This pioneer volume assembles thirteen etymological studies covering a broad range of languages, focusing in particular Australian Indigenous languages. Etymology is understood in a broad sense as a type of historical research that aims at investigating the origin of a word (lexical etymology) or structure (structural etymology). The phenomena investigated in the contributions comprise Australian Indigenous place names and kinship terms, constructions and word histories in Oceanic languages, typological investigations and papers on the methodology of etymological research.

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Lexical and Structural Etymology

Beyond Word Histories

Edited by
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DE GROOTER MOUTON
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Abbreviations

WM  wife’s mother
Wm  Wangkumara
WN  Wangaaybuwan
WTS Western Torres Strait
Ya  Yandhrundwandha
YG  Yuwaalaraay Gamilaraay
Yi  Yarulyandi
YR  Yuwaalaraay (YR)
Yw  Yawarrawarrka
YY  Yuwaalayaay

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Archaisms in placenames in Arabana-Wangkangurru country

1 Background

Arabana people lived on the west side of Lake Eyre, in dry hilly country and gibber plains, while Wangkangurru people lived on the north side of Lake Eyre, in the Simpson Desert. As in many other parts of Australia the system of naming places is largely based on the stories of Ancestral Beings who created and named the country, and so it is in a sense a historical system. For the Lake Eyre Basin this was documented in detail in the manuscript left by J. G. Reuther (1981), and has been discussed by many contributors to recent work on place-names (Koch and Hercus 2009).

The Arabana language and the Wangkangurru language were closely related and they could both be regarded as dialects of one language. Many of the place-names in this area are transparent in their etymology and can be analysed in terms of the modern form of the languages. Some placenames however reflect an earlier phase, and these are the subject of the present paper. All the places mentioned, unless stated otherwise are in Arabana-Wangkangurru country. Only some of the placenames appear on modern maps, the rest are known only from recordings from Arabana-Wangkangurru speakers.

2 Older phonological features

2.1 Old forms of words contain palatals where the modern words have dentals

Arabana-Wangkangurru belongs to the Kurni subgroup of Australian languages. The languages in this subgroup have a phonemic distinction between two sets of laminal consonants, a dental series, th, nh, and th, and a palatal series ty, ny, and ly. This distinction is probably relatively recent in Arabana/Wangkangurru. There is free variation between palatail and dentals in a few words in the environment of i, particularly in Wangkangurru, as for instance in -with/-wily- the inceptive verb-forming suffix in Wangkangurru: in Arabana it is always -th-. A modern Wangkangurru speaker could say:
noun marker -nha. This was a historical name because the Diamantina/Waaborun had long ago broken through a sandhill during a flood and carved out a new course at this place. This name is now being re-interpreted as Karla-norna 'Creek-mouth'.

The placenames thus give us a glimpse into the past in the use of older forms of words (palatals instead of dentals, and the possible absence of pre-stopping). The placenames also contain archaic words, and references to the fauna, flora and material culture of the past. This gives us time-depth for an area where we have no old historical records.

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