

*yamu in Nuclear Pama-Nyungan (and Beyond?)

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It has become increasingly apparent in the course of Pama-Nyungan comparative work over the past quarter century that a distinct majority of the members of the Family show quite massive evidence of genetic relationship. Now that R. M. W. Dixon has challenged the very essence of Pama-Nyungan as a genetic construct (1908:256, and elsewhere), the race is on to demonstrate that one or the other construct — Hale's 'Pama-Nyungan Family' or Dixon's 'Australian Family' — can be shown at least to approximate the essential overall nature of the internal genetic affiliations of the indigenous Australian languages. Whichever construct we choose must account, after all, for the facts concerning these languages.

The purpose of this short pilot study is to take the Dyirbal particle *yama* as the starting point for an experimental cognate search across Australia, and to seek evidence as to whether the provenience of the etymon which it represents correlates in any sense with the putative spread of the Pama-Nyungan languages across seven-eighths of the continent perhaps four thousand years ago, and depicted by O'Grady (1979, 1981). To the extent that the etymon in question turns up in a goodly scattering of Pama-Nyungan languages and fails to appear in languages envisioned twenty years ago by Hale as lying outside the Family, the Hale construct appears as vindicated. As far as the ancestral lexicon is concerned, this vindication would amount to perhaps 1/10 of 1% of what, I believe, will be ultimately possible.

What I mean by this is as follows. It is entirely clear by now that in addition to affixes and basic grammatical configurations,

a thousand or more lexical roots can ultimately be demonstrated for Proto Pama-Nyungan. A solitary starred form such as will be posited as the ancestral shape from which Dyirbal *yama* descends might seem to pale into insignificance by comparison. The author of such a solitary reconstruction could well be excoriated as supposedly misrepresenting (a) an instance of the widespread diffusion of a lexical item, or (b) an example of accidental resemblance in form. How could he turn aside such slings and arrows? He can do this if he and others of like mind can demonstrate that the solitary example being used here represents but a thousandth part of the lexical evidence for the validity of Pama-Nyungan as a genetic construct. It will be seen, sooner or later, that the existence of putative cognates of Dyirbal *yama* elsewhere in Pama-Nyungan does not represent a mere "flash in the pan", but should be seen in the context of a massive core of protoforms which will surely complete the establishment of Pama-Nyungan as a Family. It goes without saying that such a core of protoforms, backed up by a thousand or more viable Pama-Nyungan cognate sets, will be comparable in every way to the lexical attestation of Indo-European presented by Pokorny (1959). To this writer at least, such massive attestation of Dixon's 'Australian Family' will clearly not be possible!

Dyirbal *yama* is depicted by Dixon (1972:121) as meaning 'gently, slowly, TOO gently/slowly, softly'. As a form, it represents an attractive starting point for a systematic cognate search in representative Pama-Nyungan languages (and, out of fairness to Dixon, in non-Pama-Nyungan as well). O'Grady (1957) and Dixon (1972) provide evidence that in Nyangumarda and Dyirbal the statistical probability of a root having an initial *y*, or a single consonant, *m*, following the first vowel is by no means high. For a given root to combine

these two characteristics in the shape $yVmV(\dots)$ ¹ is thus even less probable. Dixon's Dyirbal vocabulary (p. 408) cites just four forms, including *yama*, which have this canonical shape, and Hansen and Hansen's large *Pintupi Dictionary* (1974) contains eight comparable roots.

