

Miegunyah: From bark huts to grand houses and a Fiji cane farm

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Abstract

Indigenous loanwords comprise an important component of the lexicons of the Englishes of former British colonies. Often these words are used as place-names, which are in turn transported across the country with little knowledge of their origin or meaning. In this article we trace the adoption of *gunyah* into Australian English, and its use in the house name and toponym *Miegunyah* / *Meigunyah* / *Mygunyah*, extending to a sugarcane plantation near Nadi, on Vitilevu, Fiji.

Key words: gunyah; house name; toponym; Nadi plantation name; loanwords

1. Introduction

One of the characteristics of European languages spoken in their former colonies is their stock of loanwords—words and place-names transferred from local Indigenous languages into the colonial language. Naturally, English spoken in British colonies also absorbed local Indigenous words and place-names—a subject much written about for more than 100 years (e.g. Anderson 1946; Bellet 1995; Bright 2004; Calude, Miller & Pagel 2020; Chamberlain 1902; Cooper 1952; Cutler 1994; Hercus, Hodges & Simpson 2002; Leitner 2000; Macalister 2005, 2006; Ramson 1964; Tent & Geraghty 2004; Thieberger & McGregor 1994; *inter alia*). Often, these loanwords are not understood by speakers of other regional varieties of English, and are regularly used to express national identity. Some have also become nativized and so familiar that their Indigenous origin has become obscured, either due to their anglicized spellings (often because of ignorance of Indigenous sound systems), heavily anglicized pronunciations, or their having undergone semantic shifts and extensions.

In this article we discuss one such loanword, *gunyah*, which has not only become part of the general Australian English lexicon but has also been employed in toponyms. We trace the origin of *gunyah*, and its subsequent use in the toponyms *Miegunyah*, *Meigunyah*, and *Mygunyah* both in Australia and Fiji.

2. *Gunyah*

The term *gunyah* was first recorded in two notebooks of 1790–91 on the grammar and vocabulary of the Dharuk language of Sydney.¹ The first was compiled by William Dawes (Dawes 1790–91b:29) and contains the term *gonyé* ‘house’. The second (Anon. Notebook C, [1790]), contains:

<i>Maugoniera</i>	‘at his house’ (p.3)
<i>mau_gon_yai_ra</i>	‘at his house’ (p.17)
<i>Gong_ye_ra</i> (the a as in father)	‘in the house’ (p.17)
<i>Gong_yea_go</i>	‘large house’ (p.18)
<i>Gon_ye</i> (or) <i>Go_niee</i>	‘a Hut’ (p.26)

¹ Steele (2005) refers to the language as *Biyal-Biyal* and distinguishes it from Dharuk, whilst acknowledging the two languages are closely related. The name *Dharuk* is often rendered as *Dharug*, sometimes *Dharrook*, *Dharruk*, and *Darug*. Linguists have also referred to the language as *Eora*. These names are all European creations. Troy (1994b:[1]) claims: ‘None of the early records provide any indication of the name the people gave their language nor of a word for “language”.’ She calls the language the ‘Sydney Language’ and notes that the records indicate there were at least two dialectal varieties.

Troy (1992:155–56; 1994b:[5]) argues that the anonymous notebook was compiled by several authors because there are at least three different handwriting styles (including both ‘rough’ and ‘fair’ scripts). One of the hands appears to be Governor Arthur Phillip’s rough hand, whilst the other two suggest the hands of David Collins and John Hunter. Navy lieutenant, and later third Governor of NSW, Philip Gidley King, copied these wordlists and took them to London in 1790 where they were published in John Hunter’s *An Historical Journal of the Transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island...* (1793:407–411). In King’s wordlist the entry for *gunyah* appears as *Gon-yi* ‘A house or hut’ (King 2006; Hunter 1793:409).²

The first scholarly historical dictionary of Australian English was Edward E. Morris’ *Austral English: A Dictionary of Australasian Words, Phrases and Usages* (1898). It was compiled employing the historical principles of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and contained numerous quotations based on material that Morris had collected for the *OED*. *Austral English* contains two entries for *gunyah*, the first having 15 citations dating from 1798 to 1888:

Gunyah, *n.* aboriginal name for a black-fellow’s hut, roughly constructed of boughs and bark; applied also to other forms of shelter. The spelling varies greatly [...]

Goondie, *n.* a native hut. *Gúndai* = a shelter in the Wiradhuri dialect. It is the same word as *Gunyah* (q.v.).

The Occasional Paper No. 3, of the Australian Language Research Centre of the University of Sydney, *The Currency of Aboriginal Words in Australian English*, Ramson (1964:9) lists:

gundy, *n.*, an aboriginal hut.

gunya, *n.*, an aboriginal hut.

