THE ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE OF SYDNEY

A PARTIAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE OF SYDNEY BASED ON THE NOTEBOOKS OF WILLIAM DAWES OF 1790-91, INFORMED BY OTHER RECORDS OF THE SYDNEY AND SURROUNDING LANGUAGES TO c.1905

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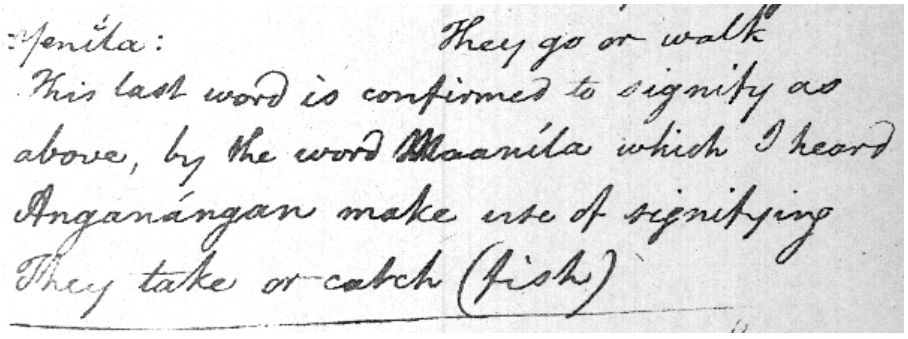
ngaya banga-ba-wu BOOK ngyini-wå-gulang (b:15:5)

Ngana-Ngana 'Collins'

Engravings, Bantry Bay

William Dawes



Menita: They go or walk
This last word is confirmed to signify as above, by the word Maanita which I heard Anganángan make use of signifying They take or catch (fish)

a:5:9: Dawes' Notebook (a)

ABSTRACT

"Wara wara!"—'go away'—the first indigenous words heard by Europeans at the time of the social upheaval that began in 1788, were part of the language spoken by the inhabitants around the shores of Port Jackson from time immemorial. Traces of this language, functionally lost in two generations, remain in words such as *dingo* and *woomera* that entered the English language, and in placenames such as *Cammeray* and *Parramatta*. Various First Fleeters, and others, compiled limited wordlists in the vicinity of the harbour and further afield, and in the early 1900s the surveyor R.H. Mathews documented the remnants of the Dharug language. Only as recently as 1972 were the language notebooks of William Dawes, who was noted by Watkin Tench as having advanced his studies 'beyond the reach of competition', uncovered in a London university library. The jottings made by Dawes, who was learning as he went along, are incomplete and parts defy analysis. Nevertheless much of his work has been confirmed, clarified or corrected by reference to records of the surrounding languages, which have similar grammatical forms and substantial cognate vocabulary, and his verbatim sentences and model verbs have permitted a limited attempt at reconstructing the grammar.

Certification

This is to certify that the following thesis is all my own work, except where acknowledgement has been made to the work or ideas of others. It has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Signed: …….

Jeremy Macdonald Steele

……

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is dedicated to the memory of Lt William Dawes, of whom his principal informant, the teenage girl Patyegorang, said: "Mr Dawes búdyěřı káraga"—"Mr D. pronounces well", literally 'good mouth'. Dawes recorded and so saved a good part of the Aboriginal language of Sydney.

I acknowledge with gratitude the support of Keith Vincent Smith, who encouraged what began as an amateur interest, and who, from an enviable serendipitous talent, provided most of the ancillary vocabularies, which he disinterred in the course of his research into the Eora clans.

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Scholars in Australian languages to whom I am indebted include principally R.M.W. Dixon, whose writings I have liberally quoted, and also Barry Blake and Colin Yallop. Scholars whose work has been consulted and to whom I am indebted include Jakelin Troy (Sydney language), Diana Eades (Dharawal), and theses by Mandy Oppliger (Awabakal) and Jutta Besold (Gundungurra). The prior work of Arthur Capell has also been invaluable.

Earlier recorders of the languages of the region without whose work the present study would have been greatly diminished are L.E. Threlkeld (Awabakal, and perhaps Karree and Gadang), R.H. Mathews (Dharug, Darkinyung, Dharawal and many other languages), and Mary Everitt (with Mathews, Gundungurra). It is too late to express my gratitude to these pioneers.

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—the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, which gave permission for the use of the portrait of William Dawes;
—the National History Museum, London, for permission to use the portrait of Ngana Ngana 'Collins';
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STYLES AND ABBREVIATIONS

The following typographical styles and conventions have been used throughout.