The ancestral Pama-Nyungan consonantism is reflected quite conservatively in a large number of daughter languages (O'Grady 1979, and forthcoming). It is clear that these include both Dyirbal and Pintupi. It will be entirely appropriate, then, on a first pass through the data, to assume that the correspondence relationships $y- : y-$ and $-m- : -m-$ hold generally for these two languages. That this is so can be seen from examples such as the following: Dyirbal (DYI) *yanu(l)* ~ *yana* 'to go', Pintupi (PIN) *ya+nu* 'went, came'; DYI *yuray* 'Adj: quiet', PIN *yura* 'reptile in hibernation', *yurati+Y+* 'to creep carefully without going down on all fours'; DYI *nyamu* 'Adj: cooked', PIN *nyamu* 'enough'²; DYI *taman* (payi/palan) 'child (of female ego)', PIN *rama* '...angry or emotionally upset — of disobedient children' ($t- : r-$ correspondence also in DYI *tapa+jana+Y* 'to duck down', based on *jana+Y* 'to stand', PIN *rapi+L+* 'to make room').

We are thus indeed in a position to narrow down the search for Pintupi material cognate with Dyirbal *yama* to just the eight roots mentioned above, so that our task turns out to be akin to searching

¹ By way of contrast, roots having the shape $kVrrV(\dots)$ are far more common in both languages; the problem of correctly pairing cognates from among such a multiplicity of highly similar forms can become formidable, especially when complex patterns arising from semantic, analogic, and other kinds of change are added to the equation.

² I appeal to semanticists and Australianists to refute or confirm the semantic relationship implied here with hard evidence.

for, say, a crowbar in a haystack (rather than a needle). Because of the possibility of sharper focus, we have the opportunity to take a long, hard, look at the *meanings* of the eight Pintupi forms. These are as follows:

- | | | |
|-----|----------------|---|
| (1) | yamalyaru | 'emu' |
| (2) | yamaji | 'friend' (Warburton Ranges dialect) |
| (3) | yamiyami | 'wife's mother's father's sister,
first daughter's daughter' |
| (4) | yimangarrka | 'area down middle of chest...' |
| (5) | yiminyjiminyji | 'great amount or number...' |
| (6) | yumari | 'mother-in-law, mother-in-law's
brother' |
| (7) | yumu | 'without a care, unconcerned' |
| | yumuyumu | 'oblivious or unknowing concerning
some happening - daydreaming' |
| (8) | yumunju | 'generous giver...' |

Another Pintupi form offering the possibility of semantic reconciliation with Dyirbal *yama*, though with problematic internal *-mp-* consonantism, is *yampurli* 'cradling position for a baby'. Not surprisingly, considering the genetic distance between Dyirbal and Pintupi, none of the Pintupi forms showing direct semantic overlap with the Dyirbal particle being examined appear to be cognate with it — e.g. *karnma* 'slowly, carefully' or *kapalya* 'soft'³.

³ Pintupi *nyunnga* 'soft' has an etymology which has to be understood in the context of both ancestral **mankarr* 'hard, hardwood' and **puulngu* 'soft': **puulngu* > **pulngu* > **punngu* > **unngu* > **yunngu* and then, influenced by the initial nasal and second vowel of **mankarr*, is reanalyzed as *nyunnga*. That the pressure toward reanalysis was exerted mutually is seen in **mankarr* > Pintupi *mannga* 'stubborn'. For **p-* > \emptyset , with the *y-* appearing prothetically, see O'Grady (1981:155-8).

Of the eight Pintupi forms given, (2) is taken here to be a direct cognate of Dyirbal *yama*, the semantic relationship being interpretable in terms of the solicitous behaviour shown toward one's *yamaji* in the Western Desert culture. The *-ji* syllable is evidently not analyzable in modern Pintupi, but is surely cognate with the Yidiny comitative suffix *+ji* (Dixon 1977:294ff). An evidently fossilized *-ji* also occurs in many Umpila adjectives, e.g. *mukanji* (~ *mukan*) 'big', *ju'uji* 'small'.

Dead **+lya* and **+ru* suffixes, discussed in O'Grady (1966:98), appear in Pintupi item (1), *yamalyaru*. This involves a semantic relationship with the Dyirbal form which is probably to be explained in terms of totemic beliefs. Writers such as Meggitt (1962:59ff.) appear indirectly to provide a key to an understanding of the semantic development here: conceivably,

GENTLY → SOLICITOUS/CARING → TOTEMIC BEING ('THAT WHICH ONE CONCERNS ONESELF ABOUT') → A PARTICULAR TOTEMIC BEING (e.g. EMU).