He also reviews a survey of first year English university students across the country on their use and knowledge of Aboriginal loanwords. He notes that knowledge of them is generally regionally distributed, noting in particular that *gunya* and *gundy* are mostly used in NSW and Queensland. Other Aboriginal loans for a temporary shelter from other languages, are commonly distributed as follows: *wurley* in South Australia; *mia-mia* in NSW, Victoria and Tasmania; and *humpy* throughout Australia.

Dixon *et al.* (2006:198) provide a more detailed definition as well as ethnographic information on the way gunyahs were used:

gunyah /'gʌnjə/

Also **gunya** and formerly with much variety as **guneah**, **gunneah**, **gunnie**, and **gunyer**.

[Dharuk, Sydney region *gaii*, ‘house or hut’]

A temporary shelter of the Aborigines, usually a simple frame of branches, covered with bark, leaves, or grass. Gunyahs were usually built close together either in a row or in a semi-circle, with the more closely related families near to each other. Unmarried men often shared a hut that was built at some distance from the others. [1790]

The *Macquarie Dictionary*’s (Butler *et al.* 2013) entry is less detailed, but is much in the same vein:

gunyah /'gʌnjə/ *n.* 1. a hut traditionally made by Aboriginal people of boughs and bark; humpy; mia-mia; wurley. 2. a small rough hut or shelter in the bush. Also **gunya**. [Aborig.; Dharug *ganya* house, hut]

The *Australian National Dictionary* (Moore, *et al.* 2016) provides the following entry to the word:

gunyah /'gʌnjə/ *n.* (Spelling variants: **gunya**, and formerly **guneah**, **gunneah**, **gunnie**, etc.) [From Sydney language *ganya* ‘house, hut’. See also *gibber gunyah*].

² In line with the general practice in dictionaries, we shall use *gunyah* as the canonical form of the word in this article.

1. (In traditional Aboriginal use) a temporary shelter usually made of sheets of bark and/or branches; any makeshift shelter or dwelling. Cf. HUMPY; MIA-MIA; WILTJA; WURLEY.

The entry then lists numerous citations of the use of the term from 1790 to the late-1990s. The term also appears in dictionaries of American and British English:

gunyah noun

Australia: an aboriginal hut; a small hut or crude shelter built for use in the bush.

(Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gunyah>)

gunyah, *n.*

A native Australian hut.

(OED)

Figure 1 illustrates the various styles of gunyah.

