Encountering Aboriginal languages:
 studies in the history of Australian linguistics

edited by
William B. McGregor
This book contains photographs of, and mentions the names of, some now deceased Aboriginal people. Readers should be aware that in some communities seeing photographs and/or hearing the names of dead people may cause distress, especially to close relatives. Before using this book in Aboriginal communities, the reader should determine the wishes of senior members and take their advice on safeguards.
Abbreviations and conventions

Language names are given as far as possible in the preferred modern spellings, where known. This is usually the form employed by literate speakers of the language, or accepted/preferred by the community of its speakers, owners or their descendants. Otherwise, the spelling is either according to the AIATSIS standard (as per the Indigenous Languages Database (2002)—a revised version of which will soon be accessible online as AusLang, at http://austlang.aiatsis.gov.au/), the standard recommended by a language centre, or to the most widely accepted spelling employed in the literature. In some cases, however, it is not possible to reliably identify languages referred to in earlier literature, and in these cases the spelling of the sources has been retained.

Throughout standard conventions are employed: cited words are given in italics, except when given specifically in phonetic, phonemic, or graphemic form, where the standard brackets [], //, and ->, respectively, are used. Any other abbreviations or conventions are explained in the individual contributions.

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1 Introduction

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1 Preliminary remarks

In Australianist linguistics the main motivations for delving into the past have been not so much to understand the ideas and conceptualisations of past investigators as to utilise and evaluate the language data they recorded. Even the few works devoted to the history of the subject have tended to address it predominantly from the perspective of the usefulness and relevance of previous work to today's concerns, anachronistically evaluating the contributions of past scholars in terms of modern knowledge. Little serious attempt has been made to reconstruct the thought of earlier times, arguably the primary goal of the history of science (Grafiti 2001:2), or to understand the work of previous investigators within their social and intellectual milieu. As Hans Aarsleff has put it:

The task of gaining the proper depth of historical perspective within a given period can only be satisfied by seeking to recapture all relevant contemporary knowledge without reference to or misguidance by the later accumulations of scholarly opinion and assignment of influences, which are far too often and too easily accorded the status of unquestioned doctrine (Aarsleff 1987:16).

The primary motivation of this book is to redress this lacuna and attempt to reconstruct the linguistic thought of earlier times, and of investigators of the traditional languages of Australia. Thus each of the following seventeen papers that make up attempts to understand thought about Australian Aboriginal languages from previous times as more or less coherent conceptual systems, as much as possible situated in their socio-cultural and intellectual contexts. Each rejects anachronistic projection of today's ideas and narrow focus on what is immediately relevant to us today. At the same time the papers aim to present both honest and critical attempts to understand and appraise the work of past investigators; nothing is served by excessively uncritical and laudatory evaluations that skim over the surface of past investigations. To do so would be as unscholarly as taking the opposite approach — unfortunately all too common in Australian linguistics and, until very recently, anthropology — of anachronistic dismissal.

1 I am grateful to the participants of the Fourth International Workshop on Australian Linguistics: History of research on Australian languages for comments, to Hilary Carey for copies of published and unpublished articles, to her, Harold Koch, Jane Simpson, and Peter Barrie for comments on a previous draft, and especially to Russell McGregor for a detailed discussion and critique of an earlier draft of this paper and for suggesting additional references. The final responsibility for any inadequacies, of course, lies with myself.

Aside from the scholarly reasons for doing research on the history of ideas about Aboriginal languages, some personal considerations might also be mentioned. Much documentary research is sheer drudgery, at least for me, and not nearly as exciting as doing fieldwork. But it can be punctuated by the occasional sudden realisation of the point of a piece of writing, an understanding of what the writer is really on about, or the sudden appearance of a key example. Thus, after hours of poring over terse and inexpressible—often incomprehensible—passages in Theems and Worms Australian languages (Nekes and Worms 1953), I have occasionally had a sudden insight into what they were trying to say. On other occasions, perusing this and other early documents (such as Tschudi's 1895 grammar of Nyuhyljy) I have been surprised by the unexpected appearance of examples of grammatical phenomena poorly represented in my own Nyuhyljy corpora.

Before getting down to business, it may be worth correcting the common misconception that it was members of James Cook's 1770 party who were the first Europeans to record words of an Australian Aboriginal language. In fact, the first confirmed attestation of an identifiable word of an Aboriginal language dates to almost a century earlier than Cook, and from the opposite side of the continent. The privateer William Dampier, who was careening his ship somewhere on the northern end of the Dampier Land peninsula in 1688, mentions in his journal that when some local Aborigines approached the ship threateningly, the ship's drum was sounded, at which they 'ran away as fast as they could drive, crying "Guiri, guiri" deep in the throat' (as quoted in O'Grady 1971:782, citing from Strowen and Day 1949:588, quoting in turn from Dampier 1697). As Toby Meecham has observed, this is most likely the Bardi word *guwar* or *guwara*, the term for a malevolent spirit (Meecham 1979:197). There is no evidence that Dampier or his crew made any serious attempt to record words of the language he encountered, so Cook's party still retains the title of first to attempt systematic elicitation and recording of words, as opposed to incidental observation.

This introductory piece is organised as follows. First, section 2 presents a historically and thematically oriented overview of histories of Australian Aboriginal linguistics, providing a backdrop for the book. Following this in section 3 the papers making up the book are overviewed, and their major themes identified. Section 4 concludes with a brief summary, and identifies additional threads of interest to the study of the history of Australianist linguistics and directions for future research.

2. A history of histories of research into Australian languages

To date, rather little has been written on the historiography of Australian Aboriginal linguistics. One might say that the subject has barely been born, though it has at least been conceived. There are no major monographs on the topic, or on any subtopic, such as exist on the history of linguistic ideas (such as Robins 1984), or of specific domains such as syntax, phonology, and morphology. The few extant works are either sections or chapters of books, or separate articles published in journals. Virtually all were published after 1960, when Australian Aboriginal linguistics came to age (see Table 1.1 below).

It is far beyond the scope of the present introductory chapter to present a comprehensive and/or revisionist history of research into Australian languages; indeed, it is the purpose of the entire book to lay the groundwork for such an enterprise. Rather, I have a more modest goal in mind, namely, to overview existing histories of research on Australian Aboriginal languages, and attempt to put them into something of a historical, or perhaps more accurately chronological, perspective.

2 Over a page of this short biography is wasted on a digression into the early history of the Telkeified family in England.

3 Prophomonic is not a particularly apt label since it was not until another eighty or ninety years—during which time many changes occurred in the shape of Australianist linguistics—that the notion of phoneme took root in Australian linguistics (see McGregor 2006a; Moore, this volume).市公安局

4 This was not the first such general survey. Also mentioned by O'Grady, Voegelin and Voegelin (1966) is Brough Smyth's survey of Victorian languages (Smyth 1878), which they refer to as a "quantitatively impressive but qualitatively empty account of the languages of Victoria". There were others as well.
I was about then that institutionally-based research began, first with the establishment of the chair of anthropology in the University of Sydney in 1926, and Ellin's appointment to it in 1933, which led soon after to the appointment of Arthur Capell (1902–1986) in the same department. The establishment of the journal Oceania (founded in 1930) which in its early years published a considerable amount of linguistics, and was one of the few outlets for articles on Australian languages, was also a relevant factor. It was also about the same time that detailed grammatical descriptions began to appear; Capell considered T.G.H. Strehlow's grammar of Anmatyerre (1946) to have been 'the first full scale grammatical account of an Australian language', although not published until the mid-1940s, typescript versions had been available during the 1930s (Capell 1970:676; see also Moore, this volume).

