

# What does *Jukurrpa* ('Dreamtime', 'the Dreaming') mean? A semantic and conceptual journey of discovery

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*Abstract: This study presents and justifies a detailed explication for the Australian Aboriginal Jukurrpa concept ('Dreamtime', 'the Dreaming'), phrased exclusively in simple cross-translatable words. The explication, which is partitioned into multiple sections, depicts a highly ramified and multi-faceted concept, albeit one with great internal coherence. After a short introduction, our paper is organised about successive stages in the evolution of the current explication. We present and discuss four semantic explications, each built on — and, hopefully, improving upon — its predecessor as our understanding of the Jukurrpa concept expanded and came into sharper definition. We focus primarily on Central Australian languages such as Warlpiri, Arrernte and the Western Desert Language (Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara, Ngaanyatjarra etc.). We do not claim to have necessarily arrived at a full, perfect or correct lexical-semantic analysis, although in principle this is the goal of semantic analysis. Rather our purpose is to share a hermeneutic process and its results. The guiding framework for our process is the Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach to meaning analysis.*

## 1. The challenge: how could one explain the concept of *Jukurrpa* ('the Dreaming', 'Dreamtime') to non-Indigenous Australians?

Anthropologist WEH Stanner opened his seminal 1953 essay 'The Dreaming'<sup>1</sup> by emphasising the central role of this concept in Indigenous Australia: 'The Australian Aborigines' outlook on the universe and man is shaped by a remarkable conception, which Spencer and Gillen immortalised as "the dream time" or *alcheringa* of the Arunta or Aranda tribe' (Stanner 2003:57).<sup>2</sup> Anthropologists and Aboriginal people alike

agree that the concept of the 'Dreamtime' or 'Dreaming' lies at the heart of Aboriginal culture (or cultures). But how can this concept be best explained to non-Aboriginal Australians? On this point, there is no consensus among scholars. Rather, as Jennifer Green (2012:158) observes, 'The Arandic term ALTYERRE and related words have been described as "possibly the most contested words in modern Australian ethnography" (Austin-Broos 2010).'

Stanner (2003:58) offered the following characterisation, among others: 'The Dreaming is many things in one. Among them, a kind of narrative of

things that once happened; a kind of charter of things that still happen; and a kind of *logos* or principle of order transcending everything significant for Aboriginal man.' Though brilliantly successful in indicating the breadth and gravity of the Aboriginal concept of the Dreaming, this passage is not a definition as such. Stanner (2003:57) described a 'central meaning' of the Dreaming as 'a sacred, heroic time long ago when men and nature came to be as they are', although, as we will see shortly, he was also insistent that the Dreaming was not 'fixed in time'.

Jumping to the present century and switching from anthropology to linguistics, the *Warlpiri-English encyclopaedic dictionary* (Laughren et al. 2006; henceforth Warlpiri dictionary) offers a definition of the Warlpiri word *jukurrpa* hinged around the idea of '[a]ncestral beings associated with life-forces and creative powers, knowledge of which is generally communicated to people by means of Dreams'. It reads in part:

The term *jukurrpa* may be applied to individual ancestral beings, or to any manifestation of their power and nature, i.e. knowledge of their travels and activities, rituals, designs, songs, places, ceremonies. This provides the model for human and non-human activity, social behaviour, natural development. *Jukurrpa* is not conceived as being located in an historical past but as an eternal process which involves the maintenance of these life-forces, symbolized as men and as other natural species.

Without (for the moment) considering the content of these two explanations (i.e. Stanner's and the Warlpiri dictionary's), we would like to draw attention to the fact that both are framed in rather sophisticated English, using words and phrases like 'logos', 'sacred', 'heroic',<sup>3</sup> 'symbolic', 'manifestation', 'eternal process', 'life-forces', 'creative powers' and the like. In our view, the meaning of these phrases would not be particularly effective in communicating with the general public (and certainly not with children).

Moreover, it is questionable whether explanations couched in such terms can really represent the Indigenous concept in an authentic fashion; i.e. whether they can represent the concept as it is seen from an 'insider perspective'. One of

the remarkable features of Stanner's (2003:59) account of 'The Dreaming' was his attempt to think from the insider's perspective (he called it 'thinking black'), as well as the importance he accorded to 'not imposing Western categories of understanding, but seeking to conceive of things as the blackfellow himself does' (Stanner 2003:58). In our view, however, he was not fully successful in carrying this through because of his reliance on words that do not have equivalents in Aboriginal languages. From our perspective, a threshold test for whether or not we are imposing Western categories of understanding is whether or not an explanation can be rendered, clearly and precisely, in the Indigenous languages themselves.

This is what we attempt to do in the present study: to find a way to explain the meaning of what we will term the '*Jukurrpa* concept' ('Dreamtime', 'the Dreaming') in words and phrases that can be readily expressed in Aboriginal languages such as Warlpiri, Arrernte, and Western Desert dialects like Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara and Ngaanyatjarra, as well as in English and other languages of the world.

We are guided in this exercise by a particular linguistic approach to meaning description that relies on explaining (or 'explicating') complex cultural concepts in terms of simple cross-translatable words. These simple cross-translatable words are known as 'semantic primes' and 'semantic molecules', and the approach to meaning description is called the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach (Goddard 2011; Goddard and Wierzbicka 2014a, 2014b; Wierzbicka 2006, 2014). The main point is that research in this approach allows us to distinguish between words whose meanings are found only in certain languages, such as English, as opposed to words whose meanings are found in all or most languages of the world. Examples of such universal or near-universal words include noun-like words such as 'something/thing', 'people', 'place', 'time', 'words', 'men' and 'women'; verb-like words such as 'happen', 'do', 'say', 'think', 'know' and 'want'; words for temporal and logical relations such as 'before', 'after', 'if' and 'because'; and several dozen more. These words and phrases, furthermore, can be combined according to a fairly simple grammar that also appears, on current evidence, to 'work'

in all languages. More detail on semantic primes and molecules is given in Appendix A.

In this study we try to articulate our understanding of the *Jukurrpa* concept in terms of explanatory 'mini-texts' (explications), phrased exclusively in simple words that have equivalents in Aboriginal languages, and, so far as we know, in all or most languages of the world. To the extent that this project is successful, it can open a window onto Aboriginal ways of thinking about the concept in question and at the same time make these ways of thinking accessible to people of other linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Needless to say, using very simple language to 'unpack' a very complex concept means that the explications will be much longer than conventional dictionary definitions. Also, the small vocabulary and simple sentence patterns give the explications an unusual stylistic effect that may take a little getting used to. This is the cost (small, in our opinion) of safeguarding the explications against the cultural bias that comes from using complex English-specific words and grammar (Wierzbicka 2014). It also has the advantage of enabling a very clear and precise articulation of meaning.

## 2. Our 'process' and our sources

Both authors have extensive experience with collaboratively developing complex explications, sometimes of unfamiliar cultural concepts, using the NSM approach. Our process is a dialogical one, with the two co-authors repeatedly re-visiting and re-thinking the current version, exploring possible improvements and variations, trying to achieve better 'flow' and logical coherence, and so on. Developing a satisfying NSM explication, especially for a very complex concept, involves a protracted struggle to find ways of formulating ideas in the small vocabulary of the simple translatable metalanguage. Though it is difficult to explain, there is a certain discipline in this process that 'forces' the analysts to explore certain directions and, in some cases, may lead them to abandon certain initial hypotheses. We hope to illustrate this in our stage-by-stage account that follows shortly.

We undertook close reading of classic commentaries and sources such as Elkin (1954), Stanner (2003) and Meggitt (1962), and modern works

such as Hirst (2006), Turner (2010), Green (2012) and Nicholls (2014a, 2014b, 2014c). One author (Wierzbicka) engaged closely with lexicographic resources on the Warlpiri language, in the form of the Warlpiri dictionary and its associated lexical database Kirrkirr. The other author (Goddard) drew on his personal experiences, dating back to the 1980s/early 1990s, with the Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara language (cf. Goddard 1996).