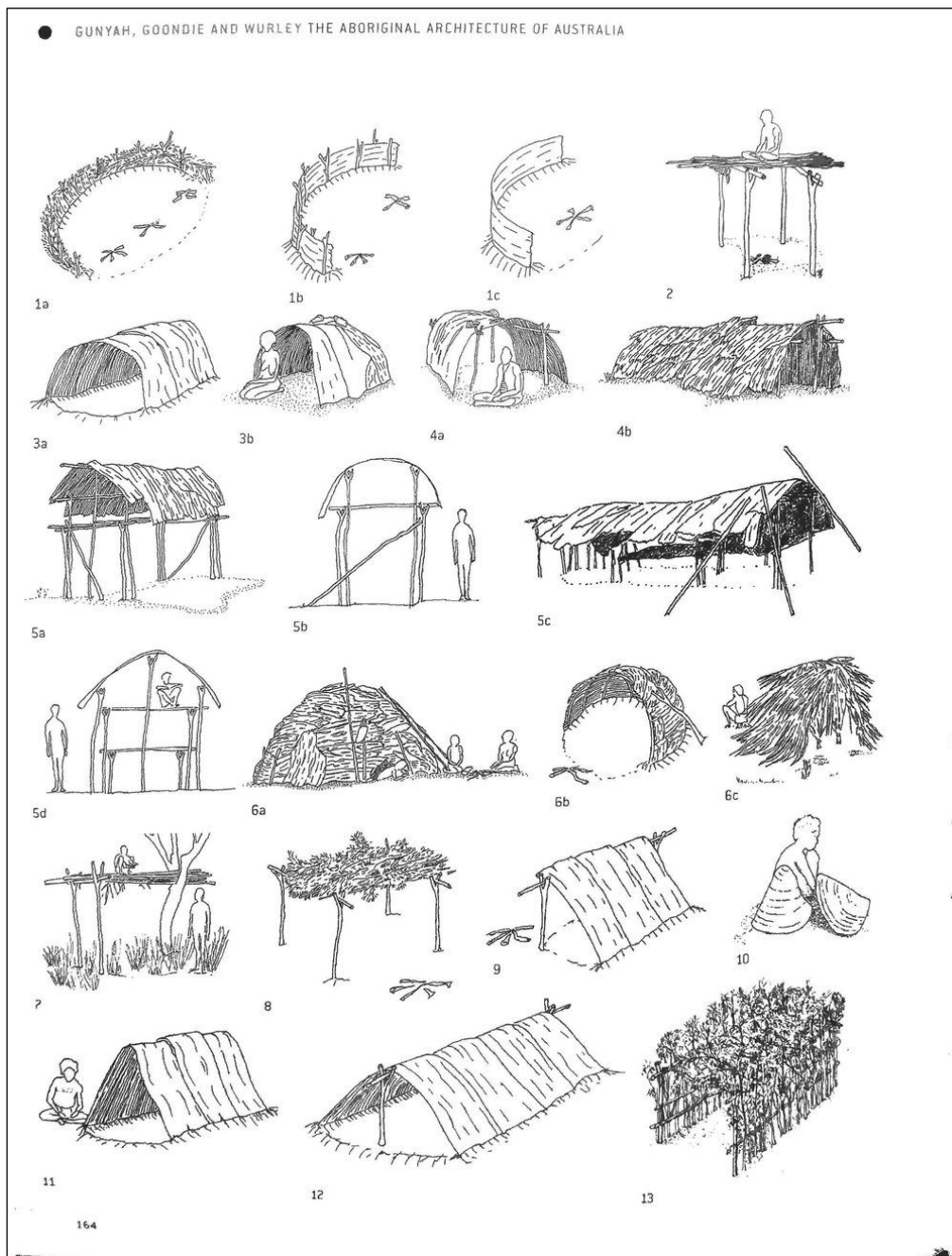


Figure 1: Various designs of gunyahs. (Source: Memmott 2007:164).

The historic variations in the spelling of *gunyah* (not to mention other Indigenous words) illustrate the difficulties experienced in the recording of Australian Indigenous languages during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It highlights the lack of the linguistic tools and skills needed to transcribe an exotic unwritten language at the time. Lectal differences between Indigenous peoples would have also contributed to variable recordings. As well as the spellings of *gunyah* itemized above, others include:

- *gonyi* ‘A hut’ (John Hunter & David Collins, in Curr 1887, Vol. III:407, collected 1790–91)
- *guneah* ‘[...] he threw down with apparent fierceness the little bark guneah which had sheltered him and his family during the night [...]’ (Oxley 1820, 21 July 1817)
- *gunnya* ‘bower formed of myrtle branches’ (‘Journal of the First Excursion up the Warragamba’ 1818, in *The New South Wales Magazine*, January 1834, Vol. II, No. 6, p. 59)
- *goonyer* ‘a hut’ (Threlkeld 1834:x, collected between 1826–34)
- *gunha* ‘house’ (‘A Ride to Bathurst’, *The Australian* 27 March, 1827, p. 2)
- *gunya* ‘Two old grey-haired men sitting silent in a gunya behind, were pointed out to me as his brothers, [...]’ (Mitchell 1848, 9 January 1846)
- *gunyon* ‘house’ (Meredith 1849:104)

It is usual in a language contact situation (where there is an urgent need to communicate, and little social opportunity to thoroughly learn each other’s language) for a pidgin to develop. Such a situation existed in Sydney after the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788. By 1796, there was an incipient NSW Pidgin (Troy 1992:148), which was probably fully developed by 1830 (Troy 1994a). Various Sydney Language words became core items in the lexicon of NSW Pidgin—*gunyah* included (Troy 1992:164)—many of which later became part of standard Australian English.

Troy (1994a, b) has documented the grammar and lexicon of NSW Pidgin, and recorded many instances of *gunyah* being used in the early nineteenth century in NSW and Victoria, thus illustrating its spread through the country. Her citations include new word formations such as *cobbon gunyah* ‘court house (lit. ‘great/large house’)’ (Harris 1967 [1849]:213), which illustrates how the term underwent a semantic extension in Indigenous languages and subsequently NSW Pidgin to include European-built buildings. An article entitled ‘Execution’ in *The Sydney Gazette* of 2 January 1828 (page 3) provides an early example of this formation couched in NSW Pidgin. It cites an Indigenous man, ‘Tommy’, from the Bathurst region who was convicted for murder:

[...] He frequently said to one of the clergymen who occasionally visited him in his cell, “All gammon white fellow pai-alla cabon gunyah, me tumble down white fellow.” [It was all false that the white fellows said in the Court-house, that I killed the white fellow] [...]

By the mid-nineteenth century, *gunyah* had acquired the English plural, showing its nativization into Australian English, e.g.

