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Article MS 5040 'Languages of the World: Gamilaraay'

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Abstract

Gamilaraay (or Kamilaroi) is an Australian Aboriginal language, from the north-west of New South Wales. It ceased to be spoken as a daily language in the early 20th century but is currently being revived and reintroduced in the local schools. A range of recorded materials and publications exist, including websites and multimedia, and an active language revival effort is currently underway.

Introduction

Gamilaraay (also spelled Kamilaroi) is an Australian Aboriginal language that was traditionally spoken over a large area in the north-west of New South Wales, from the Great Diving Range near Tamworth, north and west to the Darling and Barwon Rivers. There was a range of dialect variation within this region, mostly marked by vocabulary differences, with all the local groups identified as *gamil* 'no' *–araay* 'having'. The sociolinguistic history of Gamilaraay is typical of many south-eastern Australian languages.

The first recording of Gamilaraay is a short worldlist collected in 1832 by Major Thomas Mitchell (1839), and there is quite an amount of vocabulary materials collected by local land owners in the late 19th century. The missionary William Ridley (Ridley 1856, 1875) lived among the Gamilaraay in the 1850's and studied the language, collecting vocabulary and making simple primers and bible translations. In 1903 the surveyor R.H. Mathews published grammatical

notes and a short wordlist, however the first professional recordings of the language date from 1930 when the anthropologist Norman Tindale took down words in phonetic notation and collected a short traditional narrative text (Austin and Tindale 1986). By that time, local Aboriginal social and cultural transmission had been so disturbed by the impact of European settlement (see Australia chapter) that the two old men Tindale interviewed had difficulty recalling the story. In 1955 S.A. Wurm carried out extensive fieldwork in eastern New South Wales and interviewed at Boggabilla Peter Lang, who seems to have been the last fluent native speaker of the language. He died the following year. Wurm's materials include fieldnotes and a 13 minute tape recording. In 1972-4 Austin interviewed a large number of semi-speakers who could recall up to 200 lexical items and fixed phrases from their youth, though none could produce sentences in the language. Using all the existing modern and 19th century materials, together with comparative data from neighbouring languages (see below) it is possible to obtain a fair but incomplete idea of the language and its structure.

From the 1940's onwards Gamilaraay ceased to be used as the main means of communication, although knowledge of words and expressions (such as plant, animal and food names) continues until today. Beginning in the 1990's there has been intense local interest in the language, and strong support for its documentation and reintroduction. Austin 1992 is a bilingual dictionary that has been widely distributed; a hypertext version created by Austin and Nathan 1995 was the first fully hypertext bilingual dictionary on the world wide web.

As a result of local initiatives and with support from the New South Wales government, Gamilaraay is currently undergoing language revival and is being taught both in adult education and primary school classes. A range of materials are now available on the language and its

neighbour Yuwaalaraay (see below), including a reference dictionary (Giacon et al 2001), language lessons (Giacon 1999) and wordbook with accompanying music CD.

Language relationships

Gamilaraay is closely related to its immediate western neighbours Yuwaalaraay and Yuwaaliyaay. The languages share about 70% common vocabulary with Gamilaraay and a similar grammatical system. Fortunately, Corinne Williams was able to study with the last two fluent speakers of these languages in 1975 and compiled a basic reference grammar and vocabulary list (see Williams 1980). There is also a large amount of tape-recorded material collected in the 1970's by amateur linguist Janet Mathews (a relative of R.H. Mathews) that is being mined for other data.

These languages are quite clearly related to Wiradjuri, spoken over a large area of central New South Wales, and Ngiyampaa and Wayilwan, spoken along the Lachlan River (Donaldson 1980, Austin, Williams and Wurm 1980), and are members of a single linguistic subgroup (see Austin 1997). This subgroup belongs to the widespread Pama-Nyungan family which covers the southern two-thirds of Australia (see Australia article).

Linguistic characteristics

Phonology

The phonological system of Gamilaraay is typical of languages of eastern Australia with contrastive stops at five points of articulation, a nasal for each stop position, a single lateral, a flap, a semi-retroflex continuant, and two glides. Table 1 gives the relevant consonants in their

practical orthographic form. There are just three vowels: high front *i*, high back *u*, and low *a*, with a phonemic length contrast found in all syllables of words.