Capell's history is a valuable consolidation and compilation of the works up to the late 1930s, though it is of course now very dated. This is not just because the past thirty or so years have seen a prodigious explosion of research on Australian languages, but also because of the many documents that have since come to light. Significant amongst these is David Daws' work on the Sydney language (1970), unearthed in the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies in 1972. Furthermore, since Capell's article a number of monographs have appeared that focus on Aboriginal languages, the School of Australian Linguistics (1974), subsequently incorporated into Batchelor College, the Institute for Aboriginal Development, and a number of Aboriginal controlled language centres (see Anemey and Gale, this volume).

Capell's history contains a number of lacunae and questionable claims, as might be expected of work of its temporal and geographical scope. Thus Delys Bates' work as a collector of words across the continent goes unmentioned, and the only comment on her work concerns her 1914 publication on the languages of the south-west (Bates 1914). Gerhard Laves is dismissed in a few words (pp.681–682), principally on the grounds that he published almost nothing. Capell also largely disregards the role of Adelaide institutionally-based research, with the exception of the auspices of the Board for Anthropological Research, and the South Australian Museum and the University of Adelaide that date to about the same time that Hill and his associated research in Sydney began (see Moogahwin, this volume); as well as this, there was the Adelaide school of linguistics (see Simpson, Amrey and Gale, this volume; Moogahwin, this volume; and Moore, this volume). This omission is presumably a relic of the rivalry between Adelaide and Sydney for Rockefeller Foundation funding the foundation chair in anthropology, ultimately won by Sydney, just as the cavalier treatment of Laves may reflect the old rivalry between A.P. Elkin and his predecessor in the chair of anthropology in Sydney University, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown.

The year after Capell's history Stephen A. Warm's Languages of Australia and Economics (Warm 1973) appeared. An entire chapter of this book, amounting to some 16 pages, is devoted to the history of research; in general it can be characterized as less critical than Capell's account. Warm distinguishes three periods, as follows.

The first period, beginning in 1790 and extending to the 1920s is chiefly characterized by the collection of words lists in a great variety of languages and the compilation of very short, sketchy descriptions of a considerable number of languages largely following a set pattern of description on the basis of Latin grammar (Warm 1973:123). Warm mentions many of the most significant authors in the field, including the wordlist collectors, the describers of particular languages, and the classifiers. Of the classifiers, Schmidt and Koehrer are singled out at most notable. Warm evaluates the contribution of Koehrer more positively than the contribution of Schmidt, in that it was Koehrer who perceived the overall unity of the languages of the continent—a contentious hypothesis, yet to be convincingly demonstrated.
The second period began with the appearance in the 1930s of Arthur Capell on the scene, and extended to the early 1960s. Warm identifies three crucial characteristics of this phase: surveying and detailed study of the northern languages; strong focus on structural and typological features; and recognition of overall unity. It was in this phase that special varieties such as mother-in-law varieties, and secret imitate varieties were accorded careful attention. All Sommerfeld's notorious attempt to link Arrente language and culture, and his construal of both as "primitive" (see especially Sommerfeld 1938) is mentioned completely uncritically (see Wilkins 1989; Alpher 1994 for critiques). Also during this period a number of more detailed studies of particular languages were undertaken, resulting in grammatical descriptions and dictionaries, and a few test collections. Warm remarks that very little of the work of this period was ever published.

The third period is linked to the establishment of the Australian branch of the Summer Institute of Linguistics in 1961 (though SIL courses had been taught in Australia since 1950—Oates 2003:29) and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (now Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies) in 1964. Both institutions provided an impetus to linguistic research.

The third period is characterised by considerable diversity in linguistic interests (Warm 1972:22); establishment of lexicostatistical investigations; beginning of detailed comparative-historical investigations; demonstration that some aberrant languages were linked to other Australian languages; in-depth investigations of a number of languages resulting in grammatical descriptions and dictionaries; large-scale surveys, sometimes revealing languages thought to be dead; utilisation of amateurs in collection of data; archiving of recorded materials in the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies; study of special characteristics of the languages; understanding of linguistic prehistory, and interdisciplinary projects with prehistorians; and publication of results of the research. Although this period was only a little over a decade old at the time this paper appeared, many more researchers already figured in it than in the previous periods, and it accounts for over half of the chapter.

Two of the three general surveys of Australian languages published in the early 1980s, Dixon (1980) and Blake (1981), also contain discussions of the history of study of Aboriginal languages; the third, Yallop (1982), says nothing.

Dixon (1980:8-17, 20-21) provides a short account of the history of ideas about Australian languages, the bulk of which (all but one page) deals with the pre-1910 period. This does not purport to be a detailed history of research on Australian languages, and nor is it, many details and personages being omitted.

As previously discussed, historians acknowledge the relevance of certain external factors—anthropological and linguistic theories, governmental policy and institutional changes—to research on Aboriginal languages. Dixon goes a step further, explicitly linking (Dixon 1980:12) interest in Aboriginal languages and cultures with external socio-political and ideological factors; indeed, he suggests a correlation between this interest and the general level of treatment of Aboriginal people. Thus he suggests that the last few years of each colony was characterised by considerable interest in the languages and cultures, which rapidly gave way to apathy as the colonies consolidated and expanded. Then in about 1875, with the virtual cessation of exploration in most regions, and rise of social Darwinism, came notions that Aborigines would inevitably soon die out, and that they should be treated in a kindly fashion—'soothe the pillow of the dying race', as Daisy Bates put it. This marked the appear-

7 What Dixon fails to take into account is the fact that (as various other commentators have observed) this early interest was in a large part borne by the necessity of communicating with the indigenous population, and declined as the indigenous population declined and learnt English.

8 Here Dixon's account bears strong resemblance to Elinor's. Elinor characterised anthropological work up to about 1870 as primarily motivated by practical needs of interaction with Aborigines (Elinor 1963:5), while the subsequent forty years, his compiling and collating phase, was heavily influenced by anthropological theories.

9 In fact, the first publication attributed to Pacific Linguistics appears under the imprint of Linguistic Circle of Canberra Publications. This is a short piece of 13 pages by Stephen Warm on the role of language in the assimilation of Aborigines (Warm 1963).

10 See Wilkins (1979) for a comprehensive account of the work carried out during the 1970s, revealing the wide diversity of interests.

In general Dixon projects a more positive evaluation of the work of the last decades of the nineteenth century into the first decade of the twentieth than does Capell, who dismisses most of it on the grounds of the manner much of the material was gathered (via questionnaires sent to people at the colonial frontiers) and because it was often used to support theories of origins. Dixon's evaluation of the work of Fr Wilhelm Schmidt is also considerably more positive than Capell's.

The period from 1910 to 1960 Dixon (1980:16) refers to as the 'dark ages' of Aboriginal policy, which was accompanied by 'virtually no linguistic work'. Only Arthur Capell, he avers, was active during this period, which he dismisses in a paragraph. This period was characterised by widespread popular belief in a single Aboriginal language, and other than Capell's work Dixon mentions only the popular word books that began to appear in the 1930s (citing Kenyon 1930). This characterisation of these five decades has since been widely accepted by Australianists, and for this reason alone it is important to assess its validity. There are two grounds on which it can be criticised. First, as a number of contributions to this book attest, a good deal was actually going on in Australianist linguistics at the time, and Arthur Capell was by no stretch of the imagination alone (see especially Monaghan, this volume; Moore, this volume; Simpson, Amery and Gale, this volume; see also McGregor 2005, 2007; Nekes and Worms 2006). Second, the characterisation of the period as 'dark ages' of Aboriginal policy is not substantiated by any discussion of the policies of the times, which were by no means static during the half-century. Indeed, the period was marked by major shifts of policy and attitudes towards Aborigines, especially after World War II (see Retallack, McGroder, pers. comm.; Rowse 1998, 2005). In the absence of any characterisation of the policies of the period it is impossible to evaluate the suggested link to the linguistics of the era.