- ‘[...] their habitations [...] or gunyas [...]’ (mid-1830s) (Govett et al 1977:8)
- ‘They put me in one of their best gunyahs (a sort of hut of bark, shaped much like those of the English gypsies), and gave me two very large opossum cloaks for the night, [...]’ (Harris 1847:313)

Hercus (1986:185) documents *gunjdji* [ˈɡunjɔdʒi], [ˈɡuːnjɔdʒi] ‘house’ of the Wembawemba language of Victoria, and observes that it is ‘[a] widespread term of recent origin, spread through English’ citing Baker (1945:77, 224).

3. *Gunyah* as a Toponym

Australians are well-known for borrowing Indigenous derived words and names of places and transferring them from one region to another.³ The practice is the result of colonists being highly mobile during the nineteenth century. In addition, the latter part of that century saw the bestowal of Indigenous derived names to places such as rural and outback post offices, railway stations and sidings, by bureaucrats residing in major town centres. With little or no knowledge of local conditions or languages, these bureaucrats employed lists of so-called ‘euphonious’ Aboriginal words to name these features. No regard was given to the names’ meanings or languages of origin (Hodges 2007). A good example of the wide distribution of an Indigenous derived name is *Kurrajong* / *Currajong* (< Dharuk *garrajun* ‘fishing line’; loaned into English, its meaning being extended to the tree from whose bark fishing lines were made (Dixon et al. 2006:114)). The word can be found as the name or name component of some 160 places throughout Australia, at least a quarter of which name a homestead or rural property.

In a similar vein, *Gunyah* / *Gunya* can be found as the name or name element of some 130 geographic and civic (administrative) features ranging from streams, beaches, hills, swamps, parishes, localities, buildings, bores, and parks. Just under one third of them name homesteads or rural properties.⁴

Our interest here is, however, not with places that specifically bear the name *Gunyah* or *Gunya*, but with those to which *mie-*, *mei-* or *my-* has been prefixed. We find this name form has been bestowed upon residences, rural properties, a vineyard, a publishing house, a housing estate in Queensland, a former sugar-cane plantation (now a suburb) in Nadi (Fiji), various roads, and two self-managed superannuation funds.⁵ It is the origin of the name of the Nadi suburb that is our ultimate interest in this article, which will be dealt with in section 5.6. However, we first attempt to unravel the origin and use of the name form *Miegunyah* / *Meigunyah* / *Mygunyah* in Australia.

4. The Origin of *Miegunyah* / *Meigunyah* / *Mygunyah*

The name form *Miegunyah*, *Meigunyah* or *Mygunyah* is said to mean ‘my home/house’ for all the geographic and residential designations we were able to uncover. Its pronunciation in Australia varies between /mai'gʌnjə/ and /mi'gʌnjə/.

The origin and meaning of the prefix *mie-*, *mei-* or *my-* is somewhat enigmatic. The first form is the most common, followed by *mei-*, with *my-* being rare. Nick Thieberger (p.c. 20/05/2020) suggests three possible sources for the origin of the prefix:

1. The Dharuk / Biyal-Biyal first person pronoun *ngayi* may have been misheard so that, instead of *ngayi gunya* we have *miegunya*. However, there is not enough information to know if the pronoun in this position could have been used to indicate possession.
2. It could be that it was taken from *miamia* ‘hut, house’ and added to the front of the word.
3. It derives from English ‘my/me’ and perhaps reflects a pidgin form from early contact times.

We examine each of these suggestions in further detail.

³ We use the term ‘Indigenous derived’ rather than simply ‘Indigenous’ to highlight the fact that almost all Indigenous words and names loaned into English have inaccurate recordings of their pronunciations, with a resulting anomalous rendering into the Roman alphabet. This has led to their being highly anglicized, with many bearing little resemblance to their original pronunciation. Meanings and referents of words and names have also very often been misinterpreted (see Tent 2108).

⁴ The data for the toponyms *Kurrajong* / *Currajong* and *Gunyah* / *Gunya* were extracted from the Australian National Placenames Survey database (<http://www.anps.org.au/index.php>).

⁵ The various roads, streets and avenues named *Miegunyah* are usually associated with their concomitantly named properties, houses, or estates.

1. *ngayi*

The two Dawes notebooks [1790–91a & b] record *Ngía* (a:2; b:3, 23), *Ngia* (a:44, 45), *ngía* (b:2, 23), *Día* (b:15) *ñia* (b:21) *ngia* (b:23) and *Día* (b:30, 32) *Dia* (b:30, 33, 35) glossed as ‘I’ or ‘me’. The anonymous notebook C [1790–91] records the pronoun as *nia* (c:16) glossed ‘I’, and *Gñia* (c: 19) glossed as ‘I myself’. Steele (2005:113) records the pronoun *ngaya* ‘1SG NOM’ for Dharuk.