In conjunction with this 'internal' process, we also received, over more than eight months, repeated and constructively critical inputs from colleagues with deep linguistic and cultural knowledge of Aboriginal Australia, including linguistic anthropologist Frances Morphy, an expert on the Yolŋu languages of north-east Arnhem Land, and three linguists knowledgeable about Warlpiri; namely, Jane Simpson, David Nash and Mary Laughren. In the final stage, Ameer Glass, a linguistic expert on Ngaanyatjarra, provided invaluable input on translatability into that language, culminating in a translation of the abridged version of our explication (see Appendices B and C).<sup>4</sup>

At various times, versions of the explication were trialled in workshops, classes and seminars, including Anna Wierzbicka's Advanced Seminar on Semantics at the Australian National University (ANU). The reactions of participants at these gatherings, as well as explicit feedback from individuals, were very helpful. Over the main eight-month development period the explication passed through no fewer than 37 versions, sometimes with minor changes, at other times with major changes. Version 37 (V37) was presented at the 'Endangered languages, endangered meanings' symposium held at ANU in November 2013. In the writing and revision of this paper in late 2014 to early 2015, further adjustments were made to produce three additional versions, bringing the total number to 40. In this study, we present and discuss V3, V15, V37 and V40.

Before beginning the presentation, we need to make an important point about the lexical polysemy of words like Warlpiri *jukurrpa*, Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara *tjukurpa*, Arrernte *altyerre* etc. As Stanner realised in the 1950s, not only is the 'Dreaming' a very complex cultural concept; the situation is further complicated by the fact that the Indigenous words referring to it are polysemous — i.e. they carry with them a

number of distinct-but-related meanings. Green (2012:168) points out, for example, referring to the Arandic term *altyerre*, that all the Arandic language dictionaries published over the past 20 years 'have extensive entries on ALTYERRE and list a range of inter-related meanings'; she cites the following distinct meanings, while noting that 'one-word translation equivalents never provide more than a rough guide to the complex meanings of words': '(i) dream; (ii) the Dreaming, creation time; (iii) Dreaming, totem, ancestral being; (iv) a person's mother's country and the Dreamings or totems that come from there; (v) God; and (vi) Dreaming stories and other types of narrative'.

The material cited in the Warlpiri dictionary makes it clear that Warlpiri *jukurrpa* also has several interrelated meanings. Thus, before we begin to discuss our explications of *jukurrpa*, we would like to emphasise, first, that we are seeking to explicate only one of its several meanings and, second, that the complexity and length of the explications is entirely in line with Stanner's (2003:57) observation that we are dealing here with a cultural conception that can only be understood 'as a complex of meanings'. We will return to the polysemy issue in sections 7 and 8.

### 3. An early version (V3) of the *Jukurrpa* explication

The V3 explication was not divided into named sections but for ease of reference we have divided it into four sections, labelled A–D. The first, and in many ways the deepest, issue concerning the 'Dreamtime' concept has to do with its temporal and metaphysical status. We discuss this first, since it relates to section A of the explication, then present the explication as a whole, and then discuss sections B–D.

Although in mainstream Australian English so-called 'Dreamtime stories' are typically introduced with the words 'long ago in the Dreamtime', or the like, in Aboriginal languages Dreamtime stories may or may not begin with explicit temporal expressions like these. Often they do not. The Warlpiri dictionary writers say, '*Jukurrpa* is not

conceived as being located in an historical past but as an eternal process'. Already in his 1953 lecture Stanner had identified the problem and coined a word in an attempt to resolve it: 'One cannot fix The Dreaming *in* time', Stanner wrote, 'it was, and is everywhen'. However, the expressions 'everywhen' and 'eternal process' are potentially misleading because they suggest that the events of the Dreaming are happening at all times.

Over most of the development process of our explications, we pursued another line of interpretation, mentioned by Hirst (2006) in his commentary on Stanner's essay; namely, that the Dreaming is a cosmology 'without time' or, perhaps better, 'outside of time' (as we know it). We experimented with implementing this by using phrasings like 'it is another time' or 'it is a time of another kind', and by using contrastive components such as 'it is not a time like this time now', 'it is not a time before this time' and the like. Eventually, as explained in section 6, we abandoned this idea. The V3 explication used the phrasing 'it was a time of another kind', while also including references to the past ('some time ago', 'before, at another time'). This was motivated by the observation that when Aboriginal people talk about Dreamtime events, they speak as though they happened in the past, at least in the sense that Dreaming stories employ the past tense.

This V3 explication was also rather focused on places, insofar as the first section begins with 'places where Aboriginal people live' — saying that 'these places are as they are now' because of events that happened in these places during the Dreamtime. This was intended to give the sense that the landscape and environment have been shaped by the events of the Dreamtime.

We invite readers to go through the explication slowly, preferably reading it aloud and making an effort to fully absorb the content of each section. Briefly, section B is about the kind of events that happened in the Dreamtime, section C is about people's knowledge of it and section D is about rituals relating to the Dreamtime.

V3: *Jukurrpa* ('Dreamtime', 'the Dreaming')

A	<p>it is like this:          some time ago the places where [Aboriginal] people live were not like they are now          these places are as they are now          because some things happened in these places before, at another time          it was a time not like this time now, it was a time of another kind</p>
B	<p>these things happened at that time because it was like this:          some men did some things in these places at that time, these men were not like          men are now          some women did some things in these places at that time, these women were not like          women are now          some living creatures did some things in these places at that time, these creatures          were not like living creatures are now          some of these living creatures were like men, some of these living creatures          were like women</p>
C	<p>some old men know a lot about that time, some old women know a lot about that time          people in these places can know some things about that time          because at some times people see some things when they are asleep          people can know these things like people can know something about something          if they can see this something</p>
D	<p>at many times people in these places do things of some kinds          because they know some things about that other time          these people want to do these things          these people think like this:          "it is good if people in these places do these things now,          it will be good if people in these places will always do these things"</p>

Section B is introduced as follows: 'these things happened at that time because it was like this', and the subsequent lines say that certain men, women and living creatures 'did some things in these places', which, we understand from section A, are responsible for various places being in their present-day state. Importantly, however, these Dreamtime men, women and living creatures were not like their counterparts are today, the implication being that they were capable of 'powerful deeds'. Moreover, it is stated that some of these living creatures<sup>5</sup> were like men and some were like women.

In these components about the *dramatis personae* of the Dreamtime, we are making an effort to employ social categories and ways of speaking that match those used by Aboriginal people when they talk about the *Jukurrpa*. Dreamtime characters are usually referred to using gender-based social categories; e.g. 'these Dreaming men', 'the Dreamtime women', 'the Budgerigar Men', 'the Emu Woman' or the like.

It would have been more 'economical' to rephrase the parallel 'men' and 'women' components as a single component about 'people', but it is very rare to hear the word 'people' used about Dreaming characters and, furthermore, the parallelism of structure echoes Aboriginal oral style.

It should also be noted that the terms 'old men' and 'old women' in section C are intended to correspond to Indigenous social categories. Aboriginal languages often have a single lexeme or fixed expression for each of these categories; e.g. Yankunytjatjara (*wati*) *tjilpi* 'old/senior man'. Section C refers to old men and old women as repositories of knowledge about the Dreaming, a key component (as we understand it) of the *Jukurrpa* concept. The section also includes reference to 'dreaming' (as what one can see when one is asleep)<sup>6</sup> as a possible source of insight into the Dreaming. This is a controversial point but we believe that its inclusion accords well with the evidence presented by Green (2012: 171), who states that, 'Contrary to Wolfe, I have shown how

the glossing of ALTYERRE and related words as "Dreamtime" or "Dreaming" does have a firm basis in the semantics of Aboriginal languages, at least in Central Australia'. The Warlpiri dictionary entries on *jukurrpa*, quoted in section 1, also confirm a semantic link with dreams. V3 of the explication does not yet indicate that a great deal of Dreamtime knowledge is restricted and is not available to everyone. This was added in a later version, as 'not all people can know these things (about this other time)'.

Finally, section D was intended to refer to the rituals and ceremonies that Aboriginal men and women perform in order to stay in touch, so to speak, with this other dimension, with 'that other time'. There was nothing yet to suggest that performing these ceremonies is necessary for the wellbeing of the country. In a later version, not presented here, we added to section D, 'these people know that if they don't do these things, something bad can happen in these places'.