Dixon (1980:16) puts the beginning of serious intensive research to the years post-1960, heralded by Capell's A new approach to Australian linguistics (Capell 1956). The major institutional event he considers to have been the establishment of the first department of linguistics in an Australian university, Monash University, in 1965 (Dixon 1980:17). A number of linguistics departments emerged in the following decade or so, as did the first publication outlets in Australia specifically oriented to linguistics. The first was Pacific Linguistics, devoted to papers and books on languages of the Pacific region; its first books on Australian languages were published in 1967. A bit over a decade later came the Australian Journal of Linguistics (1981). Interest in Australian languages gradually intensified, and by the mid-1970s the standard of description of Australian languages began for the first time to measure up to world standards.

Barry Blake's history (1981:73-75) is much shorter, and effectively adopts a four period model, though the author does not actually speak of periods. Blake distinguishes the research
of the nineteenth century as amateur, characterising it primarily as recording of vocabularies, and the occasional brief grammar; he also remarks on the poor quality of the phonetic representation. E.M. Curr’s work (1886) is singled out as one of the major achievements of the century. The early twentieth century was characterised by a falling off in investigations, which did not reverse until the late 1930s with the work of Arthur Capell. The subsequent two decades saw a gradual increase in linguistic research. The early 1960s marked the beginning of a fourth period, with the establishment of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, and the explosion of linguistic investigations.

Two pages of the first volume of *Handbook of Australian languages*, co-edited by Barry Blake and Robert Dixon (*Dixon and Blake 1979:4–5*), sketch a history that closely resembles the story presented in more detail in the previous two works, with a few minor differences in focus. They speak of an early period of collecting vocabularies, culminating in Curr’s four-volume work; a few sketches of particular languages appeared in this period. Then came the lull in the first decade of the twentieth century, especially from 1912 to 1930. The 1930s saw the appearance of Arthur Capell and his surveys, and Theodore G.H. Strehlow’s work. As usual, the late 1950s and early 1960s is taken to be the watershed, with the beginning of extensive regional surveys and in-depth studies of particular languages; the role of academic institutions is highlighted. A new element in the story is the observation that the first decade or so following 1960 saw a considerable increase in quantity of research that was not always matched by a similar increase in quality.

A revision of this story appears in the fourth volume of the *Handbook* published some twelve years later (*Dixon and Blake 1991*); here the story is expanded to almost double its previous size, and includes mention of more players in the game. Most similar to Capell’s previously discussed history (1970), two periods are identified, albeit with an intervening hiatus of some two decades. The first period, an amateur period, ran from 1770 to about 1810 and was characterised entirely by educated amateurs whose work was phonetically poor. From the mid-1840s to the late 1870s, over Dixon and Blake, virtually no research was undertaken on Aboriginal languages. Characteristic of the work of the first period were methodologically unsound attempts at showing links to languages of other continents. The second period, the professional period, ran from 1930 to the present, with a gathering of momentum in the 1960s and 1970s. Compared to most other global histories, this one focuses more on what the authors consider to be significant linguistic characteristics or innovations—Capell’s notion of ‘common Australian’ and his prefixing-sufffixing typology; and the 1960s lexicostatistics of O’Grady’s, Warm, and Halle.

Two survey monographs have appeared to date in the third millennium, one dealing with the entire continent (*Dixon 2002*), the other focusing on the Kimberley (*McGregor 2004*). This surprisingly given the immense amount of research done on Australian languages since 1980, the apparent changes in Dixon’s views of the history (as represented in the introductions to the *Handbooks*), and the numerous active Australianists who began in the post-1980 era, Dixon asserts that his history of the study of Australian languages has ‘dated very little’ since his 1980 book (*Dixon 2002:xxvii*). Australian languages contain no discussion of the history of research on the languages, or ideas about them.

McGregor (2004:14–21) identifies three broad and overlapping phases of work on Kimberley languages. The phases can be summarised as follows. (The discussion is restricted to Kimberley languages, and ignores the contribution of linguists to the description of other languages.)

First was an early phase that extended from the late nineteenth century until about 1929, and was characterised primarily by the work of amateurs with little or no linguistic training. In this period, dominated by the collection of wordlists, Fr Alphonse Tachon’s grammar of Nuuymil (1885) stands out, as do the recordings of Fr Bischofs in 1910 (see McGregor 1998, 2000, and Ngapil Laurent’s recordings on Sunday Island (see Boström, this volume). Immediately following this was an intermediate phase, running from about 1930 to 1959; this was characterised by increasingly competent and trained investigators, and the appearance of the first academic investigators, A.P. Elkin, Gertrude Laves, and Arthur Capell. Strangely, the early years of this phase did not herald the appearance of detailed grammars; though noteworthy are Love’s sketch grammars of Worrora (Love 1931–1932, 1934, 1938), and brief grammatical sketches by Arthur Capell. The period might be reasonably characterised as survey-oriented. Notable surveys from the time include Capell’s report on his 1938–1939 field trip through the Kimberley and Arnhem Land (Capell 1940), and Nekes and Warm’s *Australian languages* (Nekes and Warm 1953, an edited version of which appeared in print some fifty-three years later, Nekes and Warm 2006).

Finally, McGregor (2004) identifies a modern phase—extending from 1960 to the present—characterised by the dominance of academically trained investigators. It is in this period that the first detailed grammars appeared, and interest in sociolinguistics and anthropological linguistics began to become manifest. Missionary linguists also appear in increasing numbers, and have more linguistic training than before.

### 2.1.2 Summing up

Table 1.1 presents in summary form the periods identified in each of the histories we have discussed, with the exception of the derivative one in Dixon and Blake (1979). One qualification that should be added is that it is not always possible to identify temporal periods in O’Grady’s history (O’Grady, Vogel and Vogel 1969).

It is clear from this tabulation that there is widespread agreement that 1930 and 1960—give or take a few years—represented major watershed in the development of Australian Aboriginal linguistics. Assumption of a three period model seems to be reasonable, and I adopt it in the remainder of the paper, referring to the periods as the first, second, and third periods; so also do a number of contributions in this book. It should be noted however that in identifying periods there is no implication of major paradigm shifts in the Kuhnian sense (Kuhn 1970); see also neutron (1987) and McGregor (2006). None of the histories identify radical changes in linguistic thought or theory from one period to the next, as allegedly happened in linguistic theory with the publication of Noam Chomsky’s first book (Chomsky 1957). The boundaries are generally taken (rightly, it seems to me) to be fuzzy: new ideas and approaches were adopted gradually, making their appearance in one period, and slowly becoming accepted standard by the early years of the next period.

Figure 1.1 provides a rude measure of the linguistic activity of each decade from 1770 to 2000. The exponential increase in publications post-1960 emerges clearly from the representation, and the increase is continuing, with 861 publications in the first five years of the new millennium. If this continues until the end of the decade, the figure will overreach the maximum value shown on the graph.

The second period is not revealed in this graph, partly perhaps because much of the work from that time was not published, but perhaps primarily because the period was characterised qualitatively as a transitional period, rather than quantitatively in terms of raw numbers of
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**Table 1.1: Comparison of the main accounts of the history of research on Australian languages**

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with the first European voyagers. He also discusses in considerable depth the contribution of the first colonists, missionaries, explorers and naturalists, settlers, and officials and others working under the state governments, such as protectors of Aborigines, and government sponsored missionaries. He also traces the effects of Darwin’s ideas on scholarly and popular ideas about Aboriginal languages.