We believe *ngayi* is an unlikely source for the *mie-* prefix, because if *ngayi* were misheard, it is more likely to have been pronounced with an initial alveolar nasal /n/ giving /nai/ rather than a bilabial /m/.

We agree with Thieberger, however, that there is not sufficient evidence to show whether *ngayi* in pre-nominal position was used to indicate possession, let alone whether it was a free or bound morpheme.

2. *miamia*

Mia-mia or *miamia* is another commonly used Indigenous loanword for ‘hut/house’. Its entry in Dixon et al. (2006:198–199) reads:

mia-mia /'maiə- maiə/, /'miə-mie/, /'mai-mai/

Formerly many spelling variants: **mai-mai, miam, miam-miam, mi-mi, myam-myam, mya, and mya-mya.**

[Although the word was much used in Victoria (the earliest Victorian instance is 1838), it appears to have originated as *maya* or *maya-maya* in Nyungar, the language of the Perth-Albany region.⁶

The entry for the term in the *Australian National Dictionary* (Moore et al. 2016) provides a more specific etymology:

[From Wathaurong and Woiwurrung *miam-miam*. Cf. Western Australia MIA, which some have argued (cf. B.J. Blake, *Wathawarrung and the Colac Language of Southern Victoria*, 1998) was brought to Victoria by sealers and whalers.]⁷

The term *Miya* ‘hut’ appears in Whitehurst’s *Noongar Dictionary* (1997), in Collard et al.’s *Nyungar Place Nomenclature of the Southwest of Western Australia Nyungar names [...]* [[n.d.] as *Mya, maia, mai* ‘hut’, and in Moore’s *A Descriptive Vocabulary or the language in common use amongst the Aborigines of Western Australia [...]* (1842) as *mya*. Therefore, the Victorian word may well have been borrowed from Nyungar.

Troy (1994a) also records various forms of the word being used in NSW Pidgin throughout NSW and Victoria, many noted by J.F.H. Mitchell in his *Aboriginal dictionary (Woradgeri tongue.) [...]* (1906). Hercus (1986:241) records *mai-mai* ‘camp’ in the Ganai language of Gippsland, and in southern Ngarigu where she suggests it is a borrowing from Gippsland (p. 246).

Although the Nyungar, Wathawurung and Wuyuwurung word has the forms recorded as *mya* and *mai* (most likely pronounced as /'maiə/ and /mai/), there is a lack of documentary evidence to show that it was prefixed to *gunyah*, which precludes us from concluding that such a compound existed to form *Miegunyah*.

⁶ They also report the term has reached New Zealand, where it is pronounced /'mai-mai/ and refers to a duck shooter’s hide [1833].

⁷ Although it is plausible the word was introduced into Victoria by sealers and whalers, Blake, Clark & Krishna-Pillay (1998: 59–154) (in *Wathawarrung and the Colac Language of Southern Victoria*), do not specifically state the vector. Their entry for ‘house/hut’ merely provides the Wathawurrung term *karrung*, after which various cognates are listed. After the cognates *mimi* is noted with the comment ‘[WA word spread via English]’, which is referenced to Griffith (1840–1).

3. Pidgin my / mai / me / mi

Troy (1992:147–148) notes that by 1792, ‘a contact-induced lingua franca’ had developed in the fledgling British colony, and ‘[b]y 1796, constant exposure to English and the colonists’ ‘improper application’ of the Sydney language had produced the recognizable ancestor of NSW Pidgin.’ The years between 1792 and 1830 saw the stabilization of the NSW Pidgin (Troy 1994a).

Troy (1994a) cites numerous examples from all over NSW and Victoria illustrating NSW Pidgin 1SG GEN pronoun (which she labels a ‘possessive determiner’), they include:

- p.339 (388) *You my binghi*
yu mai bingi
You are my brother
- (389) *...my fader...my moder...*
mai fada mai moda
my father...my mother
- (390) *But all gone coula mine (my anger) this time*
bat olgon gula main distaim
However, my anger is now all gone
- p.348 (452) *countryman you belonging to me*
kantriman yu blongentu mi
my countryman
- p.407 (486) *my Master*
mai masa
my master
- (487) *my brother*
mai brada
my brother
- (488) *my own people*
mai oun pipel
my own people
- (489) *my pipe*
mai paip
my pipe
- (490) *mine udthui, marmun-un*
main udthu marmunun
my me countryman
my own countryman
- (491) *mine-mar-mungun*
main marmangan
my countryman
- (492) *mine nurmungs*
main nermang
my warriors

We believe this Pidgin pronoun to be the most likely source of the prefixed *mie-*, *mei-* or *my-*.