Items (3) and (6) belong in a different cognate set, being related, for example, to Umpila *yaami* 'wife's mother'; the exceptional vocalism in Pintupi *yumari* seems most plausibly to result from taboo-deformation, the 'conscious alteration of the form of a tabooed word' (Watkins 1970:1500), as in English *gad!* (from the name of the Deity). Items (4) and (5) do not appear to relate to the forms being discussed here, so that just (7) and (8) remain. If we think of the semantics of Pintupi *yumu* along the lines of 'taking it easy', 'taking it gently', it seems natural enough to count it as being relatable semantically to Dyirbal *yama*; but what of the *u*-vocalism? This seems most clearly traceable to Warlpiri

rather than to Pintupi sound patterns — specifically, in fact, to the operation of one or other of the vowel harmony rules in the Warlpiri dialects (Kenneth Hale, p.c.). And this, in turn, would presuppose an earlier shape *yamu (or *yuma?). For the unravelling of the remaining strands insofar as Warlpiri, at least, is concerned, we appeal to the same K. L. Hale and other scholars involved in Warlpiri studies to come forward with the rest of the solution. This will need to take account also of Warlpiri *jama* 'generous' — with which comparison should be made at the semantic level with (8), above — as well as of Pintupi *jami* '...person or thing no longer effective; not savage; tame; man who does not shoot game; woman who does not gather food; *Mingkulpa* (tobacco, ...) which has no bite to it'. In view of the sporadic appearance in Pama-Nyungan of this hitherto unmotivated *y-* : *j-* 'correspondence', it should be seen as subsidiary to the dominant *y-* : *y-* and *j-* : *j-* pattern.

In this respect, the evidence from Nyangumarda is perhaps especially instructive: 'sea breeze' in this language is *yaman* (semantically < 'SOFT (WIND), GENTLE (WIND)'⁴, evidently), showing

⁴ That this is plausible in real-world terms is seen from the following meteorological data recorded by the writer in April, 1951 at Wallal (where the coast has a north-northwesterly aspect):

<u>Day</u>	<u>Temperature(C°)</u>		<u>Wind Direction</u>			<u>Wind Velocity (kph, est'd)</u>		
	<u>Min</u>	<u>Max</u>	<u>0600</u>	<u>1200</u>	<u>1800</u>	<u>0600</u>	<u>1200</u>	<u>1800</u>
18 W	21	35	SW	W	W	8	15	15
19 Th	23	36	S	NW	W	5	15	8
20 F	24	43	SE	E	W	15	15	5
21 Sa	26	41	SE	E	NW	25	25	5
22 Su	21	37	SE	NE	NW	5	8	2

the expected *y-* : *y-* correspondence with Dyirbal; but Nyangumarda, in addition, has a root *jama* 'silent, quiet, taciturn' which also appears to belong in the set of direct and indirect cognates being generated. The appearance of evident doublets (cf. English *shirt*, *skirt*) is presumably a matter of direct inheritance on the one hand and of borrowing from a neighbouring language on the other. The third Nyangumarda root which is conceivably relevant here is *yama+R+* 'to cover over, erase', perhaps relatable with Dyirbal *yama*, etc. through a semantic development GENTLY > TO DO IT GENTLY > TO COVER OVER (e.g. meat cooking in ashes) CAREFULLY. The existence of this root raises the possibility, in the event that it is *not* cognate with Dyirbal *yama*, that an alternate accounting of the semantic history of Nyangumarda *yaman* would represent the correct etymological interpretation; this would take cognisance of the fact that the sea breeze sometimes brings in low scud which partly OBSCURES the heavens. That this OBSCURING property of cloud is a dominating facet in the aboriginal conceptualization of the universe is revealed through the etymology of the Nyangumarda generic noun *mujungu* 'cloud', the first two syllables of which are relatable to Ngarla *muju* 'cloud', Gupapuyngu *muthak* 'overcast, covering of cloud', Bayungu *mujiirri+Y+* 'to hide, crouch' and Dyirbal *mujan* 'Adj: (fire or light) extinguished'. In Nyangumarda, a kindred form *muju* 'misaid, lost' appears in constructions such as *kapara muju+ja matna+rna* 'yandying dish (ABSOLUTE)