As Newton (1987) rightly observes, the surveys mentioned previously in §2.1 are more chronological overviews than histories, and deal quite inadequately with the earliest treatments of Australian languages. Among other things, they typically make little attempt to come to any understanding of the goals and methodologies of the earlier researchers, and evaluate them purely from the perspective of the present. Nor do they show any real attempt to understand these investigators as human beings living lives in social milieus very different from those of the modern academic linguist. Probably this reflects, as Newton observes, a lack of genuine interest in the history of the subject—a situation that unfortunately appears to be changing.

In the second of these general works, Barry Alpher (1994) also distinguishes periods in the history of research on Australian languages. He puts the beginning of the modern period of descriptive studies at about 1960, marked by the appearance of Douglas (1964 [1937]) and Lowe (1960). These he considers to be the first works to really ‘crack’ the code of Australian languages. Prior to these treatments, research on Australian Aboriginal languages was principally the work of amateurs, sometimes gifted, punctuated by the occasional professional such as Gerhard Laves.

### 2.2 Local histories


In most cases these pieces amount to just a few pages, and do not purport to be historiographical works; rather, their purpose is manifestly to provide a backdrop for the modern grammar. In these brief pieces we find reference to previous investigators of the language, and their works. Time is generally the primary organizing principle, and for this reason these excursions could be considered to be histories—or at least chronologies. But they are always more than mere chronologies: there are always evaluative remarks on the merits or demerits of the earlier works, as seen from the perspective of contemporary linguistics (e.g. whether the author adopted a Latin model, whether phonemes or morphemes were recognised as descriptive units), and particularly from the perspective of the description of the particular language it is embedded in. Typically one finds remarks on the accuracy of the transcriptions; how good the work in question is as a piece of linguistics; and how useful it is to us today.

They are that is, generally more evaluative than the global histories discussed in §2.1.

These local histories do not attempt to locate the previous research in the context of linguistics and other relevant disciplines of the day—and they are not always free of anachro-
nisms—not do they provide the story of any investigator’s life and work. And unlike the global histories, they do not usually distinguish periods or phases in the research. There are occasional exceptions: for instance, Terrill (1998) distinguishes two periods of research on Biri. The first, from the 1890s to the 1940s, was characterised by wordlists gathered mainly by amateurs (but towards the end of the period also including some gathered by Gerhard Laves and Norma Tindale). The second period, dating from 1966, is dominated by trained linguists.

Sketches such as these account for almost all histories of research on particular languages. Few independent publications, either articles or books, exist which perhaps specialise and esoteric topics. One of the few exceptions is Tamsin Donaldson’s ‘Hearing the first Australians’ (Donaldson 1985), which discusses research on two languages of western New South Wales, Ngiyampaa and Wiradjuri. Like most local histories this one does not explicitly identify periods, although a number are easily discerned in the text: the earliest wordlists recorded by explorers in the first decades of the nineteenth century; the missionary wordlists and grammars of the 1830s and 1840s; then after some decades of hiatus, the ‘language collectors’ of the late nineteenth century (including E. Curr and R.H. Mathews) who gathered words from a wide range of languages including Ngiyampaa and Wiradjuri; and finally (after another hiatus of more than fifty years, during which just the odd word or two was collected) the beginning of serious work by trained linguists. The latter period, unfortunately, is barely touched upon. The regional focus of this piece permits a more comprehensive and detailed coverage of the topic than is possible for the global histories discussed in §2.1, which are roughly comparable in length. Donaldson also attempts to situate ideas about, and research on, the languages in their intellectual climate. Another exception is Simpson’s 1992 article on the Adelaide school grammar tradition from the mid-nineteenth century, mentioned in the previous section.

One wonders to what extent local and national histories are homologous: to what extent are national tendencies and traditions replicated in local ones, and how are both situated in respect to goings-on in linguistics in the rest of the world?

2.3 Personal histories: the contribution of individual scholars

A fairly diverse array of works can be assigned to this category, of more or less relevance to the history of research on Australian languages. These include biographies and biographical sketches, scholarly editions of the works of particular individuals, as well as works of a more directly historical nature. On the whole, the material in these categories constitutes secondary data for historical studies more than historical investigations per se. In what follows I cast a rather narrow net, and attempt to give an idea of the range of relevant material, rather than provide a comprehensive listing.

Relatively short biographies of linguists and others who have made a contribution to the study of Australian languages can be found in footnotes and bibliographies. Among the former one could mention the biographical sketch of Luise Hercus by Isobel White (1990), my biography of Howard Coste (1996a), and Wurm’s (1997) and Tryon and Walsh’s (1997) biographical notes on Geoffrey O’Grady. Worth singling out is Tamsin Donaldson’s ‘Patakiwarparanyupwam in western New South Wales’ (Donaldson 1990), which presents recollections of Luise Hercus as fieldworker in western New South Wales by three Ngiyampaa people

Hercus worked with, Mamie King, Eliza Kennedy, and Murid Harris. Somewhat similar is Helen Harper’s overview (2007) of the legacy of Terry Crowley’s work on the languages of Cape York Peninsula, which compiles and presents the views of descendants of the speakers Crowley worked with in 1975.

Examples of works in the second category are Arthur Capell’s obituary of Ernest A. Worms (1964), Arthur Holmer’s obituary of Nils Holmer (1994), David Nash’s obituary of Gerhard Laves (1993), obituaries of Stephen Wurm (Hercus et al. 2001; Pawley 2002), and numerous obituaries of Ken Hale (Dixon 2004; Everett et al. 2002; Keyser 2003; Laingren 2001; Nash 2001b; Yengoyan 2003) and Terry Crowley (Evans 2005; Lynch 2005; Siegel 2005; Walsh 2005). Works such as these, as one would expect, tend to focus on details of personal life-history, the individual’s experiences in and away from the field, and to lack somewhat in terms of depth of discussion and critical appraisal of their linguistic work. Other article-length pieces are scattered widely throughout journals and edited books (see below). Among these one might mention the brief edited transcript of an interview with Arthur Capell on his work on Australian languages (Newton 1982), an evaluation of T.G.H. Strehlow’s writing of Arrernte (Breu 2004), and examinations of R.H. Mathews’ ethnographic and linguistic research (Thomas 2004, forthcoming).

Longer, book-length treatments exist of the lives and work of just a few Australian linguists. Schumann (1987) is a biography of Ulum Schürmann that affords interesting insights into Schürmann’s interaction with Aborigines of south eastern South Australia, and learning the language. McNally (1981) and Hill (2002) are biographies of the controversial T.G.H. Strehlow (1908–1978). While in some ways more critical than the shorter pieces just referred to, their treatment of Strehlow’s linguistics is quite shallow; see Moore, this volume for a more detailed appraisal of Strehlow’s linguistic research. Moreover, Barry Hill has a tendency to beat up the controversy surrounding T.G.H. Strehlow, and allows himself a considerable degree of poetic licence in his presentation and the evidence he presents; Hill (2002) is thus a less than reliable secondary source. T.G.H. Strehlow’s autobiographical Journey to Horsehoe Bend (1969), while dealing with the final days of his father’s life, provides fascinating insights into the author, his early life, his relationships with Arrernte people, and his aspirations to become a linguist. Dixon’s well-known Searching for Aboriginal Languages: memoirs of a field worker (1983, reissued in 1989 by Chicago University Press) is a popularised autobiographical account of R.M.W. Dixon’s entry to the field of Australian Aboriginal linguistics, and his fieldwork on the languages of the rainforests of north Queensland.

