>Vb conj</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kurnu</td>
<td>(Intermediate dialects)</td>
<td>S. Paakantyi</td>
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<td>Phonological</td>
<td>-ty-</td>
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<td>-y-</td>
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<td>Subj/obj pns</td>
<td>free</td>
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<td>bound</td>
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<td>personal possession marking</td>
<td>free pronouns</td>
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<td>by suffixes</td>
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<td>Subj pn</td>
<td>marked for tense</td>
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<td>not</td>
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<td>Allative</td>
<td>≠ Dative</td>
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<td>= Dative</td>
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YARLI Subgroup

- Lgs of far western NSW, between Darling River and Lake Eyre Basin
- Data from
  - own fieldwork, plus some by Wurm, Schebeck, Beckett,
  - Tindale1934 notebook
  - Curr 1886 wordlists evaluated (philology)
- Explores evidence for belonging to a separate subgroup vs. previous classifications:
  - either not all members of same SG, or subset of Karnic (except Bowern 1998, 2001)
- References:
### Lgs, neighbours, and others’ classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Yardliyawara</th>
<th>Malyangapa</th>
<th>Wadikali</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External neighbours in contact</td>
<td>Adnyamathanha (Thura-Yura) Pirlatapa (CKarnic)</td>
<td>Pantyikali (Paakantyi)</td>
<td>Wangkumara (EKarnic) Pirlatapa (CKarnic)</td>
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<td>Previous class’n</td>
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<td>Tindale</td>
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<td>Paakantyi</td>
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<td>Dixon 2002: xxxvii</td>
<td>“WAd” part of Lake Eyre Basin Areal Group = Karnic+</td>
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Hercus evidence

• “Yadliaura…is almost identical with Malyangapa and therefore belongs to the Dieric languages in the subgroup called “Yalyi” in [Wurm’s] book.” (Hercus 1974:392)
  • [so Wurm’s classn not based on lexical %age if using correct sources]
• “Yardliyawara and Malyangapa are so close to one another, and what we know of Wadikali is also so close, that Proto-Yarli is more or less self-evident.” (Hercus & Austin 2004: 211)

Lexical distinctiveness

• Lexemes shared by all 3 Yarli lgs and no others = innovations
• Lexemes shared by 2 Yarli lgs and no others, in 3rd lg undocumented or replaced by loan
• Lexemes shared by 2 or 3 Yarli lgs plus a neighbouring lg, probably borrowed from Yarli
• Lexemes in Yarli lgs inherited from Proto-Pama-Nyungan, but not found in neighbouring lgs = shared retentions of some diagnostic value
• Lexemes in Yarli lgs only but regional cognates with significant formal or semantic differences
• (Basic vocabulary lexemes in Yarli lgs shared with neighbouring lgs through common inheritance from pPN: not diagnostic of membership in any other subgroup
Further evidence for Yarli

• Morphological evidence for distinctiveness of Yarli subgroup
  • Form of personal pronouns
  • Form of verbal tense suffixes
  • Case suffixes
  • Demonstrative forms
  • Inchoative verbaliser -ngunti

• Diffusion: features shared through contact
  • Phonetic features: lengthening, prestopping of post-stressed consonants
  • Development of bound subject and object pronouns
  • Marking of Time of Day in verb
  • Regional spread of certain lexical items
THURA-YURA Subgroup

includes most languages of South Australia

• Kaurna: Adelaide
• Narangga
• Ngadjuri
• Nukunu
• Adnyamathanha
• Kuyani
• Barngarla (Parnkalla)
• Nauo
• ?Wirangu
Philological study of Nauo

• What can be known of the Nauo language of Coffin Bay area, southern Eyre Peninsula?
• What sources provide some linguistic data?
• Conclusion: language intermediate between Barngarla and Wirangu.

Classification main issue: place of Wirangu

• Main question: Is it a member of the Thura-Yura subgroup?


Others’ claims

• 1917 JM Black: close reln to Parnkalla and more distant to Adelaide lg in a “Tindo family”

• 1966 O’Grady Voegelin & Voegelin, O’Grady, Wurm & Hale, Wurm 1972:128: sole member of “Nanga/Nyanga subgroup” within a large “Nyungic group”, alongside Thura-Yura, Wati (Western Desert), Mirning-Ngadjuma-Kalarko subgroups, etc. [all Pama-Nyungan lgs of W.A.]