The contrast between the searing southeast trade wind from the desert in the earlier part of the day and the languorous afternoon sea breeze, at times the merest zephyr, is dramatic enough to have triggered the institutionalization of the etymon being studied here as a word for 'gentle wind from the sea'. This seems especially likely if the writer is correct (O'Grady 1979:115) in depicting the Nyangumarda people as having emerged from the Western Desert on to the northwest coast a mere half millenium or so ago.

mislaide+FROM BEING take+PAST+1 SG', 'I found the yandying (winnowing) dish which had been mislaide'.

A pass through available Bayungu and Wadjuk data reveals no evidence of the etymon under study — perhaps due to the fact that the data bases available are considerably smaller than that for Pintupi, as represented by the Hansens' impressively large dictionary. In South Australia, Schürmann (1844:79) cites Pankarla *YAMMARA MANKU+* 'to embrace', where *MANKU+* 'to take, receive' is the extended reflex of ancestral *maa+N, as indicated in O'Grady (1966: 81, 113) and Dixon (1980:405). Semantically, this coheres well with Warburton Ranges *yama:ji* 'friend', discussed earlier.

For Gawurna, Teichelmann and Schürmann (1840:59) gloss *YAMMA* as 'adj. ignorant; simple; foolish; stupid'. This form evidently represents a local pejorative semantic development in the etymon being tracked down. An entirely comparable innovation affected Late Old English *sōfte*: in the twelfth century it could mean 'gentle, mild'; in the thirteenth, 'impressionable, compliant'; and by the seventeenth, one of the meanings of its reflex was 'silly, simple'⁵, whence the modern usage *he's soft in the head*.

This writer is aware that some scholars deprecate any tendency to draw semantic parallels between indigenous Australian and non-Australian conceptualizations of the real world. Yet it is the same planet that we all inhabit; modern linguistics, moreover, brings into ever sharper focus the fact that many semantic properties of natural languages have an essentially universal provenience. The clinching evidence for the plausibility of the development *SOFT* >

⁵ See *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (1966:843).

IGNORANT, SIMPLE... in Gawurna would be, in fact, the documenting of an entirely comparable semantic change, involving a different etymon altogether, in another language belonging to the Australian cultural tradition. Needless to say, this evidence is being pursued.

For the essentially extinct languages of Victoria, Hercus (1969) appears to provide no instance of the etymon being studied in these pages. Again, this could be a matter of a smaller data base not happening to include the etymon in question. Equally, however, this absence could reflect the presence of a deeper genetic gulf between many of the languages of southeastern Australia and, probably, all other Pama-Nyungan languages. Yet the presence of crucial diagnostic Pama-Nyungan inflectional suffixes (both nominal and verbal), pronouns and core lexical roots seems to guarantee a place in Pama-Nyungan for the languages of the southeast — perhaps as Pama-Nyungan 'Outliers', as Kenneth Hale has suggested (p.c.). This suggestion, in turn, was made in response to our proposal (O'Grady 1979) that languages such as Pintupi and Umpila should count as belonging within 'Nuclear Pama-Nyungan'.

In the northeast of New South Wales, Gumbaynggir *yamaan* is 'creek, small river', as listed in Smythe (1948:144). The semantic reconciliation of this form with the foregoing seems to present severe difficulties, but it is at least worth noting in passing. Other scholars, especially aboriginal scholars, may know of a tradition which would provide a connecting semantic link here.