< Table 1 goes here>

The general structure of Gamilaraay roots is CV(C)CV(C). Every word must begin with a consonant and end in a vowel, or *n*, *l* or *y*. Word-initially only non-apical stops and nasals, and the two glides are found. Word-medially there are limited consonant clusters, primarily homorganic nasal plus stop, and apical nasal or lateral plus peripheral stop (*b* and *g*). Vowel clusters are not found. Words borrowed from English are generally restructured to meet these phonotactic constraints, eg. *wajiin* 'white woman' (from "white gin"), *ganjibal* 'policeman' (from "constable"). Word stress is entirely predictable from the phonological shape of words: primary stress fall on long vowels or on the first syllable of a word that does not contain a long vowel. Secondary stress is on each even numbered syllable to the left or right of the primary stress (except that final short syllables are not stressed). Examples are *gamilaraay* [gʌˌmilʌˈʈɑːy] 'Gamilaraay', *bandaar* [bʌnˈdɑːr] 'kangaroo', *thinawan* [ˈ̪t̪ɪnʌˌwʌn] 'emu'.

Morphology

Gamilaraay, like other languages of the Pama-Nyungan group, is entirely suffixing in its morphology. There are two major word classes: nominals and verbs, with nominals showing a rich system of case-marking and verbs marking tense/aspect/mood and dependent clause categories. Nominals can be subdivided into substantives (that cover both noun and adjective

concepts in a language like English), pronouns, and demonstratives. Minor word classes include adverbs, particles and interjections.

Nominals in Gamilaraay inflect for case, with the syntactic functions of intransitive subject (S), transitive subject (A) and transitive object (P) showing a split-ergative pattern of syncretism in the case forms determined by animacy:

for the first and second person pronouns, S and A fall together as a single (unmarked) form with P different, making nominative-accusative case marking

for third person pronouns and all other nominals, S and P fall together as a single (unmarked) form with A different, making ergative-absolutive case marking

In addition to the three main cases (*nominative* for S, *ergative* for A, *accusative* for P) there are also the following case forms:

dative marking alienable possession, and direction towards a place

locative coding location in a place

ablative coding direction from a place, and cause

The actual forms of the cases is affected by the phonological shape of the root, eg. whether it ends in a vowel or not, and what kind of vowel or consonant is root-final.

Gamilaraay has a well-developed system of nominal word-building morphology that involves suffixation between the root and case inflection. Categories encoded in word-building morphology include number (plural), having (eg. *bagaay-baraay* 'Boggabri (lit. creek-having)'), lacking (eg. *yuul-ngin* 'hungry (lit. food-lacking)').

Pronouns in Gamilaraay distinguish three persons and singular, dual and plural number; in the first person non-singular there is no inclusive-exclusive contrast (unlike other Australian languages). Table 2 sets out the basic pronoun forms. There are also bound pronouns for second

person reference only; these are reduced forms of the free pronouns and are suffixed to sentence initial negative and interrogative particles only. Examples are the following:

(1)   *Yaama-nda   ngalingu   wuu-rri   dhinggaa*

        Q-2sg   1dl.dat   give-fut   meat

        'Will you give us meat?'

(2)   *Gariya-ndaali   dhinggaa   nhama   dha-la*

        not-2pl   meat   this   eat-imper

        'Don't you two eat this meat!'

<Table 2 goes here>

Verbs morphologically distinguish between main verb and dependent verb inflections. Main verbs encode tense and mood categories, distinguishing future, non-future (covering past and present time reference) and imperative. Dependent verbs occur in hypotactically linked clauses and mark relative present tense (giving background information about the main clause event) and relative future tense (typically expressing purpose). The relative future is formally future plus dative case. There are four morphologically determined verb conjugations: conjugation 1 is primarily transitive, conjugation 2 is primarily intransitive, and conjugations three, and four are much smaller and have mixed transitivity. There are monosyllabic verb roots that occur in all conjugations. Table 3 sets out the verb conjugation endings.

<Table 3 goes here>

Verbs show productive word-building morphology, including affixes that indicate the temporal reference of an event within the tense frame of the inflected verb, eg. *–ngayi-* indicates 'event in the morning', *-mayaa-* 'event in the evening', and aspectual, eg. *–waaba-* 'completive', or directional meanings, eg. *-uwi-* 'back'. There are also transitivising and detransitivising affixes that shift conjugation and transitivity, eg. *–ala-* 'reciprocal', *-ngiili-* 'reflexive'. There are also limited category-changing processes with onlu nominalisation marked by addition of a conjugation marker to the verb, eg. *giili-y* 'urine' being productive.

The minor categories of adverb, particle and interjection show no morphological variation.

Syntax

Like other Australian languages (see Jiwarli article), Gamilaraay has relatively free word order and shows all possible orders of Subject, Object and Verb, although there is a preference for A P V order (Williams (1980:93) says this is found in 65% of examples). It also allows nouns and adjectives to be separated in the clause, with case agreement indicating which elements are constituents. Williams (1980:96) gives the Yuwaalaraay sentence showing this:

(3)   *Buma-ay*   *dhayin-du*   *buyabuya*   *dhayin*   *wamu-bidi-ju*

            hit-nonfut   man-erg   thin   man   fat-big-erg

            'The fat man hit the thin man'

When the adjective precedes the noun no case marker needs to be attached to the adjective. Similarly, possessors (in dative case) may precede or follow the alienable possessed noun.