The V3 explication also did not include anything explicit about social practices and customs ('Aboriginal law') having their basis in the Dreamtime.

#### 4. A more complete and elaborate version (V15)

The V3 explication was close to being a 'first go' and it quickly became evident that it was incomplete in several ways. Over the following weeks we experimented with ways of expanding and elaborating it, eventually arriving at V15. In terms of word count, it is about 50 per cent longer than its predecessor. There were changes in the organisational structure too. A glance will show that the explication has been divided into labelled sections, and also that there are more of these sections than in the V3 explication. Essentially, the old section B

has been broken into two, and a new section has been added at the end.

As before, we discuss the changes to the early parts of the explication before presenting the explication in full, with discussion of the other changes to follow after that. The first section now focuses entirely on the idea of *Jukurrpa* being a 'special time'; i.e. '*Jukurrpa* is a time not like this time now, it is not a time before this time, it is another time'. As well, the previous focus on 'places' has been shifted downwards in the explication.

The next section begins by introducing a new idea, namely that Aboriginal people often say things about *Jukurrpa*, and the explication goes on to characterise the kind of content involved in what people say about it. In hindsight, it looks very odd that the earlier version did not include any reference to Dreamtime 'stories'.<sup>7</sup> Though still not completely satisfactory, the sections labelled 'What people say...Places' and 'What happened' draw attention to the explanatory importance of Dreamtime 'stories' or 'tales'.

V3 also referred to the role of Dreaming events in shaping how places are today. In other words, the content of this component is not new — it is just appearing in a different position in the explication. On the other hand, the next two components are new, because they introduce the idea that Aboriginal people's present-day 'way of life' also depends on what happened in the Dreamtime: 'people living in these places live now as they live now, because some things happened at this other time'. As well, 'many kinds of creatures living in these places are as they are now, because some things happened at this other time'. In short, in V15 the 'explanatory remit' of the Dreamtime is recognised as more all-encompassing than in the previous version. We comment on the rest of the explication after presenting it in full.

V15: *Jukurrpa* ('Dreamtime', 'the Dreaming')

## A TIME NOT LIKE OTHER TIMES

*Jukurrpa* is a time not like this time now  
it is not a time before this time  
it is another time

## WHAT PEOPLE SAY...

Aboriginal people can say many things about this other time  
when Aboriginal people say things about this other time, they say things like this:

## - PLACES

"places where [Aboriginal] people live are as they are now  
because some time ago some things happened in these places,  
these things happened at this other time  
people living in these places live now as they live now  
because some things happened at this other time  
many kinds of creatures living in these places are as they are now  
because some things happened at this other time

## - WHAT HAPPENED

when these things happened at this other time, it was like this:  
some men did some things in these places,  
these men were not like men are now  
some women did some things in these places,  
these women were not like women are now  
some living creatures did some things in these places,  
these creatures were not like living creatures are now"

## WHO KNOWS ABOUT THAT OTHER TIME

some old men in many places know a lot about this other time  
some old women in many places know a lot about this other time  
some old people in these places can know some things about this other time  
because sometimes they see some things when they are asleep  
they can say some things about these places because of this, these things are true  
other people can't know a lot about this other time

## WHAT PEOPLE DO NOW

at many times men do some things in these places  
because they know something about this other time  
they do these things like other men in these places did before  
if they don't do these things, something bad can happen to these places,  
they know this  
at many times women do some things in these places  
because they know something about this other time  
they do these things like other women in these places did before  
if they don't do these things, something bad can happen to these places  
they know this

## WHAT ALL ABORIGINAL PEOPLE CAN KNOW

all Aboriginal people can know some things  
because they know some things about this other time  
because of this, people can say about some things:  
"people can't do something like this  
if at some time someone does something like this, it is very bad  
all people can know this"

We pick up our commentary about V15 midway through the explication, in the section titled 'Who knows about that other time'. The main changes

they can say some things about these places because of this, these things are true  
other people can't know a lot about this other time

The first line links Dreamtime knowledge with the capacity to be authoritative about the significance of particular places. In explicitly mentioning 'true', the explication mimics a common way of speaking by Aboriginal people. For example, in the material included in the Warlpiri dictionary, *Jukurrpa* stories are often explicitly characterised as 'true' (e.g. 'This is a true Dreaming story that I'm telling him, a true Dreaming story'). The second new line adds an important detail about the 'restricted' status of much Dreamtime knowledge. Read in context, it conveys the idea that although 'old men' and 'old women' know a great deal about the *Jukurrpa*, 'other people' cannot have similar knowledge.

The next section, titled 'What people do now', is an expanded and much altered version of the components about rituals and ceremonies that were in section D of V3. There have been two main changes. Whereas previously the component in question was phrased in terms of what 'people' do, it is now divided into two sections, one for men and one for women. This is more consistent with the previous parts of the explication and more aligned with Aboriginal practices. In particular, important ceremonies, like most other domains of Aboriginal life, are conducted according to a principle of 'sex segregation'; i.e. men's ceremonies and women's ceremonies are distinct. Not only can people of the opposite gender not attend them; knowledge about what takes place is kept secret from them.

The second change to this section involves a new component (inserted into both the men's section and the women's section) about the 'traditionality' of ceremonial performance. For example, when the men 'do some things in these places because they know some things about this other time', they do these things 'like other men did in these places before' (and likewise with the women). This new component seems to make the previous final components (which were about people's 'commitment', as it were, to perform ceremonies

are additions. Referring to the people who know about the Dreaming, new components read as follows:

in the same way in future times) somewhat redundant, so they have been removed.

Finally, a completely new section has been added, titled 'What all Aboriginal people can know'. The reference to 'all' Aboriginal people alerts us that whatever follows, it is not about some secret or restricted knowledge. What does follow is a set of components about, roughly speaking, social prohibitions; i.e. the fact that Dreamtime knowledge allows people to say about some acts that they are prohibited ('people can't do something like this'), and that if anyone should do such a thing it is to be universally condemned ('if at some time someone does something like this, it is very bad, all people know this').

In an earlier version, after V3 but prior to V15, there was a continuation about possible 'punishments' if violations occurred and were discovered, but the components needed to spell out this idea were worryingly complicated in wording. After further reflection it was decided that it was sufficient to include just the strongly condemnatory components, leaving it to inference that punishment would be a likely consequence. Around the same time as explication V15, we also experimented with a component about 'totemism', in the sense of totemic identification with different kinds of living creatures. Eventually, however, we came to the view that although totemic identification is indeed part of the 'belief complex' associated with the *Jukurrpa*, it was not necessary to posit it as part of the lexical meaning of the sense of the word being explicated (see section 8).

### 5. A still more elaborate version (V37), with improved logical structure

It would be wrong to give the impression that the development of our explication always went in a straight line. Sometimes we went too far in certain directions and had to cut back. There were numerous twists and turns during the many intermediate versions that separate V15 from the next version to be considered in full here. V37 was presented at



the 'Endangered languages, endangered concepts' symposium held at ANU in November 2013. It is the longest of the four explications considered in this paper — more than 200 words longer than its predecessor and more than 150 words longer than our 'final' version (V40) presented in section 6. Despite this, V37 shows several improvements in the structure of the explication.

The most significant changes concern the role of 'knowledge'. The section about knowledge ('How people can know about this other time') has been moved upwards to assume second position and a new line ('people here can know some things about this other time') has been inserted at the end of the first section to create a natural link to the second section. Having the knowledge section in the second position answers a question, as it were, that has been raised by the first section (namely, how can people possibly know about this seemingly mysterious 'time not like other times'), and it also leads more naturally to the subsequent sections, which are about people saying things about the Dreamtime. It makes better sense to think about people 'telling stories' about something if we first understand how they get the necessary knowledge.

