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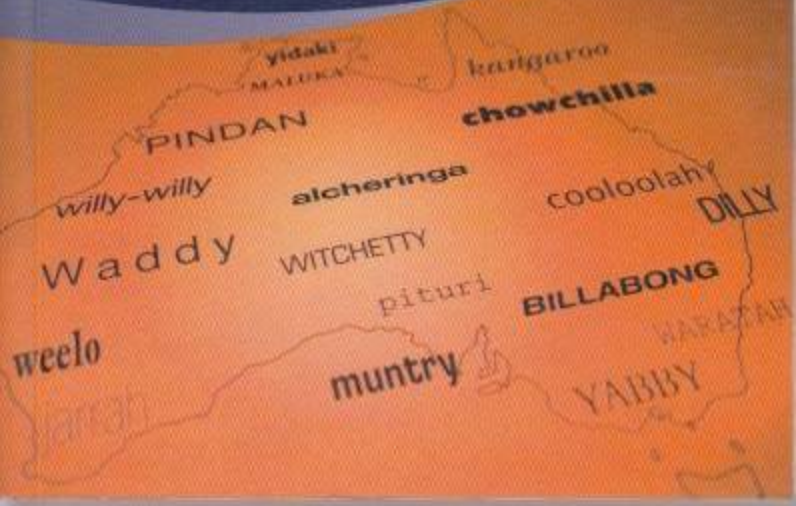
Australian Aboriginal Words in English

Their Origin and Meaning

Second Edition

R. M. W. Dixon • Bruce Moore

W. S. Ramson • Mandy Thomas



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Guide to the English pronunciation of the borrowings

List of symbols used

Vowels		Diphthongs		Consonants	
i	heat	eɪ	hay	p	pat
ɪ	hit	oʊ	hoe	b	bat
ɛ	bet	aɪ	high	t	tap
æ	bat	aʊ	how	d	dot
ɑ	part	ɔɪ	toy	k	cat
ɒ	hot	ɪə	tier	g	goat
ɔ	sort	ɛə	dare	f	fat
ʊ	put	ʊə	tour	v	vat
u	hoot			θ	thin
ʌ	hut			ð	that
ɜ	hurt			s	sat
ə	another			z	zap
				ʃ	shot
				ʒ	measure
				tʃ	church
				dʒ	joke
				m	mat
				n	not
				ŋ	ring
				l	long
				r	ring
				h	hang
				y	young
				w	way

Preface

Up until the late 1980s, all dictionaries of English—including the *Macquarie Dictionary* (1981)—included some words borrowed from the indigenous languages of Australia, but without stating their specific origin. For *kangaroo* from Guugu Yimidhirr in North Queensland, for *boomerang* from Dharuk at Sydney, for *budgerigar* from Kamilaroi in central New South Wales, and for all others, the etymology was simply given as ‘native Australian’ or ‘Australian Aboriginal’, without any attempt to identify which of the 250 or so distinct Australian languages a given word came from. This is rather like lumping together all loans into English from French, German, Spanish, Turkish, Hungarian, Russian, Greek etc. as ‘European’.

In 1978, W. S. Ramson of the Australian National University announced a project to compile an *Australian National Dictionary (AND)*, a ‘dictionary of Australianisms on historical principles’, to be published by the bicentennial year, 1988; I agreed to assist with the etymologies of words borrowed from Australian languages. Since it was known that many of the most important loans came from Dharuk, the Sydney language, Ramson employed linguistics student David Wilkins to work on these etymologies in 1980, using my comprehensive materials on the language.

Meanwhile, over in America, Random House was working on the second edition of their large ‘unabridged’ dictionary, and in June 1984 they requested my assistance in obtaining specific etymologies for a list of words claimed to be ‘Native Australian’. About 35 of these were from Dharuk, for which etymologies had been provided by Wilkins. Utilising the files I had been building up since 1973 (with the assistance of grants from the Australian Research Grants Committee)—which gathered together all published and unpublished materials on each of the 250 Australian languages—Research Assistant Claire Allridge was able to trace the origin of a further 70 loans. I checked and corrected these etymologies, sending them off to Random House the following year (with a copy to Ramson for the *AND*). The *Random House Dictionary*, published in September 1987, thus became the first dictionary to include precise etymologies of loans from the Aboriginal languages of Australia.