5. **Miegunyah as a Toponym in Australia**

The name forms *Miegunyah*, *Meigunyah* and *Mygunyah* have been applied to residences and rural properties probably from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, and certainly from the last quarter of that century. We catalogue their occurrence below.

5.1. ‘Miegunyah’ in Queensland

Conceivably one of the most iconic *Miegunyahs* in Australia is the one in the Brisbane suburb of Bowen Hills, *Miegunyah House Museum* (Figure 2). This *Miegunyah*, like all those in Queensland, is pronounced /mai'gʌnjə/.



Figure 2: *Miegunyah House Museum*, 35 Jordan Terrace, Bowen Hills, Brisbane. (Source: With kind permission of 'foto fanatic' at 'Your Brisbane: Past and Present. Brisbane's history in photographs'. Available at <http://www.yourbrisbanepastandpresent.com/search/label/miegunyah> accessed 11 May 2020)

The house was built by businessman William Perry, the founder of Perry Bros hardware emporium. Perry built *Miegunyah* on his estate at Bowen Hills in 1886 for his sons Herbert and George. It remained in the Perry family until 1926, and had several changes of ownership up to 1966. It was acquired by the Queensland Women's Historical Association in 1967, who refurbished it and opened it as a house museum dedicated to the pioneer women of Queensland. During WWII *Miegunyah* was requisitioned by the Government and served as an officers' club and a safe house for the men of Z Special Unit commandos.

Queensland's second *Miegunyah* is a homestead in the state's southeast, about 470km west-south-west of Brisbane. It is one of the southernmost homesteads in Queensland, being very close to the border with NSW. The nearest populous place is the village of Dirranbandi, 15km away. The current owners do not know the origin of the name.

The third *Miegunyah* is the *Miegunyah Estate of Tara*, a rural subdivision of so-called 'lifestyle blocks', situated on the Darling Downs, some 250km west of Brisbane. No information as to the origin of the name could be unearthed.

The fourth is another estate, *Meigunyah Estate* in Goranba (approximately 150km west-north-west of Toowoomba), and is situated on its namesake thoroughfare *Meigunyah Court*. Its origin is unknown.

5.2. 'Miegunyah' in NSW

NSW has three *Miegunyahs*, all homestead names. The first (also known as *Mygunyah*) is 32km south-west of Tenterfield, in the north-east of the state, some 200km west-south-west of Byron Bay. The second is in the south-west of the state, some 46km from Hay. The third is *Miegunyah North*, just north-west of Walbundrie, 50km north-west of Albury. We were not able to discover the pronunciations or origins of these *Miegunyahs*.

We also found three *Mygunyahs*; a homestead north-east of Moree, a *Mygunyah Hunter Country Farm* in McCullys Gap, 16km north-east of Muswellbrook, and a *Mygunyah Lane* in Mulwala on the Murray River, west of Albury. Owing to the 'my-' spelling it is assumed all these are pronounced /mai'gʌnjə/.

5.3. 'Miegunyah' in Victoria

Victoria also has a well-known *Miegunyah*, the mansion on 641 Orrong Road Toorak (pronounced /mi'gʌnjə/). It was built in the 1880s, and purchased by Sir Russell and Mabel Grimwade in 1911, who lived there until 1955. Before the Grimwades bought the property it was owned by a John Goodman, who developed it in the 1850s. It is not clear whether the name of the property dates back to its establishment.

Sir Russell, a businessman and philanthropist, was a passionate collector of Australiana, especially books and paintings dealing with Australia's European beginnings, and was responsible for bringing Captain Cook's Cottage to Melbourne in 1934. He had a long-held desire to fund the 'birth of an antipodean Clarendon Press' at Melbourne University, and through major bequests provided by him and his wife, the Miegunyah Press was established in 1967, and is now an imprint of Melbourne University Publishing. In 1973 *Miegunyah* was bequeathed to the University of Melbourne along with its contents from the Grimwade estate.

Finally, there is a homestead, *Meigunyah Downs*, approximately 75km west of Echuca. No information could be obtained for this name.

5.4. 'Miegunyah' in South Australia

There are four properties in this state bearing the name *Miegunyah*.⁸ No information regarding their names could be garnered. Three are homesteads:

- *Miegunyah*, south-east of Murray Bridge
- *Miegunyah/Meigunyah*, north of Port Lincoln
- *Meigunyah Woods*, near Mount Compass about 75km south of Adelaide

The fourth is a vineyard, *Miegunyah Vineyard* (/mai'gʌnjə/) in McLaren Vale, 40km south of Adelaide. Its name was adopted from *Miegunyah Avenue* in Adelaide, the street on which the grandparents of the current co-owner of the vineyard, David Lloyd, lived. The wine range of the vineyard naturally has the label *Miegunyah*.