Another innovation is the insertion of a new section into third position, the section titled 'People say some things about this other time at many times'. The idea that 'telling' about it is an important aspect of the Dreamtime concept was already present in V15, but in subsequent versions we elaborated this idea by adding components to state that Dreamtime narratives are frequently told and often take a considerable time to tell, and that people often want to hear the same stories again and again. This aligns with Stanner's emphasis on the 'constant recitation' of Dreamtime stories, and Aboriginal people's great appetite for them. The section ends with the component, 'people know that these things are true', which further reinforces their importance. The following section, 'What people say ...', has

been substantially carried over from previous versions. Overall, we think that in V37 the treatment of Dreamtime 'narratives' ('tales') begins to satisfactorily match Stanner's (2003:62) characterisation of their validity and significance: 'The blacks cite The Dreaming as a chapter of absolute validity in answer to all question of *why* and *how*. In this sense, the tales can be regarded as being, perhaps not a definition, but a "key" of Truth.'

The next section, 'What men and women do now because of this other time' (the title has been slightly rejigged), is an expanded account of the 'rituals/ceremonies' section. Adjustments have been made to bring in the ideas that these repeated performances are intended to focus people's thinking on the Dreamtime ('...because they want to think about this other time') and that ritual performance literally 're-enacts' Dreamtime events. Also in regard to this section, it is an important fact that Aboriginal people see ritual performance as part of 'looking after the country'. This element was already present in V15, but the wording has been improved in V37. There were some minor adjustments to the final section, both in the label (which is now explicitly about 'prohibitions' on behaviour; i.e. about 'What people can't do') and in the wording.<sup>8</sup>

Finally we must mention that in the period between V15 and V37 we attended to a niggling problem of wording that marred earlier versions. It concerns the phrase '[Aboriginal] people', which appeared in V15. This was unsatisfactory because without the parenthesised modifier 'Aboriginal' the expression 'people' by itself would be too broad in its application, but, on the other hand, with the modifier the expression 'Aboriginal people' would be inappropriate as a way of modelling an 'insider perspective'. This problem was resolved by substituting the expressions 'people here' and 'people in this place', which have the effect of deictically 'localising' the reference.

The full V37 is as follows:

V37: *Jukurrpa* ('Dreamtime', 'the Dreaming')

A TIME NOT LIKE OTHER TIMES

*Jukurrpa* is a time not like this time now  
it is not this time, it is not a time before this time, it is not a time after this time  
it is another time  
people here can know some things about this other time

HOW PEOPLE CAN KNOW ABOUT THIS OTHER TIME

some old men in many places know a lot about this other time  
some old women in many places know a lot about this other time  
someone can know some things about this other time  
because sometimes they can see some things when they are asleep [in a dream]  
it can be very bad if some people know these things

PEOPLE SAY SOME THINGS ABOUT THIS OTHER TIME AT MANY TIMES

at many times, some people here say some things for some time about this other time  
at many times, people here want to hear the same things about this other time  
these things are true

WHAT PEOPLE SAY ...

when people here say things about this other time, they say things like this:

"many places here are as they are now - places  
because some things happened in these places during this other time  
many things happen in these places as they do now  
because some things happened here during this other time  
people here live as they live now - people  
because some things happened here during this other time  
many kinds of living creatures here are as they are now - living creatures  
because some things happened here during this other time  
when these things happened during this other time, it was like this: - what happened  
some men did some things in some places, these men were not like men are now  
some women did some things in some places, these women were not like women are now  
some living creatures did some things in some places, these living creatures were not  
like living creatures are now"

WHAT MEN HERE DO BECAUSE OF THIS OTHER TIME

at many times men here do some things in some places  
because they want to think about this other time  
they do the same things at many times  
they want to do these things like many other men here did at many times before for a long time  
when these men are doing these things somewhere,  
something can happen in this place as it happened during this other time  
if men in these places don't do these things, something very bad can happen to these places

WHAT WOMEN HERE DO BECAUSE OF THIS OTHER TIME

at many times women here do some things in some places  
because they want to think about this other time  
they do the same things at many times  
they want to do these things like many other women here did at many times before  
for a very long time  
when these women are doing these things somewhere,  
something happens in this place as it happened during this other time  
if women in these places don't do these things, something very bad can happen to these places

## WHAT ABORIGINAL PEOPLE CAN'T DO BECAUSE OF THIS OTHER TIME

because people here know some things about this other time,  
 people here can know some things about many other things  
 because of this, at many times when someone does something, other people here can say:  
 "people can't do something like this  
 if at some time someone does something like this, it is very bad"

Before proceeding to our 'final' version, we will mention a component that we entertained at various times in the period between V15 and V37. It was an attempt to capture the idea that Aboriginal people recognise some present-day 'group affiliations' on the basis of the deeds of certain Dreamtime characters. There was reference to some individuals being thought of as 'part of something', and to 'some other people' being thought of as 'part of the same something'. This was intended to refer to membership of clans, totemic groups, subsections, or the like.

The wording was not satisfactory, however, because of its reliance on the use of 'part' in an abstract context. Although we spent a good deal of time trying to improve it, we could not find a way of doing so without making the components disturbingly cumbersome. Eventually we reached the conclusion that although this aspect is indeed part of the broad 'belief complex' associated with the Dreamtime, it is not part of the lexical meaning of *Jukurrpa* in the specific sense we are dealing with. We discuss this issue in section 7.

## 6. The 'final' version (V40)

This section presents the final version considered in this paper. It is the result of a final intensive period of development during the writing-up process in October 2014 and during revision in February 2015.

At a first glance, explication V40 looks quite different, but, as we explain in a moment, many of the changes are essentially rearrangements of previous components, or else they are simplified or condensed phrasings of material that was already present in previous versions. The section structure of the explication is also largely the same; i.e. an initial block about the general 'nature' of *Jukurrpa*, followed by sections concerning how people KNOW about it, what kinds of things they SAY about it, and what they DO and DON'T DO because of it. Due to some sections having been merged or

condensed, V40 is more than 150 words shorter than its predecessor and it has a 'tighter' textual feel.

The greatest change to V40 was the result of a major rethink about an aspect of the explication that we had taken for granted from early days in the development process; namely, the idea that *Jukurrpa* depends on 'time' as an ontological category. In V37 almost the entire first section of the explication was devoted to spelling out that *Jukurrpa* was, on this interpretation, a 'special time' — a time unlike the past, present or future, to be sure, but a time nonetheless. To speak a little figuratively, this presented *Jukurrpa* as being or belonging to a separate temporal dimension: a time outside of time.

Despite the attractions of this idea (touched on in section 2), there had always been some lingering doubt about the translatability of the word 'time' in this particularly abstract sense. It is well established that Aboriginal languages (like all languages) can use noun-like words in expressions like 'at this time' and 'at the same time' (i.e. in phrases with an adverbial function), but this does not necessarily mean that they have anything like 'time' as an ontological category. Actually, in the second paragraph of his essay 'The Dreaming', Stanner (2003:57) noted, 'I have never been able to discover any Aboriginal word for *time* as an abstract concept.' Our linguistic consultants for Warlpiri and Arrernte had also raised problems with rendering expressions like 'it is a time not like this time now...it is another time', but, preoccupied as we were with developing the main content of the explication, we had deferred attending to their objections to these top-level components. Eventually, we turned our attention to these objections and after considerable investigation we had to face the fact that 'time' as an abstract category is, indeed, not translatable into Indigenous Aboriginal languages. This meant that our interpretation of *Jukurrpa* in terms of 'time'

as an ontological category could not be an authentic representation of Aboriginal ways of thinking. It had to be abandoned.

In V40 the initial components of the *Jukurrpa*

when people say "Jukurrpa" ("Dreamtime", "the Dreaming"), they think like this:

at some time before, many things were happening here for some time, things like this  
can't happen now

when people here want to say something about all these things, they can say it with one word,  
this word is Jukurrpa

[...]

This opening frame is similar to that developed in Goddard and Wierzbicka (2014a) as a way of dealing with 'abstract' nouns. Essentially, it presents the word *Jukurrpa* as invoking a shared way of thinking about many things (in Stanner's phrase, 'a complex of meanings'). This way of thinking is premised on the idea that at some previous time 'many things were happening for some time, things like this can't happen now'.<sup>9</sup> There is certainly a temporal aspect involved, insofar as these remarkable events are understood to have happened 'at some time before', but this use of

explication have been replaced with the following lines, which represent a different interpretation (and one which is cross-translatable):

'time' is a matter of 'when', rather than 'what'. In the third component, special importance is attached to the word *Jukurrpa* (or its counterparts in other languages) as a way of allowing people to 'say something about all these things...with one word'.