One should also mention in this context James R.B. Love’s Stone age bushmen of today (1936). In this book Love—a gifted amateur linguist, who wrote the first grammatical description of Worrora (see §2.1; McGregor 1986)—presents a popular ethnography of the Worrora woven into an account of his experiences as a missionary at Kunmyna mission. As the story unfolds one gets a clear picture of Love as a human being, and his relationships with the Worrora people; language plays a fairly prominent role in the account, and one chapter deals with his experiences in learning Worrora (Love 1936:41–50). Moira Burgess’s BA (Hons.) thesis (1986) presents an evaluation of Love’s contribution to Aboriginal anthropology and linguistics, focussing on his thirteen years at Kunmyna, 1927–1940. Burgess is not a linguist, and her evaluation of Love’s linguistic work is largely based on opinions of contemporary and modern linguists. While this evaluation is rather restricted from the linguistic
perspective, Burgess is successful in contextualising Love's work in its times, in relating it to missionary and academic linguistics of the 1930s and 1940s.

David Trudinger's exemplary PhD thesis *Converting salvation: protestant missionaries in Central Australia, 1930s-1940s* (Trudinger 2004) also deals with the work of J.R.B. Love, though it focuses on his period at Emuella (Central Australia), 1941-1946. This work is concerned more with the discourse and praxis of missionaries in Central Australia in the 1930s and 1940s than with the linguistic or ethnographic contribution of the missionaries. Nevertheless, it provides some fascinating insights into Love's thought on language and culture, as well as that of other missionaries, including Ronald M. Trudinger, who published the first grammatical sketch of a Western Desert variety (Trudinger 1943). One of the especially interesting aspects of this thesis is the insight it provides into Love's and Trudinger's attitudes to the use of the traditional language in relation to the conflicting discourses of missionary, evangelist, and modernisation (Trudinger 2004:286-289).

The recent festschrift *Forty years on: Ken Hale and Australian languages* (Simpson et al. 2001) is unusual in the extent to which Ken Hale's contribution permeates the papers. Indeed, the book is almost as much an examination of Hale's influence on Australian Aboriginal linguistics since 1959 and on linguistic theory generally as a festschrift. Hale's support of Aboriginal participation in linguistic research (see Hale 1965) is also dealt with (Green and Turpin 2001; Young 2001; Granites and Laughren 2001), as is his encouragement of speakers to maintain their languages. Aside from the expected bibliography of Hale's writings (Nash 2001a), there are papers treating aspects of Hale's fieldwork (e.g. S. Hale 2001; Sax's reminiscences of Hale's first fieldtrip to Australia; Green 2001; an edited version of an interview with Ken Hale on the same fieldtrip); O'Grady 2001 (Geoff O'Grady's reflections on their renown 1960 fieldtrip); Nash and O'Grady 2001 (cataloguing the vocabularies gathered in the 1960 fieldtrip); Wurm 2001 (Stephen Wurm's reminiscences of working on Mornington Island with Hale); contextualisation of Hale's work in the situation of Australian Aboriginal linguistics (e.g. Sharpe 2001); appreciations of Hale as a person and scholar (including Young 2001; Sutton 2001); and further investigations based on Hale's corpus (e.g. Koch 2001). Three contributions in this book deal with issues in the history of Aboriginal language education, in which Hale played a role. Hoogenaar (2001) gives a critical historical overview of bilingual education in Central Australia. Black and Green (2001) provides an overview of the history of the School of Australian Linguistics. And Sharp and Thieberger (2001) outline the history of Wangka Maya, the Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre, Port Hedland.

Edited versions and collections of the scholarly works of particular individuals are also relevant, though for Australianist linguistics these number considerably fewer than for anthropologists, and are sometimes lacking in terms of the contextualisation they provide. Thus the recent reissue of James R.B. Love's MA thesis (1934) on Worrorra grammar (Love 2000) is no more than a reprint. 15 Lacking an appraisal of Love's work, and with virtually no editorial intervention in the text, this does a considerable disservice to an important and insightful missionary grammar from the second period of research on Australian languages (see §2.1 above). Niel Gunson's scholarly edition of the published works of Lancelot Threlkeld (Gunson 1974) is considerably better in providing contextualising information. However, it includes only Threlkeld's ethnographic writings, not his linguistic works. In press as of the time of making the final revisions to this introductory piece is Martin Thomas' edition of a selection of R.H. Mathews' voluminous ethnographic and linguistic publications and correspondence (Thomas 2007). This work provides an appraisal and interpretation of Mathews' work, as well as a biography.

The present author recently completed the major enterprise of revising and editing Frs. Herman Nekes and Ernest Worms' monumental *Australian languages* (1953) for publication as a book. This work originally appeared in microfilm form, as the tenth volume in the series *Micro-Bibliotheca Antiquaria*, and is not easily accessible. The main value of this major achievement of missionary linguistics of the second period (see §2.1) lies in the documentation it provides of a number of now moribund Nyulnyulan languages, as well as a scattering of languages from elsewhere on the continent. From today's perspective it is of considerably less value as a piece of language description. The revision of the book, Nekes and Worms (2006), can be regarded as documentation of their language documentation and description, and an appraisal of the contribution of the two priests (see further McGregor 2007). It contains an editorial introduction that outlines the lives and achievements of the authors and attempts to place their work in its historical context; it also attempts to understand the authors' guiding ideas about language and society. In these senses it is in part a work on the history of ideas. The remainder of the book consists of a revision of the authors' text of Parts I and V, their grammatical description and sample texts. The editor attempts to be level-headed in his treatment of the work, being neither dismissive nor eulogistic; he does not shy away from criticism where it is due, nor from giving credit where it is due. McGregor (2005) deals specifically with the dictionaries of Parts II to IV (see also next section).

Aside from hard-copy publication, mention may be made of web sites as repositories of information on Australianists. A notable example is the Gerhardt Laves site [http://www.anu.edu.au/linguistics/nash/aust/laves](http://www.anu.edu.au/linguistics/nash/aust/laves) managed by David Nash. This site presents biographical information on Laves, as well as indication of the range and depth of his corpus, excerpts from his written notes, the use made of his materials by modern scholars, and so forth. Also informative is the Norman B. Tindale site [http://www.nrmuseum.sso.gov.au/archives/hmcs/338/tindale.html](http://www.nrmuseum.sso.gov.au/archives/hmcs/338/tindale.html), managed by the South Australian Museum; this provides detailed biographical information on Tindale, and detailed descriptions of the contents of the archive of Tindale's materials, which include short vocabularies of nearly 150 language varieties. Less informative is the homepage of the Streloch Research Centre [http://www.nt.gov.au/nrec/museums/strehlow/index.html](http://www.nt.gov.au/nrec/museums/strehlow/index.html), though it does provide some idea of the holdings in the extensive Streloch archive.

### 2.4 Historical treatments of particular themes

Four themes in Australian Aboriginal languages and linguistics have received treatment in article-length or longer historical pieces: language documentation by Aboriginal people, missionary linguistics, lexicography, and language classification. 16 These, and other themes are of course dealt with in national, regional, local, and personal histories. Here I restrict attention to contributions focussing on the topics, occasionally mentioning shorter and non-specific treatments where they provide information useful for contextualising the more detailed studies, especially where they express historical notions widespread in the Australianist community.

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14 It seems that J.R.B. Love had already prepared a 'rudimentary grammar and vocabulary' of the language (Trudinger 2004:259; see also Simpson, Amery and Gale, this volume), which may have served as a foundation or model for Trudinger's sketch.

15 In the early 1960s I began to prepare a critical edition of Love's MA thesis, intended initially for my thesis, with the result that for Howard Cooles (McGregor 1994b). However, it was not completed in time to meet the deadline for the festschrift, and remains in manuscript form, in a half-finished state.