• 1967 John Platt treats as related with Kukata in a subgroup of Wati lgs

• Other authorities follow this classification, treating Wirangu as part of Western Desert

• Dixon 2002: xxxvii Wirangu as sole member of his “WC” subgroup

• NOTE: All modern sources treat Wirangu as not member of TY subgroup
O’Grady & Klokeid 1969

- claim Platt error due to intense Wirangu-Kukata contact;
- justify placement of Wirangu in separate subgroup of Nyungic group
- publish 100-word lexicostatistical lists of Kukata, Wirangu, “Pankarla”,
  - plus 5 other lgs of area
- O’Grady “cognate” figures: WIR-KOK 47, WIR-PNK 39
- Criterial figures used in O’Crady Wurm Hale lex-stat classification:
  - 50%+ required to classify languages as members of same subgroup
  - 25-50% lgs belong to different subgroups of same “group”
Hercus view (1999: 8-10)

• More WIR-PNK cognates using older WIR words plus extra PNK words
• Applies to O’Grady & Klokeid’s first 10 words
• HK extends LH approach to all 100
• Well within 50-70% subgroup criterion

[Implications for
• application of lex-stat methods
• constituency of Nyungic group
• processes by which one language can dominate another
—deserves further study

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<tr>
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<th>O’G</th>
<th>Hercus trial 1st 10</th>
<th>Koch</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WIR-PNK(T-Y)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>(55)</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIR-KOK(WD)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>(30)</td>
<td>33</td>
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Hercus view (cont)

- LH values shared grammatical features above lexical percentages
- grammatical features (e.g. verb morphology) shared with T-Y stronger evidence of genetic relation (11)
- Wirangu is outlier of Thura-Yura, with similarities to WD result of recent borrowing (10)
- “it might be considered an outlier, but it certainly belongs” (94)
- “By the term ‘outlier’ we imply that this language shows some differences from the rest of the subgroup; we suggest that these differences are not genetic, but due to profound changes that have taken place in relatively recent times owing to the influence of Western Desert languages.” (Simpson & Hercus 2004:180)
- Simpson & Hercus 2004 reconstructions to Proto-Thura-Yura only if evidence from Wirangu, otherwise to Proto-Central-Thura-Yura
- Should not be interpreted as indication that Wirangu is more distantly related within the subgroup [as the term “outlier” might imply]
Karnic subgroup: Arabana-Wangkangurru


Classification issues

• Hercus accepted Breen’s 1971 inclusion of A-W as a 4th branch of a Karnic subgroup

• BUT Austin’s 1990 “Classification of Lake Eyre languages” (LTWPL 3:171-201) omitted AW from Karnic: too few cognates

• LH insisted that AW belonged: more cognates can be found if consider semantic changes and other processes that render them obscure—hence etymological study (2013 papers)

• At same time studied and mapped areal features:
  • “phonetic changes could sweep over a large area even if the languages were not very closely related” (1972: 302)
Family tree of Karnic and adjacent lgs
(Hercus 1994:10 < Breen 1971)
Etymology: identifying archaisms

• obsolete words survive in placenames
  • Wangkangurru kupa ‘little’ replaced by nyara
    • but survives in placename Karla kupa Kallakoopa ‘little creek’
  • A-W ngapa ‘water’ has been replaced by kutha,
    • But survives in placenames e.g. Napa-marra ‘fresh water, Ngapamura’

• & compounds
  • Karnic ngandi ‘mother’ replaced by lhuka
    • But survives in mara-ngandi ‘thumb’ < ‘hand-mother’
  • pari ‘creek’ (cf. Thura-Yura, Yarli lgs) replaced by karla
    • survives in AW warru-pari ‘Milky Way, *’creek white’

• Derivatives
  • kupa ‘little’ survives in derivative kuparli ‘younger sibling’

• Deparadigmatised
  • Old 1Sg pn form preserved in adverb anhari ‘this way, towards me’
Areal diffusion

“work by several researchers, especially Hercus, has demonstrated that there are a number of linguistic features which cross-cut the apparent genetic groups east of Lake Eyre and which appear to have been distributed by linguistic diffusion”:

- Prestopping and C length (laterals and nasals)
- Initial C loss
- 3 r-sounds intervocalically
- Stop voicing
- Kinship-based pronouns (Hercus & White)
- Associated Motion meanings

- Earlier AP Elkin had established shared cultural features for the same area
- (Peter Austin 1989 Verb compounding in Central Australian languages, La Trobe Working Papers in Linguistics 2: 67-68)
Explaining diffusion process

• Careful synchronic study of conditions of nasal and lateral prestopping and of partial initial C loss in A-W

• Comparison with surrounding languages

• LH’s proposed chronology deserves closer evaluation; e.g.
  • 1972: 301 conclusion that “prestopping probably later than loss of ng-” [& k-]

• Since words beginning with a- do not reflect presence or absence of prestopping acc to whether initial C was non-nasal or nasal [= synchronic conditioning in C-initial words]

• But—this overlooks the possibility of restructuring the phonological rules after a sound change takes place

• [deserves further study]
Conclusions

• Historical linguistic issues were not LH’s main concern. But—
• Relating her field-based knowledge to old sources was a major concern
• She cared about the genealogical classification of the languages
• Generally she considered this to be fairly evident from a knowledge of the grammars especially.
• She was not too interested in lexicostatistical comparison
• She was very aware that cognates were not always obvious
• She was very much interested in (areal) linguistic features shared across genetic boundaries
• And in the shared cultural relations that were responsible for them
• Her results need to be taken seriously in any historical comparison.