The first section of V40 is completed by the following lines. Their content is not new (i.e. they were already included in previous versions), but gathering them together in the top section of the explication increases their impact and, we think, imparts an appropriate gravitas to the *Jukurrpa* concept.

many old men know a lot about this, many old women know a lot about this  
they can say many things about it  
these things are true

In V40 *Jukurrpa* appears immediately, in the very first section, as something that people (especially, old people) can KNOW about, can SAY things about and, in particular, can say TRUE things about. In a way, discarding the previous ontological (or metaphysical) components has had a liberating effect, freeing space for the important main ideas to appear early, and combined in a way that reinforces their impact.

The second section of the explication ('How people can know about this') now houses two important details: that one source of knowledge is from dreams and that some knowledge of the *Jukurrpa* is restricted. Note, by the way, that as well as removing 'abstract time' from the top section, all other references to 'this other time' have been removed from later parts of the explication, either by rephrasing them in terms of

'about-ness' or by using translatable temporal expressions such as 'at this time'.

The third section of V40 is all about 'What people say...'. It combines the two 'saying' sections from V37, and, more importantly, rearranges and reconfigures their content. This is the second major change from V37. Previously, this section began with a series of 'because-components', then continued with components about Dreamtime 'happenings'. This order of presentation could give the impression that Dreaming stories are typically oriented as 'explanatory' in purpose; but while it is true that they have an 'explanatory' function (and that it is a crucial function), it is not usual for Dreaming stories to be explicitly framed in an explanatory mode. Instead, the primary focus is on describing the events that took place: how they happened and where they

happened. Explicit statements about Dreamtime events explaining present-day landscape features and social practices are more likely to come at the end of a Dreaming story rather than at the beginning. For this reason, we rearranged the 'What people say...' section so that the material about the Dreamtime events comes first and their

explanatory importance is not mentioned until afterwards.

As for the explanatory importance components, in place of the elaborate eight lines in the previous version, the V40 phrasing has been radically simplified as follows:

people often say something like this about many places: "this place is like this because of *Jukurrpa*".  
people often say something like this about many things: "it is like this because of *Jukurrpa*".

Aside from the simpler phrasing, these formulations have another important attraction; namely, they are much closer to the kind of things Aboriginal people actually say themselves.

The fourth and fifth sections ('What people do...' on account of *Jukurrpa*, and 'What people can't do...') have also been simplified in their phrasing. The section about ceremonial and ritual activities has been condensed by merging the men's and women's sections, and at the same time placing more relative emphasis on the 'men's side'. In V37 there were separate sections about

men's and women's activities, and the content of each was completely parallel. In V40 men's activities are presented as more frequent and more far-ranging than women's ('at many times' and 'in many places' for men, as opposed to 'at some times' and 'in some places' for women). The third section ends with a simple but powerful warning about the consequences of not performing the ceremonies and re-enactments: 'if people don't do these things, something very bad can happen in these places'. The final section has also been simplified in its wording.

#### V40: *Jukurrpa* ('Dreamtime', 'the Dreaming')

##### **When people say "Jukurrpa" ("Dreamtime", "the Dreaming"), they think like this:**

at some time before, many things were happening here for some time, things like this  
can't happen now  
when people here want to say something about all these things, they can say it with one word,  
this word is *Jukurrpa*  
many old men know a lot about this, many old women know a lot about this  
they can say many things about it  
these things are true

##### HOW PEOPLE CAN KNOW ABOUT THIS (ABOUT JUKURRPA)

because many old people know a lot about this (about *Jukurrpa*),  
other people can know some things about it  
not all people can know these things  
sometimes people can know things about this (about *Jukurrpa*)  
because they see some things when they are asleep [in a dream]

##### WHAT PEOPLE OFTEN SAY ABOUT THIS (ABOUT JUKURRPA)

people in this place often say many things for some time about this (about *Jukurrpa*)  
people in this place often want to hear these things  
when people in this place say these things, they say things like this:

"many things happened at this time before, these things happened in many places  
some men did some things in some places, these men were not like men are now  
some women did some things in some places, these women were not like women are now  
some creatures of some kinds did some things in some places, these creatures were  
not like creatures of these kinds are now"

people often say something like this about many places: "this place is like this because of *Jukurrpa*"  
people often say something like this about many things: "it is like this because of *Jukurrpa*"

## WHAT PEOPLE DO BECAUSE OF ALL THIS (BECAUSE OF JUKURRPA)

men now do some things in many places  
 because they want to think about all this (about *Jukurrpa*)  
 they do some things like many other men did at many times for a long time before  
 when they do these things somewhere, something happens in this place as it happened before  
 at some times women do things like this in some places  
 if people don't do these things, something very bad can happen in these places

## WHAT PEOPLE CAN'T DO BECAUSE OF ALL THIS (BECAUSE OF JUKURRPA)

people in this place know very much things about all this (about *Jukurrpa*)  
 because of this, they do not do some things  
 if someone does something like this, people say: "this is very bad"

This completes our exploration of what we see as the primary sense of the '*Jukurrpa* concept' in Central Australian languages, such as Warlpiri, Western Desert Language and Arrernte. Needless to say, we do not regard this explication as perfect or complete, though we do hope that it is substantially correct in many details.

We believe the explication can serve as a basis for explanatory outreach to people in the broader Australian community, who need to develop a deeper and more accurate understanding of this concept, which is so fundamental to traditional Aboriginal ways of life. In some contexts, a full explication like that given above might be too long to be practical. Appendix B presents a shorter abridged version, which we hope can be useful, for instance, in school education. Appendix C is a rendition of the abridged version in the Ngaanyatjarra dialect of the Western Desert Language, kindly provided by Ameer Glass.

### 7. The lexical polysemy of *jukurrpa* and the 'Dreamtime belief complex'

As we see it, the time-related meaning of *Jukurrpa*, which we have explicated, stands at the centre of a large complex of associated meanings. Some of these associated meanings exist as additional (polysemic) senses of the word *jukurrpa* itself, while others are carried by distinct '*jukurrpa*-related' words. Looking at it from the point of view of cultural knowledge and belief, rather than from a lexical point of view, it can be helpful to think about the 'Jukurrpa belief complex' or 'Dreamtime belief complex'. Although we can hardly do more here than raise the subject, we would like to explain why we think that the time-related meaning of *jukurrpa* is so central.

The key thing about this sense of *jukurrpa* is that it allows the possibility of forming thoughts such as 'this happened in the *jukurrpa*', 'this someone did some things in the *jukurrpa*', 'it happened in this place, in the *jukurrpa*' and so on. It seems to us that thoughts like these are the essential starting points for many other Indigenous concepts.

Typically, some of these other concepts are embodied in other meanings of the word *jukurrpa* itself, though the exact range of polysemic meanings may differ somewhat from language to language. In Warlpiri, for example, the word *jukurrpa* can be used not only in the 'Dreamtime' sense but also to designate Dreamtime characters themselves (as the Warlpiri dictionary puts it, 'Dreamtime beings'). The meaning appears to be (roughly) 'someone, this someone did many things in the *jukurrpa*'. Another example of a polysemic meaning of '*jukurrpa* words', one that seems to be quite widespread across Aboriginal Australia, is to express a personal affiliation to a particular Dreamtime 'story line'; e.g. in expressions like 'That's my Dreaming', which use a personal 'possessive' pronoun. Often the basis for the affiliation comes from where the person was born or conceived; i.e. in a place where certain things 'happened in the *jukurrpa*'.