16 The history of the emergence and use of the notion of the 'phoneme' in Australian: Aboriginal Linguistics is discussed in a conference presentation, as yet unpublished (McGregor 2006a).
Oates (1990) is one of the few works documenting research by Aboriginal people on their languages; in this case, the recordings by two men, Jimmie Barker (1900–1972) and Norman Baird (c. 1891–1961), of their traditional languages, Murrurwari and Kaku Yapeaker. In contrast, with the personal histories discussed in the previous section, little is said about the lives of these men (though see Matthews 1968 for a biography of Jimmie Barker), and the focus is on the nature and quality of the documentation they provided. Much of the article consists of a discussion of Baird’s orthography. Barker and Baird were acquainted with Lynette Oates; other Aboriginal people have also initiated language documentation projects with the intention of preserving their languages, and the stories of these attempts need to be told.

The history of lexicographical investigations of Australian languages, principally the history of the compilation of wordlists and dictionaries, is the subject of just two articles. The first is O’Grady (1971), which deals with work up to the late 1960s. O’Grady gives a detailed overview of the lexicological work done during the period since first contact, and discusses the content and organization of some representative works; he also remarks on some aspects of Australian languages that posed problems for early lexicographers, including phonetic and phonemic distinctions, as well as grammatical (the type of grammatical information to include) and semantic (identification of the range of referents and senses of lexemes and specification of definitions) issues. O’Grady (1971) distinguishes between wordlists (consisting of less than 1,000 items) and dictionaries (with more than 1,000 lexical entries), and remarks that just 8 had been published up to the late 1960s, including Australia and Torres Strait Islands.

Of these, half appeared in the nineteenth century, the other half in the twentieth. O’Grady also remarks he was aware of forty-eight unpublished dictionaries, all produced during the twentieth century. An interesting suggestion is the idea that a motivation for interest in gathering wordlists in the nineteenth century—often by amateurs with fairly limited contact with the languages—was the widespread interest in the origins of Australian Aborigines (O’Grady 1971:780). O’Grady also remarks on one aspect of Ken Hale’s fieldwork methodology relevant to lexicographers, namely the solicitation of sentences illustrating prompt lexemes, which often resulted in the appearance of new lexemes.

O’Grady considers the late 1930s as a turning point, the beginning of a new era in Australian linguistics (1971:783). This was inaugurated by Arthur Capell’s first field investigations of languages of the Kimberley and Arnhem Land. Capell compiled relatively extensive dictionaries of some of these languages, though unfortunately none have ever been published.

A quarter of a century passed before the appearance of the next publication on this topic, Goddard and Thibeberger (1997), which updates the story by treating the period from 1968 to 1993. Cliff Goddard and Nick Thibeberger identify the mid-1960s to mid-1970s, in the middle of which period O’Grady’s article appeared, as something of a turning point in Aboriginal linguistics. It saw changes in the universities (especially the emergence of departments of linguistics), in society, and in policies concerning Aborigines, that led to increasing interest in the compilation of dictionaries (understood as consisting of more than 2,000 entries, with detailed semantic information). Lexicographic work, that is, came to be motivated not just for academic and strictly documentary purposes, but also for practical purposes including education. It was not until the 1980s, however, that such dictionaries were published in reasonable numbers; of the seventeen dictionaries they list for the post-1968 period, fully eleven (65%) appeared in the 1990s—dating to the first four years of the decade. (This of course reflects lexicographic research beginning in the 1980s or earlier.) Goddard and Thibeberger (1997) discuss various issues in lexicographical practice, updating the discussion provided in O’Grady (1971). These include orthography (moving beyond the ideal of phonemic orthographies presumed by O’Grady 1971), organization, and definitional practices.

Three other developments from this period are worth remarking on. One was the advent of the personal computer, and resulting in the computerisation of the field, which (among other things) greatly facilitated production of dictionaries from data files (Goddard and Thibeberger 1997:181–185). Another was the increasing role of Aboriginal people in compiling dictionaries and writing definitions (Goddard and Thibeberger 1997:181). A third was the emergence in the early 1980s of institutions supporting linguistic work of all types financially and/or logistically (see pp. 8, 9, above).

While neither article identifies periods in the history of lexicographical research on Australian languages, it is worth observing that the two turning points identified—the late 1930s (O’Grady 1971) and the late 1960s to early 1970s (Goddard and Thibeberger 1997)—correspond reasonably well with the beginnings of the second and third periods identified in §2.1. Lexicography perhaps followed the same trends in development as Australian Aboriginal linguistics generally, though it lagged behind by about a decade.

Another work dealing with the topic is McGregor (2005), which deals specifically with the lexicographical research of Fra. Hermann Nekes and Ernst Worms, who collaborated in the 1930s and 1940s on investigations of Kimberley languages (see previous section). A substantial—not to say perhaps the most valuable from today’s perspective—portion of their magnum opus (775 of the 1067 pages—almost three-quarters of the work) is lexicographical in nature; the grammatical description fills a paltry 160 pages. This article attempts to situate the author’s wordlists in the historical context, and evaluate their contribution to the documentation of Australian languages.

Historical information on the classification of Australian languages can be found in some of the general works mentioned in §2.1. Thus O’Grady, Voegelin and Voegelin (1966:6, 8–13), Wurm (1972:22, 96), and Dixon (1980:20–22, 220–228) contain a few remarks on earlier attempts at classification, as does Alpher (1994). These can, however, hardly be called histories of attempts at classification. Nor can the similarly brief pieces appearing in articles and books presenting classifications of Australian languages, such as Wurm (1971), and Evans (2003a). The third section of Capell’s history of research on Australian Aboriginal languages, ‘Research into language classification and linguistic history’ (Capell 1970:700–715) is a somewhat more comprehensive piece, organised thematically according to type of classification.

The most comprehensive treatment is Koch (2004), which focuses on the methodologies employed for establishing genetic groupings more than on the proposed groupings. It is restricted to twentieth century classifications, focusing on four approaches, discussing them in detail and evaluating them: Fr Wilhelm Schmidt’s classification (1919), the first major attempt at classifying the languages of the continent; Arthur Capell’s typological classification (moored in his first article on Australian languages, Capell 1927, though the scheme underwent changes over time); the lexicostatistical classification of the 1960s (e.g. O’Grady, Voegelin, and Voegelin 1966); and finally R.M.W. Dixon’s views on classification (e.g. Dixon 1980, 2002).

Remarks on missionary linguists and linguistics are scattered throughout the Australianist literature, in the brief histories of work on particular languages published in grammars and...
other biographical works, and in the national histories. However, Carey (2004) is one of the few publications to date that deals specifically with missionary linguistics in Australia. This paper is also unusual in being one of the few contributions to the history of the subject written by a professional historian rather than by a linguist. Dealing with Australian missionary linguistics from the early to mid-nineteenth century, it situates missionary linguistics in the social and intellectual background of the time, as well as in relation to other work on Australian languages, to the situations of the languages and their speakers, and to missionary linguistics generally. As Hilary Carey observes, for some now moribund languages of eastern Australia missionary grammars represent the most primary if not best documented. Carey remarks on the consistent failure of missionaries to both document languages, and preserve them—despite in some instances efforts or ideals to the contrary—and suggests some possible reasons (see also Trudinger 2004). She also comments on the treatment of missionary linguistics by linguists and other academic investigators, ranging from dismissal to denigration. Few indeed are the accounts that give missionary linguistics the advantage of a fair and even-handed scholarly appraisal.