Immediately to the north, the Bandjalang dialects appear to betray not a trace of the etymon being sought, either in statistic-

ally more probable *yVmV form or in the less frequent metathesized⁶ shape, which would be *mVyV in this language.

For the representative Pama-Nyungan languages of northeastern Australia with the ancestral sound pattern preserved more or less intact, we turn to Guugu Yimidhirr and Umpila. Here the etymon under study appears to be clearly represented in the form *yamunh* 'cooled off, no longer hot', given in Haviland (1972:83) for the former; for Umpila, data recorded by the writer include the form *aami* 'at rest (e.g. not away from camp hunting)' and the derived construction *aami nhiina+Ø+* 'to have a rest', where *nhiina+Ø+* is 'to sit' (O'Grady 1968:1). Semantically, these forms cohere well with the foregoing⁷. What of their phonology? From the Guugu Yimidhirr and other evidence — including the postulated Warlpiri form **yumu* — we reconstruct the ancestral Nuclear Pama-Nyungan shape as **yamu*⁸, with one or another nasal suffix (Alpher, p.c.) appearing in individual daughter languages; *+n* in Nyangumarda *yaman*, *+nh* in Guugu Yimidhirr *yamunh*. The ancestral representation of the latter is taken to be **ny*, following Hale (1966, 1976a,b)

⁶ Compare, for example, **puka*₂ >Gawurna *BUKKI* 'formerly; a long time ago', Gidabal *kupa.ni+* 'to do² first', Umpila *ukaapi* 'in front, first'; and **nguku* > Kala Lagaw Ya *nguuki* (and, as a loan therefrom, Miriam *goke*), Yarlalde *NGUKE*, Bayali *KOONGO*, Gidabal, Waalubal *kung* 'water'. The latter two forms were not recognized in O'Grady (1979:109-10) as part of a metathesis pattern in the languages of this area.

⁷ The presumed development is: GENTLE/GENTLY → TAKING IT EASY → TAKING A REST/COOLED OFF.

⁸ Other study of the reflection of Pama-Nyungan roots of **CaCu* shape has been carried out by Dixon (1980:344-5) and by O'Grady (forthcoming).

and Black (1980). There remains the problem of the historical derivation of Umpila *aami*. This is taken to have proceeded via four stages:

*yamu+ny

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| 1. fronting of <i>u</i> preceding
laminar | yami+ny |
| 2. suffix lost through
reanalysis | yami |
| 3. glide assim. to vowel
in tongue position | <u>a</u> ami |
| 4. glide assim. to vowel for
[syl] | aami [ǎ:mi] |

In several further instances, the loss of ancestral initial glides *w and *y in Umpila is also accompanied by lengthening of a following short vowel. Note, for example, pre-Umpila *wutu (< *ngurru) > *uutu > uu'u 'forehead', discussed in detail in O'Grady (1981:157); proto Nuclear Pama-Nyungan (PNPN) *wulu > Yindjibarndi *wulu* 'thigh', Gidabal *wulu* 'ankle; foot of tree', Guugu Yimidhirr *wulu* 'leg', and Umpila *uulu*, attested in *tali uulu* 'shin' (*tali* 'lower leg'), *muji uulu* 'backbone' (*muji* 'back, spine'); PNPN *yaaaju+L > Nhanda *athu+* 'to burn it, cook it', Pintupi *yujurn.pu+NG+* 'to cook in the ground', Strelley Nyangumarda *yujurn.pi+R+* 'to cook', Guugu Yimidhirr *yaaaji+L* 'to burn, be burned, get burned', Umpila *aaaji+Y+* 'to cook, burn it, light it'; the Umpila reflex shows loss of the initial *y but not, to our ears at least, triple vocalic length in the adjacent vowel. Pintupi *yampurli* 'cradling position for a baby', mentioned earlier in connection with Dyirbal *yama*, is more plausibly to be related etymologically to Wik Mungkan *ep*⁹ 'lap' (Sayers and

⁹ In which an *m, however, has to be posited as being exceptionally

Kilham 1967) and to Umpila *aampa* 'lap'; since none of these languages can be counted in this instance as being diagnostic for ancestral vowel length, the protoform must be represented as *yAmpu pending the marshalling of cognates from length-preserving languages (cf. Dixon 1980, e.g. p. 406). If cognation is assigned correctly here, then the Umpila form at all events shows the expected loss of *y-.