5.5. 'Miegunyah' in Western Australia

There are two *Miegunyahs* in Western Australia: a *Miegunyah Marron Farm* at Kojarena, 30kms west of Geraldton. The current owners do not know the origin of the name, but do acknowledge it is pronounced /mai'gʌnjə/ and that it purportedly means 'my house'. The second is a homestead north of Esperance, also pronounced /mai'gʌnjə/.

6. *Miegunyah* in Fiji

Intriguingly, Fiji also has a *Miegunyah* (sometimes spelled *Meigunyah*) (see Department of Town and Country Planning 2015), a cane-farming area and suburb a few kilometres east of the centre of Nadi, on the main island of Vitilevu. The road that runs along the suburb's perimeter is known as *Miegunyah* or *Meigunyah Road* (on Google maps).

In order to discover how *Miegunyah* found its way to Fiji, we must go back to about 1873 when sugar production was established. Initially, it consisted of a few small sugar mills that were badly managed and not profitable, many of them ceasing operations when sugar prices fell in the 1890s. In 1879 a representative of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) of Sydney arrived to assess

⁸ There is also a homestead bearing the name *My Mia Mia*, south of Bordertown close to the South Australia-Victoria border.

prospects for a sugar industry in the colony. They started operations at its first mill in Nausori, close to Suva, in 1882. In 1903, CSR established the Lautoka Sugar Mill, close to Nadi. (Moynagh 1981).

The earliest references to *Miegunyah* in Nadi that we have been able to find are in CSR documents of 1906–07 (Colonial Sugar Refining Company Limited 1905-1926). They include:

- Documents concerning Reginald Arthur Harricks' subleasing in 1905 the land blocks *Wasina* and *Ione* (which were CSR freehold) 108 acres in total; the whole 950 acres of *Nasau*, leased by CSR from the Crown; and a portion (25.5 acres) of CSR's lease of *Na Buyagiyagi*, leased from the Misses Luks; comprising a total of 1083.5 acres. These blocks were named *Miegunyah* by Harricks in 1906.
- A document entitled *Valuation of cane crops, livestock, implements &c. on Mr. Harricks' plantation "Miegunyah" 1906.*
- 1905 and 1906 correspondence between R.A. Harricks and the General Manager of CSR, Sydney, regarding the subleasing of *Miegunyah*, the rental thereof, and the reimbursement of building materials for the estate. (Figure 3.)

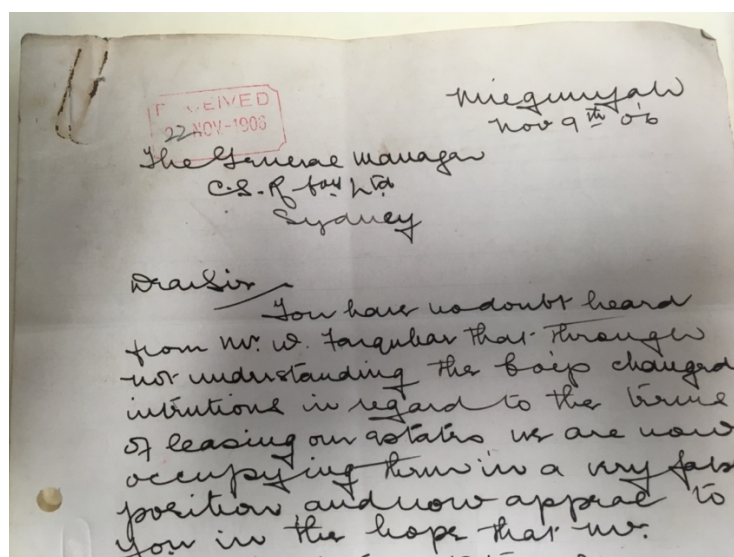


Figure 3. Fragment of correspondence from R.A. Harricks to the General Manager, CSR.

The first public mention of *Miegunyah* we have been able to find is in *The Fiji Times* of 16 June, 1909:

Nadi.

[...]

A week or so ago Mrs R.A. Harricks of "Miegunyah" entertained her many friends at a "pink tea". The guests all wore some pink favour, the decorations and almost all the dainty tea being pink. Not the least exciting was the picturesque arrival on horse back [*sic*] of two bachelor guests who were clothed from their helmets to their shoes in pink, they were preceded by two coolies also garbed in pink and waving branches of cane flowers.

[...]

We have been unable to determine why Reginald Harricks named his sublease *Miegunyah*, but he originally came from Maryborough in Queensland, so may have come across the name in that state. Since the *Miegunyah* in Brisbane is the most well-known, and had been named in 1886, this may have been the inspiration for the name of his estate. In addition, Maryborough is only 250km north of Brisbane, and the Perry Bros business extended over the whole of Queensland, so Harricks may well have done business with them and heard of their house name. Indeed, the building materials for which Harricks was seeking reimbursement could conceivably have come from the Perry Bros hardware emporium. Since their business encompassed all of Queensland, and given the close links

between Australia and the South Pacific, business dealings in Fiji are therefore not beyond the realm of possibility.