In 1985, Ramson prepared a comprehensive list of about 400 loans from Australian languages for which there would be entries in the *Australian National Dictionary*. During 1985 and 1986, Linda Macfarlane and Lysbeth Ford, employed

by the *AND* project, combed my files for the origins of these words, building on the earlier work of Wilkins and Allridge. The *AND*, published in September 1988, made this information available for the first time.

Soon after publication of the *AND*, Bill Ramson and I conceived the idea of the present book. Mandy Thomas, then an anthropology student, was employed by the Australian National Dictionary Centre to expand the *AND* entries on loans from indigenous languages (Chapter 3 of the present book) and to draft Chapters 1, 2 and 5; Ramson wrote the first draft of Chapter 4. All chapters were then thoroughly revised and rewritten by me, in consultation with Ramson and Thomas. In particular, I undertook a full reassessment of the etymologies in Chapter 3, making a fair few corrections and additions to the information given in the *AND*. A number of further loans were added in the course of this investigation. Most of the quotations included in Chapter 3 were taken from the *AND*, but a number were added, from additional sources, for the first edition of this work, which was published in hardback in October 1990 and reissued as a paperback eighteen months later (being reprinted in 1995).

Work on a topic such as this is cumulative, building on previous scholarship. We owe a considerable debt to such works as *Austral English: A Dictionary of Australasian Words, Phrases and Usages* by E.E. Morris (Macmillan, 1898) and *Australian Aboriginal Languages* by Barry Blake (Angus and Robertson, 1981), as well as the many handbooks on fauna and flora, anthropological texts, and grammars and dictionaries that we have consulted.

We have also depended on the help of many people. First of all, the foundational etymological research of Wilkins, Allridge, Macfarlane, and Ford. Then, a draft of the complete book was read by Barry Blake, Alan Dench, and Luise Hercus, and of Chapter 3 by Peter Austin and Gavan Breen, each of whom provided the most useful corrections and additions. Phil Rose gave assistance with the pronunciations of the words in English. Nicolas Peterson read the entire draft from the point of view of an anthropologist. We hope this book will appeal to a wide range of readers, including schoolchildren; Mary Besemeres read the draft as a sample member of the latter group, and her comments were really helpful.

Individual etymological queries and suchlike were answered by Paul Black, Neil Chadwick, Tamsin Donaldson, Wilf Douglas, Nicholas Evans, Kevin Ford, Ian Green, Jean Harkins, Mark Harvey, Jeffrey Heath, John Henderson, Tony Johns, John McEntee, Francesca Merlan, Frances Morphy, Alice Moyle, David Nash, Nick Reid, Bruce Rigsby, Alan Rumsey, Jane Simpson, Gerda Smith, and Dorothy Tunbridge.

Jeanette Covacevich, Senior Curator (vertebrates) at the Queensland Museum, read through the fauna section, and also had relevant parts read by other curators: Wayne Longmore (birds), Steve Van Dyck (mammals), Rolly McKay (fishes), and Geoff Monteith (insects). John Calaby, of the CSIRO Wildlife Division, read the

entire fauna section and made the most valuable suggestions for improvement and addition, providing detailed historical information from his files. Tony Irvine, of the CSIRO Tropical Forest Research Centre (in Atherton, North Queensland), and Beth Gott, of the Department of Botany and Zoology, Monash University, read the whole flora section and made invaluable comments and corrections.

It is appropriate to undertake a revision of a standard reference work, such as the present volume, about every fifteen years. Bruce Moore (who took over as Director of the Australian National Dictionary Centre on Bill Ramson's retirement) and I have worked together and added another three dozen loans that appear to be in general usage, for which it has been possible to find etymologies. And further quotes have been added for many of the words already included. Chapter 6 (an enlargement of the list 'Aboriginal objects and concepts in English', on pages 211–16 of the first edition) has been added, and all the other chapters revised and updated by me, in association with Bruce Moore.