The widespread Australian retroflex continuant, *r*, identified as a glide in Hale (1966, 1976a, b), O'Grady (1966, 1976, 1979) and Wurm (1972), but counted as [+rhotic] in Dixon (1980:192), is lost in Umpila with concomitant lengthening of a preceding short vowel in PNP *parntung > *paanti.ku* 'all' (O'Grady, forthcoming).

Despite this reassuring array of examples of systematic glide loss in Umpila, we now feel compelled to propose a revision of an earlier claim concerning a particular etymon: O'Grady (1981:158-60) posited a development whereby ancestral *yuuri+L was reflected in Umpila as *aa'i+L+* 'to play, dance, sing'. This proposal seemed solidly based, especially in light of Guugu Yimidhirr *wuuri+* 'to play, dance'. Consider, however, the following: Wik Mungkan *kee'+* (Hale 1968), Bakanha *ka'i+* (Sommer 1968) 'to play, dance'. Black (1980) appears to list no forms which would shed light on the source of the internal glottal stop; in terms of Umpila historical developments, it could be any one of *p, *t, *rr or *r (O'Grady 1976). If it were to turn out to be *rr, then the Wik Mungkan and Bakanha forms probably enjoy cognation with Warlpiri *karri+Y+* 'to stand', 'Kalarko' *karri+* 'to fall' and Nyangumarda *+karri+Y+* 'STATIVE verb marker'.

absent; cf. Proto-Paman *kaampa+ > Wik Mungkan *kaamp+* 'to cook in earth oven', Proto Pama-Nyungan *kumpu > Wik Mungkan *kump*, Umpila *kumpu* 'urine' (Hale 1976a:55). A rule which deletes the nasal in a homorganic nasal + stop sequence is an attested Paman feature, but in languages further to the north, and in an environment different from that involved here. See Hale (1976b).

The vocalism of Umpila *aa'i+L+* poses no problems vis-à-vis the assigning of cognation with the forms just cited; on the other hand, this form would then have to count as the solitary example known to us of the outright loss of initial *k in this language. Whereas, however, Proto-Paman *kalmpar > Wik Mungkan *kemp*, Thaayorre *karrmpar* 'flesh', cited in Hale (1976a:54), Umpila shows as an apparent reflex *yalmpay* 'meat, flesh; body (?)', with apparently unmotivated initial *y*. Since the loss of initial glides, on the other hand, is well documented in Umpila (though under conditions which are not yet fully understood), it seems preferable, pending a possible final breakthrough, to regard Umpila *aa'i+L+* as a blend resulting from mutual influence exerted between reflexes of *yuuri+L and, presumably, *kArri+Y.

The final Pama-Nyungan language to be examined here is Yuulngu of Northeastern Arnhem Land. In Lowe and Lawton's ms. *Gupapuyngu Dictionary* there appears a solitary candidate for cognation with Dyirbal *yama* and the other forms proposed as cognates of it: *yämba* 'senile'. This seems semantically compatible with Gawurna *YAMMA*, discussed earlier. Conceivably, semantic drift has resulted in the evolution of pejorative meanings in these two Pama-Nyungan languages from the extreme north and south of Australia, as well as in English *soft in the head*. If this is so, then the long vowel *ä* and the epenthetic (?) *b* in Gupapuyngu *yämba* would require a principled explanation. Alternatively, this Gupapuyngu form may be eventually assignable as representing a widespread Pama-Nyungan 'widower' etymon, seen in Pankarla *YAMBINNA* with this meaning, as well as in Nyangumarda *yamparra* 'single person' ¹⁰.