Fiji's *Miegunyah* is a good example of how a borrowed name can become nativized and its origin obscured. For the European community of Nadi—always a minority and even more so now—the pronunciation remains /mai'gʌnjə/, as in Australia, according to Valda ('Weetie') Ferrier-Watson, a long-time resident of Nadi who knew the Harricks family and whose mother went to school with the Harricks' son Paul. She adds that it is generally known in the European community that the name is of Australian Aboriginal origin.

The two most populous communities in the area, speakers of Fijian and Fiji Hindi, have different pronunciations: /ma'ŋa'niə/, and /me'ŋenjə/, /meŋ'genjə/ or /meŋge'niə/ respectively. We tentatively suggest that the reason for the disparity in the first two vowels may be that the name was first nativized by the Fijian-speaking community (which includes ethnic Fijians, part-Europeans and others) and that their pronunciation is approximately as would be expected given the phonology of English and Fijian. The Fijian pronunciation was then borrowed by Fiji Hindi speakers, who applied to it the convention of rendering /a/ in Fijian place names as /e/, by no means universal, but also witnessed in *Nadi* /nendi/, *Lami* /lemi/, and *Rakiraki* /rekireki/. As for the reason for this convention, we can only speculate that it may be a consequence of the introduction of many speakers of New Zealand English in the education system from around 1930, given the less open articulation of this variety's /æ/, and/or vowel assimilation, with raising of /a/ triggered by the following high vowel or semi-vowel. The fact that Fiji Hindi speakers generally believe the name to be Fijian (and Fijian-speakers believe it to be Hindi) may be viewed as supporting this proposal. Its spelling is equally enigmatic. While official sources tend to use the traditional spelling, a nearby mosque and primary school are spelt *Maigania Masjid* and *Maigania Muslim Primary School*. This spelling can be found on Google Maps and in the Fiji Ministry of Education records. The local Muslim football club also bears the name *Maigania*.

Conclusion

An empirical *sine qua non* for any historical linguistic analysis of a toponym is to start from its oldest documented attestation. As is often the case with tracing the origin and meanings of toponyms, especially those derived from an Australian Indigenous language, satisfactory evidence often cannot be found, the main cause being the lack of written documentation of its first use. The first use of *Miegunyah* as a house or property name in Australia is such a case. However, as Figure 3 demonstrates, we do have documentary evidence of one of its first uses in Fiji. It is not unusual in Australia for a house, homestead or rural property name to be adopted for the name a contiguous suburb, parish, shire, or indeed a natural feature such as a river.⁹ Nadi's *Miegunyah* is a fitting example of this phenomenon.

As regards its original Australian use, we can affirm that the *gunyah* element of the name derives from Dharuk, and that it denotes a 'temporary shelter usually made of sheets of bark and/or branches'. Secondly, the commonly accepted meaning of *Miegunyah* is 'my house/home', and is generally pronounced either /mai'gʌnjə/, or less commonly /mi'gʌnjə/. And the name, like so many other Indigenous names for homesteads, rural properties and houses, has spread far and wide.

What we are less certain of is the origin of the name's prefix *mie-* / *mei-* / *my-*. If the prefix has its origins either in the NSW Pidgin 1SG GEN pronoun *my* / *mai* / *me* / *mi* (which seems most likely), or from a form of the Wathawurrung and Woiwurrung *mia-mia* (which seems much less likely), either way, we are dealing with a hybrid name (i.e. one that results from an amalgamation of words from two languages) (see Tent 2020).¹⁰

⁹ The Sydney suburbs *Lakemba* and *Casula* being two notable Australian examples.

¹⁰ Another term that may be employed is 'macaronic compound toponym' (Tent & Blair 2019)—'macaronic' referring to a text or word using a mixture of languages (usually two). It can also be used to refer to hybrid words (i.e. internally macaronic), e.g. *television* from Greek τῆλε (tēle) 'far' + Latin *visio* 'seeing' (< *videre* 'to see').

Miegunyah is also rather special in that it is the result of the compounding and concomitant lexicalization of a pronominal possessive noun phrase, *viz.* ‘my gunyah’. The resulting compound noun has then become proprialized, in other words, transformed into proper name (see ICOS n.d:4). Finally, it has undergone a not very common amelioration of meaning (i.e. a rise or elevation of quality) from ‘temporary shelter; hut’ to ‘house; home’.

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