Although a number of missionary linguist figures in Carey's story, the article pays particular attention to the work of one rightly famous missionary linguist, Lancelot Threlkeld, who wrote what is widely regarded as one of the best nineteenth century descriptions of an Australian language (Threlkeld 1834). Threlkeld is noted for setting a standard for missionary linguistics, and the creative descriptive approach he adopted, the extent to which he grappled with descriptive difficulties posed by Awabakal. We lack a comparable treatment of missionary linguistics post-1850.

Another important work on the missionary contribution to knowledge about Australian languages is the previously mentioned unpublished MA thesis by Peter Newton, which devotes two full chapters to missions from 1788 to 1860, i.e. roughly the same time period as dealt with by Carey (Newton 1957:131-218). Newton's treatment is somewhat more comprehensive than Carey's, dealing with virtually all missions and missionaries of the period, regardless of how minor their contribution, and their social and linguistic backgrounds.

Heidi-Marie Kneebone's recent PhD thesis, The language of the chosen few (2005) also stresses the significance of the contribution of missionaries. She treats in detail the documentation and description of Diyari by Lutheran missionaries at Hermannsburg mission, South Australia, from 1867 to 1880. Among other things, Kneebone discusses a number of previously unexamined primary sources, including the first grammatical description of the language and early examples of indigenous writing. Like most others working in this domain, Kneebone is also motivated by practical considerations, in particular to make the contribution of the early missionaries accessible to descendants of Diyari speakers.

Other than these detailed treatments, which focus on missionary linguistics of the nineteenth century, one finds a few articles outlining the contributions of particular missionaries—e.g. McGregor (2000) mentioned above. McGregor (2006b) treats missionary linguistics in the Kimberley region generally, whereas, in 1890. Also relevant to the topic of missionary linguistics is Lynette Oates' brief history of the involvement of the Summer Institute of Linguistics in research on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages (Oates 1999), and her book-length autobiography of the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Australia (Oates 2003). And John Harris' (1990) overview of two centuries of missionary work in Australia contains a good deal on work by missionaries on Aboriginal languages, in particular, on translation.

3. The papers in this volume

Figure 3.2 provides an overview of the contributions to the volume, and depicts the time frame each treat.

The papers are divided into three thematic parts. Part 1 consists of three contributions dealing with the history of research on particular languages or regions. In the first paper Peter Austin describes research on the now moribund northern New South Wales language Gamilaraay. In the second paper Claire Bowern documents research on two closely related Nyulnyul languages, Bardi (highly endangered) and Jawu (effectively extinct). Research on these two languages shows some unusual features. For Gamilaraay, as Austin observes, little research has been carried out by amateurs during the twentieth century by professional linguists, most investigations having been carried out by amateurs during the nineteenth century. By contrast, Bardi is notable for the number of professional linguists who worked on it from the late 1920s; yet no reference to Bardi has yet appeared (although Bowern is currently in the process of preparing one).

Both Austin and Bowern describe the efforts in recent years by Gamilaraay and Bardi people to document and revive their languages.

The third paper in Part 1, by Jane Simpson, Rob Amery and Mary-Anne Gale, documents in detail the close to two centuries of research on South Australian languages. Their history agrees well with the three period model proposed in §2.1.5. and the period 1930 to 1950 emerges as an active one in documentation of South Australian languages. Detailed treatment is provided of a range of topics, both descriptive and applied, and the article concludes with a discussion of current research, commenting on indigenous and community directed research, and directions for future research.

The ten papers of Part 2 focus on the contributions of particular individuals. The first paper, by Mathias Boström, documents the contribution of the Swedish ethnographer Ynge Laurell, who, in 1910, compiled brief wordlists of a few Kimberley languages, and made some of the earliest sound recordings, including a recording of a brief conversation. Boström situates Laurell's work in the context of Swedish and international ethnography and academic concerns, and explores Laurell's representation and use of Aboriginals as revealed by his writings and ethnographic collections.

Lynette Oates' contribution is an autobiographical account of her entry into the Australianist field in the early 1960s, and her work on moribund languages of the south-east coast of the continent. She provides a passionate account of the fieldwork situation in the region in those days, when Aboriginal languages were far wider managed by whites, and Aboriginal people made to feel ashamed of them. Oates concludes with comments on recording of songs, and their linguistic and anthropological significance in language endangerment situations, not to say their status amongst last speakers as significant cultural artefacts.

Harold Koch's contribution treats the work of R.H. Mathews, who, at the turn of the twentieth century, recorded and published basic information on many languages, mainly from the east and south east of the continent. Koch discusses the general schema Mathews' descriptions follow, the tension between the data and the traditional system of grammatical description, and the strategies Mathews adopted to deal with problematic data that did not fit the mould.

William McGregor and Matti Miestamo discuss the work of Nils M. Holmer, the only linguist from a Scandinavian country to do first-hand research on an Australian language. Holmer's fieldwork centred on the eastern part of the continent, where he gathered basic information on some thirty different language varieties from the Torres Strait Islands to the north coast of New South Wales (NSW), many now moribund. McGregor and Miestamo dis-
cuss Holmer’s published works, and conclude that the main value lies in their documentation of some of the more endangered languages.

Paul Monaghan treats Norman Tindale’s contribution to the documentation of Pijinajtjarjara. From his first fieldtrip in the early 1920s, Tindale gathered vocabularies of the language he came into contact with, primarily for the purpose of tribal identification and validation. His Pijinajtjarjara vocabulary, based mainly on his own primary sources from the early 1930s, comprises almost three thousand headwords, representing ten different varieties of the Western Desert language. Monaghan links Tindale’s research with the then dominant discourses of racial purity and corruption, the most relevant aspect of which was the equation of racial purity with linguistic purity.

The next two papers are by David Moore, and deal respectively with T.G.H. Strehlow, and George F. Moore’s 1842 A descriptive vocabulary of the language in common use amongst the natives of Western Australia. Despite the fact that T.G.H. Strehlow published in 1844, what was then one of the most comprehensive grammars of an Australia language, his grammar of Arrente (Strehlow 1944), his contribution has in recent years been either ignored or denigrated. Moore attempts to set the record straight by reassessing Strehlow’s contribution fairly, while not being eulogistic, and eschewing anachronistic interpretations. Moore suggests that some aspects of Strehlow’s grammatical description were motivated by a wish to show that the language was a fully functional one, in no way inferior to European languages, which could lead to dominant views of the day. Another important aspect of Strehlow’s work was his focus on the collection of texts, in particular of song texts, on which he published a major work (Strehlow 1971). Moore (1842) is one of just four dictionaries (according to O’Grady 1971—see §2.4 above) of an Australian language to be published in the nineteenth century. This work is described in detail in David Moore’s second contribution, which also discusses its formation as a collaborative enterprise involving various investigators who contributed throughout the 1830s.

The final paper in Part 2, by Nick Thiebarger, deals with the work of the maverick Carl von Brandenstein. Just a few years younger than Nils Holmer (see above), von Brandenstein began working on Australian languages at the beginning of the modern period, when he was over fifty years of age; for the next thirty years he worked on languages of the southern half of Western Australia. Thiebarger suggests that many aspects of von Brandenstein’s approach fit better with nineteenth century linguistics than with modern linguistics, and tells an instructive story of some of von Brandenstein’s conflicts with the linguistic establishment, and his courage and stubbornness to continue regardless of the fashion of the times.

The six papers of Part 3 deal with the history of particular topics in Australianist linguistics. Together they deal with a fair range of time periods, regions, languages, and themes. This part begins with a paper by Rob Amery and Mary-Anne Gale on the history of language revival in Australia. Amery and Gale provide a comprehensive overview of formal revival efforts for morpho-languages of the eastern states, and document official policies relating to language revival, as well as the efforts of community and region-based institutions that have arisen since the 1980s. Three programs are discussed as case studies: Gumbaynggir revival on the north coast of NSW; Kaurna reclamation in Adelaide; and Ngarrindjeri revivals in southern South Australia.