¹⁰ Specialists in Yuulngu dialects are urged to come forward with any

As promised earlier, we turn finally to a consideration of four representative non-Pama-Nyungan languages; Ngandi, Maung, Tiwi and Ungarinyin. Of these, the first and the last appear to show not a trace of any of the etyma discussed earlier herein. In the case of Ungarinyin, this negative evidence is corroborated in a general sense by Rumsay (p.c.), who noted that the writer's presentation of several dozen Pama-Nyungan etymologies at MIT in January 1979 made clear to him that in the great majority of cases, a cognate set could not be extended to include Ungarinyin. In the case of Tiwi, our findings tally, on the whole, with Osborne's claim (1974:3) concerning the total lack of lexical evidence for genetic relationship between this and other Australian languages, and with Dixon's observation (1980: 430) that for Tiwi it is 'hard to find any correspondence with the verbal pattern reconstructed for pA'¹¹. Certainly Tiwi *piyi+ni* and *pithukwayi+ni* (with masculine noun class suffix +*ni*), both meaning 'widower', appear as unrelated to any of the forms studied here. The Tiwi adverb *mamana* 'softly, gently, slowly' shares -*ama*- with Dyirbal *yama*; cognation is certainly conceivable here, yet the possibility of reconciling Tiwi *m*- with Dyirbal *y*-, perhaps through an anticipatory assimilation rule in the former, seems remote indeed. The problem is exactly the same as that involving Tiwi *kukuni* 'fresh water', and focussed on in O'Grady (1979:109-10): this may reflect Proto-Australian *nguku, and the putative development *yamu > Tiwi

variant shapes in which this form may appear, in the interests of a solution to this problem. If indeed there is no evidence for an historical rule in Yuulngu phonology whereby intervocalic *m would descend as *m̥* in certain contexts (cf. OE *θymel* > NE *thimble*), then Gupapuyngu *yāmba* would appear to represent the 'widower' etymon.

¹¹ ... studied here ¹².

¹² Tiwi *amparrú* 'widow, widower', however, recognized by Osborne

mama.na may even - who knows? - reflect the selfsame assimilation rule. We may well be ten thousand years too late to work out in detail the evolution of Archaic Tiwi phonology, semantics and grammar (let alone more recent developments), and in this era in man's existence all that is possible is to grasp at the odd straw.

Comparative method linguistics, an immensely powerful tool when applied to languages showing massive evidence of genetic relationship - such as Dyirbal and Pintupi - stands as helpless as a person trying to reconstitute a plate of scrambled eggs back into the original eggshells when faced with an enormous time span such as no doubt separates Tiwi from its nearest relatives¹².

Finally, turning to Maung, the remaining non-Pama-Nyungan language, we note a solitary lexeme which could possibly represent a non-Pama-Nyungan cognate of Dyirbal *yama*: Maung *yimi:jimi* 'gentle rain', which appears on p. 166 of Capell and Hinch (1970). This is certainly attractive semantically as a possible cognate form, but if a relationship does indeed exist here, the extremely deep genetic gulf between Maung and Pama-Nyungan languages may forever preclude the possibility of actually demonstrating cognation. Time will tell.

Other problems remain, including the need to reconcile the final vowel of Proto Nuclear Pama-Nyungan **yamu* 'gentle, soft' with its apparent /a/ reflex in Dyirbal *yama*. Vocalic fluctuation, such as is seen in Dyirbal *yanu*(l) ~ *yana* 'to go', cited earlier, may well provide a clue here. In any event, it is hoped that other workers in this vast field will come forward with further evidence which will either effectively negate or provide backup for the protoforms

(p.119) as a Yiwadja loan, may well represent the etymon referred to above.

¹³ I owe this very apt metaphor to colleague Robert D. Levine of the British Columbia Provincial Museum.

put forward in these pages.

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