Turning now to examples of lexically distinct '*jukurrpa*-related' words, examples from the Warlpiri dictionary include the following, among many others: *juju*, defined as 'rituals associated with Dreamtime beings (*jukurrpa*)'; *yanjarra*, defined as 'creative power; manifestation of creative power'; and *miirn-nyina-mi*, defined as 'x (=human) perform the ceremonial role appropriate to the matriline (*kurdungurlu*) involving material preparations'. Some examples

from the Eastern and Central Arrernte dictionary (Henderson and Dobson 1994) include *ameke-ameke*, defined as ‘an important Dreaming place which certain people, especially women and children, are not allowed to go near; sacred site; ceremonial ground’; *arwenge*, defined as ‘own personal Dreaming, totem’; and the verb *aknganeme*, defined as, in one meaning, ‘originate in the Dreaming and exist forever’. Other examples can be found in words connected with beliefs about how people come into the world and about what happens after people die. These beliefs often involve concepts akin to ‘spirits’ and immaterial ‘parts of a person’; i.e. concepts akin to ‘soul’ or ‘a person’s spirit’.<sup>10</sup> To illustrate from another part of Aboriginal Australia, consider the word *birrimbirr*, from the Yolŋu Matha language of Arnhem Land. The anthropologists Frances and Howard Morphy (2013, unpublished; cited in Wierzbicka in press) gloss it as follows: ‘soul; the animating force from the *wajarr* [Dreaming, sacred realm] that enters the foetus at conception and returns to the *wajarr* realm at death’.

Perhaps it is useful to compare the semantic and cultural role of the *Jukurrpa* concept in Aboriginal languages with the semantic and cultural role of the concept of ‘God’ in European languages. Of course, we do not mean that the *Jukurrpa* concept is in any way ‘theistic’ — clearly, it is not — but that does not mean that there are no parallels to be drawn. There are several parallels. First, just as there is a great variety of ‘God-related’ vocabulary in European languages (e.g. Christian vocabulary items such as *prayer*, *heaven*, *hell*, *angel*, *sin*, *priest*, *church*...), so there is a great variety of ‘*Jukurrpa*-related’ vocabulary in Aboriginal languages. And just as the meaning ‘God’ is a conceptual building block or ‘semantic molecule’ in the lexicon of Christianity, so the meaning ‘*Jukurrpa*’ is a semantic molecule in the lexicon of many ritual-related and ‘spiritual’ terms in Aboriginal languages.

Given the cultural centrality of the *Jukurrpa* concept — or concepts — the question naturally arises: How similar are the meanings of ‘*jukurrpa* words’ across the diversity of Australian languages? It seems likely to us, but by no means certain, that the primary, time-related sense of such words in Central Australia is the same or very similar across the languages of the region,

such as Warlpiri, Western Desert Language and Arrernte. This does not mean, of course, that the full ‘Dreamtime belief complex’ of these three languages is the same. Presumably, it is not. But the foundational concept may be the same or similar, despite other differences in the belief system. Here again a parallel with European languages and cultures may be useful, for it can well be argued that the lexical meaning of ‘God’ is the same across a wide diversity of European languages — even though specific beliefs *about* God differ markedly between Catholic and Protestant varieties of Christianity (cf. Wierzbicka 2001, forthcoming).

Clearly, we cannot pursue these questions here. We return to the issue of how to approach explaining the core *Jukurrpa* idea to non-Aboriginal Australians.

## 8. ‘Dreamtime’, ‘Dreaming’ or *Jukurrpa*?

If one wants to try to explain the key concept at the heart of Aboriginal culture to non-Indigenous Australians, one question concerns the label or labels that one is going to start with. Stanner (2003) declared himself against ‘Dreamtime’ and in favour of ‘Dreaming’, and his stand was no doubt highly influential. Strehlow (1971:614) also regarded the English term ‘dream time’ as ‘vague and inaccurate’ and saw its appeal as deriving from ‘sentimentality and its suggestion of mysticism’ (quoted in Green 2012:165). Both terms, ‘Dreamtime’ and ‘Dreaming’, subsequently came under criticism because of their association with ordinary ‘dreaming’ (e.g. Wolfe 1991), but both have survived in Australian English, showing different strength in different areas of usage. In educational materials, ‘Dreamtime’ is still widely used, and indeed appears to be preferred (as a term better known to the wider population), whereas in Aboriginal studies, the Aboriginal art market and the discourse surrounding land rights, ‘Dreaming’ is clearly favoured. To quote Green (2012:171):

The words ‘Dreaming’, and these days to a much lesser extent ‘Dreamtime’, are ubiquitous, manifest in the work of Indigenous songwriters, in the genre of texts offered as explanations for Aboriginal art, and in millions of words generated in the processes

of reclaiming traditional land or establishing Native Title to it.

Despite the preference for 'Dreaming' over 'Dreamtime' among anthropologists, and even among many Aboriginal people, we would like to go against the tide and say a few words in support of retaining the term 'Dreamtime' in some contexts at least. The main advantage of 'Dreamtime' is that it has, essentially, only one meaning, whereas the word 'Dreaming' is highly multifunctional (appearing in collocations like 'my Dreaming', 'Dreaming track', 'Dreaming site' and the like). Furthermore, the form of the word 'Dreamtime' (specifically, the presence of the element 'time') helps to pinpoint an important aspect of the Indigenous meaning. As we have argued, words like *jukurrpa*, *altyerre* and their counterparts in other Australian languages are typically polysemous, but one of their meanings — perhaps the most central one — does have a temporal aspect, albeit very vague; namely, the events of the *Jukurrpa*, *Altyerre* etc. took place 'at some time before'.

Some have argued that it would be better to give up using English terms like 'Dreamtime' and 'Dreaming' entirely. In his Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara dictionary, Goddard (1996) notes that 'there seems to be an emerging Aboriginal preference for this use of the word [*tjukurpa*] not to be given an English equivalent at all'. Quoting this observation, Green (2012:173) comments that 'the choice to not translate is perhaps the best way of honouring the complexity of key indigenous terms'. Nicholls (2014b:5) argues the same point, saying:

Unfortunately, the dream-related terminology serves to erase the complexities of the original concepts in the many different Indigenous languages and cultures, by emphasising their putatively magical, fantastic and illusory attributes, when The *Jukurrpa*, *Altyerr*, *Ungud*, *Ngarrankarni*, *Manguny*, *Wongar*, and so forth are understood by their diverse Aboriginal adherents to be reality, religion, and the Law.

We fully agree with this comment, which, of course, applies equally to 'Dreamtime' and 'Dreaming', but the fact is that the terms 'Dreamtime' and 'Dreaming' both have wide

currency among non-Indigenous Australians. In trying to correct or to deepen their understanding of the corresponding Aboriginal concept(s), it makes sense, pedagogically, to start with words they know. Plus, in view of the existence of so many Aboriginal language words for the same or similar concepts, there is a need for some English word or words that can help co-ordinate or keep track of the correspondences. Our argument is that it makes good sense, both semantically and pedagogically, to retain both words (i.e. 'Dreamtime', as well as 'Dreaming'), while using extended paraphrase in simple language as a way of helping the general public appreciate their true semantic complexity.

As for the dangers of the 'dream-related terminology', we believe that from an intercultural and educational point of view, the references to what people can KNOW and what is TRUE in the first section of our explication can provide a more effective safeguard against any misleading implications of something magical, fantastic and illusory than complex words like 'reality' or 'validity' (which many schoolchildren would hardly ever use themselves). From the Aboriginal insiders' perspective, old men and women can KNOW things about *Jukurrpa* and what they say about *Jukurrpa* is TRUE (just as from a Christian perspective, people can know a lot about God from the Gospels, and what the Gospels say about God is true). This may be a demanding idea for non-Aboriginal Australians, and especially for schoolchildren, but precisely because the words are familiar and fully understandable, they can bring the beginning of a healthy cultural shock, and the chance of genuine intercultural understanding.