For this second edition, Peter Menkhorst, of the Victorian State Department of Sustainability and Environment, has provided critical comments on the fauna, and Tony Irvine on both flora and fauna sections of chapter 3; with their assistance, zoological and botanical identifications have been updated. Alexandra Aikhenvald provided comments on the entire manuscript. Information on loans into languages other than English came from Rik de Busser, Stefan Dienst, Ilya Itkin, Vladimir Plungian, and Dory Poa. New information on etymologies was supplied by Gavan Breen, Alan Dench, and Dorothy Jauncey. Comments were provided on a draft of Chapter 6 (added for this edition) by Barry Blake, Gavan Breen, Stephen Morey, Sarah Ogilvie, Nicolas Peterson, Bill Ramson, Mandy Thomas and Melanie Wilkinson. In addition, Sarah Ogilvie shared with us information from the ongoing revision of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, for entries from M to Pap.

We owe a tremendous debt to all of these friends and colleagues for the unstinting assistance they have provided in their area of special knowledge.

R. M. W. Dixon
Melbourne, October 2005

A note on pronunciation

Different languages have different habits of articulation, which must be clearly distinguished. On page vi, we give the phonetic symbols, in terms of which the pronunciation in English of the loans is shown for each entry in Chapter 3. The phonetic alphabet we use for representing the original forms of the words in Australian languages is described on pages 12–15 of Chapter 1.

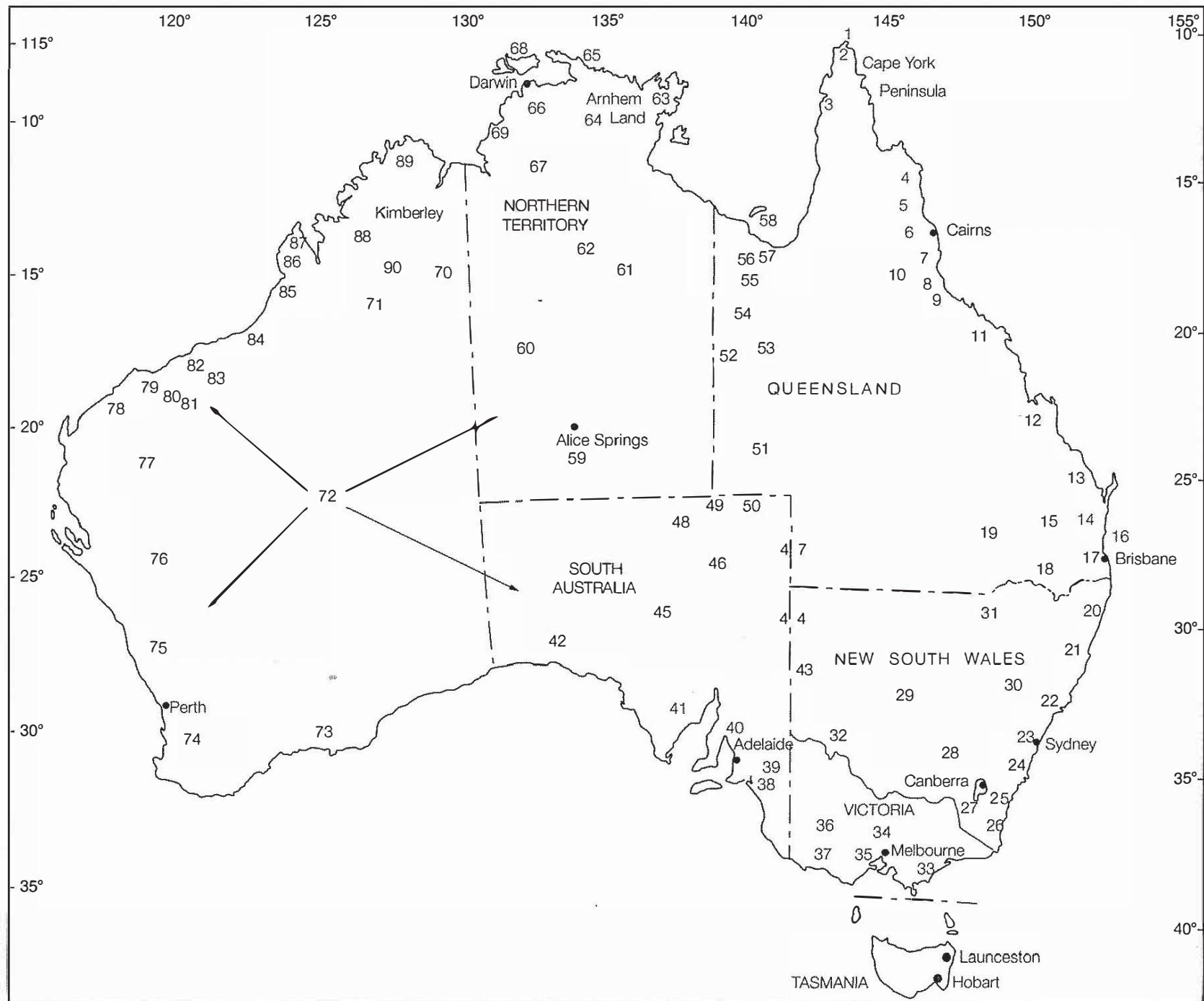
One of the most important principles for the proper pronunciation of words in Australian Aboriginal languages is that every syllable should be clearly enunciated; there are, in most languages, no ‘weak vowels’ such as the schwa, /ə/, in English (as at the end of *data*, /deɪtə/ or in the middle of *kangaroo*, /kæŋgəru/). For example, the original word in Guugu Yimidhirr on which our *kangaroo* is based, *gayurru*, should be said almost as if it were three separate words with no gap between them, *ga-ŋoo-rroo*.