Gamilaraay inter-clausal syntax is relatively simple, compared to some other Australian languages. Dependent clauses occur hypotactically located on the margins of main clauses and distinguish only between relative future tense (purposive) or relative present tense (with adverbial or adnominal interpretations, depending on context). There are no cross-clausal coreference restrictions (such as switch-reference or syntactic ergativity). Examples from Yuwaalaraay (Williams 1980:117-122) are:

(4) *Girr   ngaya   nhama   baa-nhi   nhaadhiyaan-di,   nginda   garra-ldaay*

affirm   1sgnom   that   jump-past   log-ablat   2sgnom   cut-relpres

'I jumped off the log that you cut'

(5) *Nginda   ngaaluurr burrulaa   bayama-ndaay, ngay   bulaarr   wuu-na*

2sgnom   fish   many   catch-relpres   1sgdat   two   give-imper

'If you catch many fish give me two'

(6) *Ngaya   yana-y   walaay-gu,   dhinggaa   dha-ligu*

1sgnom   go-nonfut   camp-dat   meat   eat-relfut

'I am going to camp to eat meat'

Particles in Gamilaraay have scope over the whole clause and encode such semantic concepts as polar question (see (1) above), affirmation (see (4) above), and negation. There are different particles for negative imperative (see (2) above) and negative statement, as in:

(7)　　*Gamil*　　　　*ngaya*　　　*gamilaraay*　　*guwaa-li*

　　　　not　　　　　　1sgnom　　　Gamilaraay　　speak-fut

　　　　'I will not speak Gamilaraay'

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Web site

http://coombs.anu.edu.au/WWWVLPages/AborigPages/LANG/GAMDICT/GAMDICT.HTM

Table 1

	Bilabial	Lamino-		Apico-	Dorso-velar
		dental	palatal	alveolar	
Stop	*b*	*dh*	*j*	*d*	*g*
Nasal	*m*	*nh*	*ny*	*n*	*ng*
Lateral				*l*	
Flap				*rr*	
Continuant				*r*	
Glide	*w*		*y*		

Table 2

	A/S	P	DATIVE	LOCATIVE
1sg	*ngaya*	*nganha*	*ngay*	*nganunda*
1dl	*ngali*	*ngalinya*	*ngalingu*	*ngalingunda*
1pl	*ngiyani*	*ngiyaninya*	*ngiyaningu*	*ngiyaningunda*
2sg	*nginda*	*nginunha*	*nginu*	*nginunda*
2dl	*ngindaali*	*ngindaalinya*	*ngindaalingu*	*ngindaalingunda*
2pl	*ngindaay*	*ngindaaynya*	*ngindaayngu*	*ngindaayngunda*

Table 3 Verb conjugations

	Conjugation 1	Conjugation 2	Conjugation 3	Conjugation 4
Future	*-li*	*-y*	*-gi*	*-rri*
Non-future	*-(a)y*	*-nhi*	*-nhi*	*-nhi*
Imperative	*-la*	*-ya*	*-nga*	*-na*
Relative present	*-ldaay ~ -ndaay*	*-ngindaay*	*-ngindaay*	*-ndaay*
Relative future	*-ligu*	*-ygu*	*-gigu*	*-rrigu*

Key words

Australian Aboriginal languages, ergativity, case-marking, non-configurationality, free word order, complex sentences, language revival

Biography

Peter K. Austin is Märit Rausing Chair in Field Linguistics and Director of the Endangered Languages Academic Programme in the Department of Linguistics, SOAS, University of London. He joined SOAS in January 2003 after having held a Humboldt Prize (Germany's most prestigious research award) at the University of Frankfurt, and previously being Foundation Professor in Linguistics at the University of Melbourne, Australia. He is past President of the Australian Linguistic Society and was English Language Convenor for the secondary school Board of Studies for the state of Victoria. He is on the DOBES Endangered Languages Documentation Advisory Board of the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics Nijmegen.

Prof Austin has held numerous visiting appointments including the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics Nijmegen, University of Frankfurt, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, University of Hong Kong, and Stanford and Harvard Universities. He has carried out extensive fieldwork on Australian Aboriginal languages and published widely on them, including writing seven bilingual dictionaries and co-authoring the first fully hypertext bilingual dictionary on the world wide web (the Gamilaraay-English dictionary). He has published articles on computer-aided linguistic analysis and multimedia, and co-authored websites displaying multimedia materials on several languages. He is also currently working on the morpho-syntax of Sasak and Samawa, Austronesian languages of eastern Indonesia. In theoretical linguistics his main interest is in morpho-syntax and typology, including non-configurationality, case marking, complex

sentence constructions, transitivity, and Lexical Functional Grammar. He has published six books

and 60 articles.