## 9. Parting comment

In his book *Sense and nonsense in Australian history*, historian John Hirst (2006:66) writes of the understanding of Aboriginal religion as 'one of the great challenges of scholarship in this country'. He continues:

The first observers declared that Aborigines had no religion. Now we know how deeply religious they were and how far religion affected all of life — to such an extent that perhaps our term *religion* is not appropriate since it is one of the labels by which we



distinguish different aspects of life which in Aboriginal society were all intimately interconnected. *When the terms of life are so different our language is strained to make adequate description.* (Hirst 2006:66, emphasis added)

Yes, indeed. But the strain can be overcome if — and only if — we are prepared to give up the futile goal of finding a short pithy gloss, let alone a single-word gloss, for such a complex concept. As we have tried to show in this study, it is fully possible to unpack the conceptual content of key Aboriginal words such as *Jukurrpa*, provided we follow good principles of cross-linguistic semantics — above all, casting our explanations in terms of simple, shared concepts — and provided we have the patience, both to undertake the conceptual analysis and to absorb the complexity of the explication.

## Acknowledgments

Many people have helped us in the 'journey of discovery' described in this paper, which (to repeat) we regard as still ongoing. We are particularly grateful to Mary Laughren, David Nash and Jane Simpson for their sustained critical engagement with our project. We are also grateful to Frances Morphy, Jenny Green and Lizzie Ellis for helpful comments. Two reviewers for AAS provided useful reviews. We are greatly indebted to Ameer Glass, who provided not only her Ngaanyatjarra language skills and experience as a translator but a great deal of constructive advice that helped shape the 'final' version of the *Jukurrpa* explication. We take full responsibility for all remaining errors and shortcomings.

## Appendix A: Semantic primes and molecules

This appendix gives basic information about the NSM (Natural Semantic Metalanguage) approach to meaning, which is based on a decades-long program of conceptual analysis and cross-linguistic research. A key finding is that the primary meanings of the words in Table 1 (known as 'semantic primes') can be expressed by words or word-like expressions in all or most languages. Available evidence indicates that semantic primes can be combined according to certain patterns that are found in all or most languages (Goddard 2012; Goddard and Wierzbicka 2002). This means that semantic primes can function as a 'culturally safe' (i.e. non-Anglo/Eurocentric) vocabulary for analysing and understanding the meanings of complex words in any language.

**Table 1:** Semantic primes (English exponents) grouped into 12 categories

- 
- |    |   |
|----|---|
| 1  | I-ME, YOU, SOMEONE, SOMETHING~THING, PEOPLE, BODY, KINDS, PARTS                 |
| 2  | THIS, THE SAME, OTHER~ELSE  |
| 3  | ONE, TWO, MUCH~MANY, LITTLE~FEW, SOME, ALL                                      |
| 4  | GOOD, BAD, BIG, SMALL   |
| 5  | THINK, KNOW, WANT, DON'T WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR                                  |
| 6  | SAY, WORDS, TRUE  |
| 7  | DO, HAPPEN, MOVE  |
| 8  | BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING), (BE) MINE                     |
| 9  | LIVE, DIE   |
| 10 | WHEN~TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT |
| 11 | WHERE~PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE, TOUCH                 |
| 12 | NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF, VERY, MORE, LIKE~AS                               |

Aside from semantic primes, which are the ultimate bedrock of linguistic meaning, evidence suggests that a smallish number of more complex meanings (perhaps 60–80 in number) also appear in all or most languages of the world. These include biosocial meanings such as 'men', 'women' and 'children'; body-part words like 'hands', 'mouth' and 'eyes'; physical descriptors like 'long', 'round', 'hard' and 'sharp'; environmental words like 'sky', 'ground', 'water' and 'fire'; and others. Because these apparently universal or near-universal meanings play a role, alongside semantic primes, as the 'building blocks' of yet more complex meanings, they are known as semantic molecules.

The technical literature on semantic primes and molecules is extensive. Interested readers can find abundant references in Goddard (2012) and in Goddard and Wierzbicka (2014a, 2014b). For a textbook treatment, see Goddard (2011).

## Appendix B: What does *Jukurrpa* ('Dreamtime', 'the Dreaming') mean? An abridged explication for educational purposes

Since this text is designed for the general public, normal conventions for capital letters and punctuation are used, rather than the minimal style favoured in NSM explications. Note that the expression 'Aboriginal people' is used throughout to make it clear — for pedagogical purposes — that the text is intended to depict an Aboriginal way of thinking.

### When Aboriginal people say '*Jukurrpa*' ('Dreamtime', 'the Dreaming'), they think like this:

At some time before, many things were happening here for some time. Things like this can't happen now.

When people here want to say something about all these things, they can say it with one word. This word is *Jukurrpa*.

Many old men in this place know a lot about this, many old women in this place know a lot about this. They can say many things about it. These things are true.

#### *What Aboriginal people often say about Jukurrpa*

When Aboriginal people say some things about this (i.e. about *Jukurrpa*), they say things like this:

'Many things happened at that time, these things happened in many places.

Some men did some things in some places, these men were not like men are now.

Some women did some things in some places, these women were not like women are now.

Some creatures of some kinds did some things in some places, these creatures were not like creatures of these kinds are now.'

Aboriginal people often say something like this about many places: 'This place is like this because of *Jukurrpa*'.  
Aboriginal people often say something like this about many things: 'It is like this because of *Jukurrpa*'.

#### *What Aboriginal people do now because of Jukurrpa*

Men now do some things in many places because they want to think about all this (i.e. about *Jukurrpa*). They do these things like many other men did at many times for a long time before. At some times women here do things like this in some places. If people don't do these things, something very bad can happen in these places.

#### *What Aboriginal people can't do because of Jukurrpa*

Aboriginal people know very much about all this (i.e. about *Jukurrpa*). Because of this, they do not do some things. If someone does something like this, people say: 'This is very bad.'

## Appendix C: The abridged explication in Ngaanyatjarra, translated by Ameer Glass

Ngaanyatjarra is a dialect of the Western Desert Language. Together with its neighbour Ngaatjatjarra, it is spoken by approximately 1400 people living in the central east of Western Australia (cf. Glass and Hackett 2003). In Ngaanyatjarra the cognate word to Warlpiri *Jukurrpa* is spelled *Tjukurrpa*. The following text has kindly been provided by Ameer Glass, who has more than 40 years' experience as a linguist and translator.

Each section corresponds closely to the abridged explication given in Appendix B. The interlinear glosses are intended to help the reader track through the Ngaanyatjarra rendition and can be regarded as 'semi-literal'. We do not provide a full morpheme-by-morpheme glossing, which would be distracting and of little interest to non-linguists. The word *kutjupa-kutjupa* perhaps warrants a comment. It is glossed as 'different', which is close to the meaning it expresses when used as a modifier, but when used as a substantive, it can express the meaning 'things' or 'many/different things' in general.

When people say "Tjukurrpa" ("Dreamtime", "the Dreaming"), they think like this:

<i>Kutjulpirtu</i> some.time.ago	<i>kutjupa-kutjupa</i> different	<i>ngurra</i> place	<i>ngaangka</i> this-in	<i>ngarala-wanaranytja.</i> were.happening				
<i>Kutjupa-kutjupa</i> different	<i>palunyapirinypa</i> that-like	<i>puru</i> again	<i>ngarakitjamunu.</i> will.not.happen					
<i>Yarnangu-ya</i> people-they	<i>ngurra</i> place	<i>ngaangka</i> this-in	<i>palunyatjarra</i> that-about	<i>watjalkitjalu,</i> want.to.speak	<i>wangka</i> word	<i>kutju</i> one		
<i>watjalku</i> will.say	<i>Tjukurrpa.</i> Tjukurrpa							
<i>Wati</i> man	<i>yirna</i> old	<i>pirni-ya</i> many-they	<i>ngurra</i> place	<i>ngaangka</i> this-in	<i>palunyaku</i> that-for	<i>ninti</i> knowing	<i>purlkanya</i> very	<i>nyinarra.</i> are
<i>Minyma</i> woman	<i>pampa</i> old	<i>pirni-ya</i> many	<i>ngurra</i> place	<i>ngaangka</i> this-in	<i>palunyaku</i> that-for	<i>ninti</i> knowing	<i>purlka</i> very	<i>nyanyinarra.</i> are
<i>Palunyalu-ya</i> then-they	<i>kutjupa-kutjupa</i> different	<i>palunyatjarra</i> that-about	<i>watjalpayi.</i> always.say	<i>Palunyanya-ya</i> those-they	<i>tjukarurru.</i> true			