In most Australian languages, the first syllable bears the major accent or stress. It is most important to observe this, otherwise words may be pronounced in an unrecognisable way.

Plea for further information

We have attempted, in this book, to give accurate information concerning the major loans from Australian languages into English. There must surely be some things we have missed, and there may be additional words that could be included.

We invite our readers to send further data, and suggestions, to us at
The Australian National Dictionary Centre
The Australian National University
Canberra, ACT 0200
Australia



Key to the approximate locations of those Australian languages mentioned in this book

Adnyamathanha 45	Gaurna 40	Margu 65	Parnkalla 41	Wik-Mungkan 3
Arabana 48	Gooniyandi 90	Martuthunira 78	Pitta-pitta 53	Wiradhuri 28
Aranda 59	Gowar 16	Mayi-Kulan 57	Thawa 26	Wirangu 42
Awabakal 22	Gunwinygu 64	Mayi-Thakurti 55	Tiwi 68	Wuna 66
Baagandji 43	Gunya 19	Mayi-Yapi 56	Ungarinyin 88	Wunambal 89
Bandjalang 20	Gureng-gureng 13	Midhaga 51	Waga-waga 15	Wuywurung 34
Bardi 87	Guugu Yimidhirr 4	Ngamini 50	Walmatjari 71	Yadhaykenu 2
Bigambil 18	Guyani 45	Ngarigo 27	Wangganguru 49	Yagara 17
Biri 11	Jiwarli 77	Ngarla 82	Wangka-Yutjuru 52	Yandruwandha 47
Dharawal 24	Kala Lagaw Ya 1	Ngarluma 79	Waray 67	Yaralde 38
Dharuk 23	Kalaaku 73	Ngayawang 39	Warlpiri 60	Yawor 86
Dharumbal 12	Kalkatungu 54	Ngiyambaa 29	Warrgamay 8	Yidiny 6
Dhurga 25	Kamilaroi 30	Nhanta 75	Warumungu 61	Yindjibarndi 80
Diyari 46	Karajarri (Karadjeri) 85	Nyamal 83	Warungu 10	Yitha-yitha 32
Djaru 70	Kattang 21	Nyangumarda 84	Wathawurung 35	Yolngu 63
Djingulu 62	Kuku-Yalanji 5	Nyawaygi 9	Watjarri 76	Yuwaalaraay 31
Dyirbal 7	Kuurn Kopan Noot 37	Nyungar 74	Wemba-wemba 36	
Gabi-gabi 14	Lardil 58	Pajamal 69	Western Desert language	
Ganay 33	Malyangaba 44	Panyjima 81	72	