In the next paper Adam Kendon treats the history of investigation of sign languages in Australia, updating and expanding the history in his monograph (Kendon 1988). He traces observations on the Aboriginal sign languages from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Significant is the work done around the turn of the twentieth century by W.E. Roth, A.W. Howitt, Baldwin Spencer and Francis Gillen. From them until about 1970 early brief treat-
ments of sign languages appeared; in modern times Kendon himself emerges as the main player in the field.

In the third paper, McGregor attempts to piece together the story of fieldwork on languages of the Kimberley, covering the period from initial colonisation in the late nineteenth century to the present. This article identifies changes to fieldwork as a social practice, methodological changes in fieldwork practices—in particular in the character of elicitation—with the increasing professionalisation of the field; and technological changes and their affects on fieldwork practice.

Peter Mithun tells the story of research on pidgins and creoles in Australia. He observes that comprehensive descriptions of Australian varieties only began to appear after 1970; this he attributes to concerns of linguistic purity (the previous remarks on Monaghan’s article). Investigations of pidgins and creoles intensified in the 1980s and 1990s, with descriptive, sociolinguistic, and educational work being undertaken; this research compares favourably with contemporary research elsewhere in the world. Things have continued relatively unchanged into the present decade, studies of pidgins and creoles remaining fairly marginal to mainstream Australian Aboriginal linguistics.

Fritz Schweiger’s contribution deals with Fr Wilhelm Schmidt’s monograph on personal pronouns, Die Personennomen in den australischen Sprachen, published in the same year as Die Gliederung der australischen Sprachen. Schweiger gives a detailed account of the contents of Die Personennomen, focusing on Schmidt’s criteria for classification. Schmidt also remarked on regularities in the construction of pronominal forms, touched on regularities in the structure of case forms, and noticed the importance of borrowing. Interestingly, despite groupings of Cape York languages with languages of Arnhem Land and the Kimberley, Schmidt perceived that the pronominal forms of Cape York languages are reminiscent of the southern languages.

The final paper, by Davids Wilkins and Nash, deals with the findings of an early expedition that was universally regarded as a failure. This expedition was into the Sydney hinterland in 1791, led by Governor Phillip. Although it did not achieve the anticipated geographical findings, encounters with Aborigines led to important new understandings of the language situation. In particular, it became evident that the continent was home to a number of mutually unintelligible languages, and that many individuals were multilingual. Other important linguistic and ethnographic observations were made during the course of this expedition, that are drawn out and discussed by Wilkins and Nash.

To conclude this overview, three general observations are in order. First, as already remarked, the period from about 1930 to 1960 is accorded relatively good coverage in this book, and the widespread belief that it was a period of virtually no activity in Aboriginal linguistics (see §2.1.1 above) is amply refuted. Second, a significant feature of the papers is the attention they pay to detail: they focus on particular investigators, languages, or topics, and deal with them in depth. Third, it is not just the work of most notable or dominant linguists of the era that is dealt with, but the contributions of rank-and-file Australianist and the non-conformists. In fact, it might reasonably be objected that the word ‘just’ should be excised from the previous sentence: the institutionally and intellectually dominant figures from each period are mentioned only in passing in this book. I have two responses to potential criticisms arising from this. To begin with, someone has to write the piece, and if (as was in fact the case) no contribution was forthcoming, an editor is left with the options of either curtailing the project altogether or for the foreseeable future, or proceeding with what is available. I have opted for the latter course in the firm belief that the stories of the dominant figures are not that important. For another thing, in case of living individuals I would argue that a suitably dispassionate history is impossible.

4. Conclusion

In this introductory chapter I have attempted to sketch an overview of works treating the history of Australian Aboriginal linguistics. This provides a context for the contributions in the present book, a number of which present new stories, or new appraisals of old stories. Some cherished views about the history of the field have been shown to be false, or at least highly dubious.

Australianist linguists have tended, like linguists generally, to show somewhat less interest in the history of their subject than have their anthropologist and archaeologist colleagues. This may stem from a fear of complicating or detracting from their scholarship. But those concerns have, as we have noted, been unfounded. The case seems to go for historians and biographers, who, with very few exceptions, have rarely chosen linguists or languages as subjects of their investigations. As revealed by the contributions to this book, there is a sign of signs, that linguists are beginning to see the relevance of the history of their subject beyond the more conventionalising of their own work. And historians are also beginning to show interest in the history of Aboriginal linguistics. This book attempts to take an initial step in meeting the challenge of developing a ‘planned historical historiography in Australia’ (Newton 1987:7).

Much, of course, remains to be done. To wind up the paper I make a few suggestions concerning prospects for the historiography of Australianist linguistics, remarking on what I consider to be some of the most important themes demanding attention. This list does not pretend to be complete.

Most obviously, there is much scope for in-depth historical investigations of research on particular languages, and by particular individuals, only a small selection of which are treated or even mentioned in this volume. We also need to know more about the linguistic theories and traditions investigators worked in, and how these shaped the study of Aboriginal languages, including the recording of primary information; vice versa, the impact of description of the Australian languages on linguistic theories needs to be explored. The two dominant traditions of the second period required thorough treatment, the Sydney and Adelaide schools; although the latter is touched on in the papers by Simpson, Amery and Gate, Monaghan, and Moore in this volume, we are a long way from understanding either school, or the relations between them.

The context of Australianist linguistics demands much more attention, including its links with international developments in linguistics, with Aboriginal and international anthropological, archaeology, history, and history and philosophy of science (including linguistics). Also important is the development of a theorised historical account of Aboriginalist linguistics, that adequately links the subject to dominant social ideologies and politics, including colonialism and post-colonialism and their discourses (see e.g. Errington 2001; Zwartjes and Hovehaugen 2004, 2005). Except for the works by a few historians (e.g. Jones 1996, 2000; Carey 2004; Trudinger 2004) the relation between colonialism and linguistic thought has barely been touched upon in histories of Australian Aboriginal linguistics.

The role of organisations devoted to Aboriginal issues such as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, the Summer Institute of Linguistics, the School for American Research, the National Centre for the Languages of Australia, the National Centre for Contextualising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research, and others have also been under represented.

18 The reasons for this are not clear to me. It cannot be simply because the subject matters of anthropology and archaeology are less accessible (a period of recent journal articles would seem to suggest otherwise); and after all, there are innumerable histories—many popular—of the most obscure subject of all, mathematics.
of Australian Linguistics, and the many language centres now in existence, needs to be explored critically.

The content and methods of Australian Aboriginal linguistics also demand attention. There is a need to know more about how phenomena such as grammatical relations, pronouns, categories, prepositions, compound verb constructions, complex sentence constructions, and ergativity have been dealt with over time, and how and why notions such as the phoneme and morpheme became entrenched in the beginning of the third period of research, but failed to do so in the second period. Perhaps more interesting than the history of lexicographical research remarked on in $\S 2.4$ is the history of semantic studies of Aboriginal languages. While we have some works treating the history of classifications of Aboriginal languages, these are language-internal, and fail to draw much on wider notions of the human prehistory of the continent, and how the latter ideas impact on the systems of the linguistic past.

The rise and development of ethnolinguistic research remains to be investigated in Australianist linguistics, and in relation to Australian Aboriginal studies generally. And finally, as hinted at various points above, the role of speakers of Aboriginal languages in the development of Australian Aboriginal linguistics has barely been touched upon; nor do we have a good idea of Aboriginal views of research on their languages, or how these views have changed over time.

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**Part 1:**

*Investigations of particular languages and regions*