WHAT PEOPLE HERE OFTEN SAY ABOUT THIS (I.E. ABOUT TJUKURRPA)

<i>Yarnangulu-ya</i> people	<i>ngurra</i> place	<i>ngaangka</i> this-in	<i>tjukurratjarra</i> tjukurrpa-about	<i>ngaapirinypa</i> this-like	<i>watjalpayi:</i> always.say			
<i>"Kutjupa-kutjupa</i> different	<i>kutjulpirtu</i> some.time.ago	<i>ngaralanytja.</i> were.happening	<i>Palunyanya-ya</i> those-they	<i>ngurra</i> place	<i>piringka</i> many-in			
<i>ngaralanytja.</i> were.happening								
<i>Wati</i> man	<i>kutjupatjarralu-ya</i> some-they	<i>kutjupa-kutjupa</i> different	<i>palyaranytja</i> were.doing	<i>ngurra</i> place	<i>kutjupa-kutjupangka.</i> different-in			

<i>Wati</i> man	<i>palunyanya-ya</i> those-they	<i>wati</i> man	<i>kuwarringatjapirinymaalpa.</i> nowadays-like-not		
<i>Minyma</i> woman	<i>kutjupatjarralu-ya</i> some-they	<i>kutjupa-kutjupa</i> different	<i>palyaranytja</i> were.doing	<i>ngurra</i> place	<i>kutjupa-kutjupangka.</i> different-in
<i>Minyma</i> woman	<i>palunyanya-ya</i> those-they	<i>minyma</i> woman	<i>kuwarringatjapirinymaalpa.</i> nowadays-like-not		
<i>Kuka</i> animal	<i>kutjupatjarralu-ya</i> some-they	<i>kutjupa-kutjupa</i> different	<i>palyaranytja</i> were.doing	<i>ngurra</i> place	<i>kutjupa-kutjupangka.</i> different-in
<i>Kuka</i> animal	<i>palunyanya-ya</i> those-they	<i>kuka</i> animal	<i>kuwarringatjapirinymaalpa.</i> nowadays-like-not		
<i>Yarnangulu-ya</i> people-they	<i>ngurra</i> place	<i>kutjupa-kutjupatjarra</i> different-about	<i>ngaapirinypa</i> this-like	<i>watjalpayi,</i> always.say	
" <i>Ngurra</i> place	<i>ngaanya</i> this	<i>tjukurrnguru</i> tjukurrpa-because.of	<i>ngaapirinypa</i> this-like	<i>ngarala.</i> " is	
<i>Yarnangulu-ya</i> people-they	<i>kutjupa-kutjupatjarra</i> different-about	<i>ngaapirinypa</i> this-like	<i>watjalpayi,</i> always.say		
" <i>Ngaanya</i> this	<i>tjukurrnguru</i> tjukurrpa-because.of	<i>ngaapirinypa</i> this-like	<i>ngarala.</i> " is		

WHAT PEOPLE DO NOW BECAUSE OF ALL THIS (I.E. BECAUSE OF TJUKURRPA)

<i>Kuwarrinya-ya</i> now-they	<i>wati</i> man	<i>pirnilu</i> many	<i>kutjupa-kutjupa</i> different	<i>palyalpayi</i> always.do	<i>ngurra</i> place	<i>pirningka</i> many-in
<i>Tjukurrpa</i> Tjukurrpa	<i>kulikitjalu.</i> to.think					
<i>Palunyanya-ya</i> those-they	<i>palyalpayi</i> always.do	<i>wati</i> man	<i>kutjupatjarralu-ya</i> some-they	<i>kutjulpirtu</i> some.time.ago	<i>palyaranytja,</i> were.doing	
<i>palunyapirinypa.</i> that-like						
<i>Kuwarrinya-ya</i> now-they	<i>minyma</i> woman	<i>pirnilu-ya</i> many	<i>kutjupa-kutjupa</i> different	<i>palyalpayi</i> always.do	<i>ngurra</i> place	
<i>kutjupatjarrangka.</i> some-in						
<i>Tjinguru-ya</i> maybe/if-they	<i>yarnangu</i> people	<i>pirnilu</i> many	<i>palunyapirinypa</i> that-like	<i>palyalkitjamunu,</i> will.not.do		
<i>palunyangka</i> then	<i>kutjupa-kutjupa</i> different	<i>palyamunu</i> bad	<i>purlkanya</i> very	<i>ngaraku.</i> will.happen		

## WHAT PEOPLE CAN'T DO BECAUSE OF ALL THIS (I.E. BECAUSE OF TJUKURRPA)

<i>Yarnangu-ya</i> people-they	<i>ngurra</i> place	<i>ngaangka</i> this-in	<i>Tjukurrku</i> Tjukurrpa-for	<i>ninti</i> knowing	<i>purlkanya</i> very	<i>nyinarra.</i> are
<i>Palunyanguru-ya</i> that-because-they	<i>kutjupa-kutjupa</i> different	<i>palyantjamaaltu</i> do.not.do	<i>wantipayi.</i> always.leave			
<i>Kutjupalu-tjinguru</i> someone-maybe/if	<i>palunyapirinyapa</i> that-like	<i>palyalku,</i> will do	<i>nyangka-ya</i> then-they	<i>watjalku</i> will.say		
" <i>Palunyanya</i> that	<i>palyamunu</i> bad	<i>mularrpa</i> ". very				

## NOTES

1. Historian John Hirst (2006:66) goes so far as to say, 'If I were asked to nominate the finest achievement of European civilisation in Australia I would point to the fifteen pages of Stanner's essay "The Dreaming".'
2. Stanner was speaking somewhat loosely. Spencer and Gillen first used the plural form 'dream times' (Gillen 1896:185, cited Green 2012:159; cf. Spencer and Gillen 1927: 592).
3. The word 'logos' is, obviously, not part of ordinary English but belongs to a sophisticated 'cultured' register. Less obvious, perhaps, is that the same applies to the word 'heroic', which in Stanner's usage does not mean the same as *heroic* in ordinary English.
4. Although we gratefully acknowledge the generous help from these experts, we do not want to imply that any of them is in full agreement with the 'final' version of the explication offered in this study.
5. The word 'creatures' is used as a semantic molecule (see Appendix A). To express an equivalent meaning in Warlpiri, for example, one can use the polysemous word *kuyu*. This word can have the meanings 'meat' and 'edible creature, game', but it can also be used more broadly; as, for example, in the titles of the Warlpiri booklets *Kuyu ngarninja-wangu* ('*Kuyu* we do not eat') by Robertson George Jampijinpa (1980) and *Kuyu kuja karlipa ngarni* ('*Kuyu* we eat') by Ormay Gallager Nangalarlu (2009). Note that *kuyu* can apply equally well to what are termed in English 'animals', 'birds', 'snakes' and 'lizards'. Whether the meanings of *kuyu* (in the relevant sense) and 'creature' are precisely identical requires further research but it seems clear that they are substantially equivalent. Note also that the expression 'living creatures' was later adjusted to 'creatures of some kinds'; see section 6.

6. It might be asked why we use 'asleep' as a semantic molecule rather than 'dream'. The reason, in brief, is that to qualify as a semantic molecule a lexical meaning must be needed as a conceptual building block not just in one or two words but in many words. It is clear that 'asleep' (or 'sleeping') meets this requirement but it is doubtful if the same applies to 'dream'.
7. Bringing 'saying things' into the picture also connects with the fact that in some languages, such as Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara, the word *tjukurpa* also has the meanings 'something said, message' and 'story'.
8. Stanner (2003) places emphasis on Dreamtime as 'a "key" or guide to the norms of conduct'. As we understand it, the 'normative' implications of the Dreamtime are mainly about ritual and procedural practices that follow models from the Dreamtime (e.g. how to butcher a kangaroo) and about prohibitions on various social behaviours. As we see it, these aspects are adequately covered by the present explication.
9. The component 'things like this can't happen now' indicates that we are talking about a time that is very unlike the present. It is possible that this aspect should be strengthened with an additional component such as 'at that time people weren't living here like now', or similar.
10. See Elkin (1954) and Meggitt (1962) for discussions about such beliefs in Central Australia.

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