Diacritics and individualised characters (as in the examples cited)

å — ‘a’-over-ring used to represent Dawes’ ‘a’-overdot (‘a’ with a central dot above, not achievable on the computer): for the sound as in ‘all’, ‘bought’: phonetic symbol [ɔ]

ü — ‘u’-dieresis used to represent Dawes’ ‘u’ with a dot placed within the vertical strokes (not achievable on the computer): for the sound as in ‘but’: phonetic symbol [ʌ]

i (bold) — ‘i’ in bold type, used to represent Dawes’ ‘i’ *with* dot, used by him only at points after he had introduced his final system of transcription

a (underline) — underlining, any vowel: used to represent an overline or macron (e.g. [ā] not readily achievable on the computer)

ng (bold) — represents ‘-ng’ as in ‘sing’, or [ŋ]; this latter character has not generally been used in the databases, or in the thesis, because it is not known how to render such a word as ‘wonga’, which might be written:

original	respelt	no hyphens	phonetic
wonga	wån-Ga	wanGa	*wanga*
	wå-nga	wanga	*waŋa*
	wång-Ga	wangGa	*waŋga*

This ‘ng’-convention was originally adopted, and has been retained, because:

—the ‘no-hyphens’ form has the minimum spelling variation, enabling the greatest range of computer searching to be done on a list, as the computer will find ‘wunga’ whether it includes bold characters or not

—the special character [ŋ] is not recognised as part of a word, so that *wuŋga* is seen as three ‘words’: ‘*wu*’, ‘*ŋ*’ and ‘*a*’, making searches for words in this format unsuccessful

G in respellings, indicates that this letter is not part of the ‘ng’ digraph but is separately pronounced

Other conventions

Sans serif is used for forms of words that have been respelt, e.g. “we-row-ey” wirawi

Archaic ‘thou’ and ‘thee’, ‘you’ and ‘ye’

To avoid ambiguity, the archaic English pronominals ‘thou’ and ‘thee’ are used throughout (as they were by Dawes) to distinguish second person singular forms from the plural, and dual. Consequently the sentences:

—I hit you	—you hit me

are rendered in the following ways:

—I hit thee	—thou hit(test) me
—I hit ye-two	—you-two hit me
—I hit ye-all	—you-all hit me

‘You’ is used for subject and ‘ye’ for object roles.

Double quotation marks

Double quotation marks (“…”) are used when an original recorder’s record has been reproduced exactly. They are also used for quotations within quotations.

Personal names

Spelling of personal names: e.g. ‘Kolbi’ and ‘Kolby’ (Dawes), ‘Colbee’ (Tench), ‘Colebee’ (Thomas Watling, painter), Gulibi. Consistency in spelling personal names has not been imposed in this work; rather spellings have been used appropriate to the source or subject matter under discussion.

Standardising the records

Respelling indigenous language examples

Indigenous language examples have been respelt throughout, generally set alongside the originally recorded form. The purpose is to standardise the diverse ways in which words were recorded by different, or even the same, original recorders, in order to assist in the analysis. Such respellings are approximate. Some general principles followed in the respelling are:

T0.1 ORIGINAL RECORDINGS AND RESPELT FORMS

Original recording	Note	Respelt form	Comment
a	as initial letter	nga, ya, wa	transcribed in this order of preference
doubles		singles	“gibber” --> giba; “naa” --> na
e		i	
ee		i	
g		g	
g		dy	sometimes ‘g’ was used for ‘j’, as in English ‘gin’, in which case dy has been used (these occasions are rare)
gn		ny	when ‘gn’ has been judged to have been used in the Italian style (as in Italian *bagno*), ny has been used (these occasions are rare); generally ‘-gn’ has been taken to be an alternative to ‘-ng’
i		i	
i	at end of word	ai	-i pronounced ‘eye’, as in the Sydney beach ‘Bondi’
i	within a word	a, ai, ayi	-i- pronounced ‘eye’, as in the English word ‘bite’
i	as initial letter	yi; or deleted	transcribed in this order of preference
-ine		-ayin -ång	if the recorder’s intention was judged to be -ine as in English ‘mine’, then -ayin, or -ång, was used; in other instances, -ini has been used
j		dy	
k		g	
ñ		ny	
ng		ng	nasal ‘eng’, shown in the cited examples in bold type; if *not* bold, indicates either ‘eng’ or separate pronunciation of ‘n’ and ‘g’
ng		nG	indicates separate pronunciation of ‘n’ and ‘g’ if this seemed the intention of the original recorder
ngg		ngG	‘G’ indicates second ‘g’ is separately pronounced, as a ‘g’
o		u	

-ong		-ång	Dawes used å (a with dot over) to represent ‘a’ as in ‘all’
oo		u	
-ow		-awu	
p		b	
t		d	
u	followed by double consonant	a	‘bulla’ --> bala
u	if ‘oo’ also used by recorder	a	i.e. if the recorder wrote ‘moola’ and ‘bula’, then these have been transcribed mula and bala
u	otherwise	u	‘bula’ --> bula
u	as initial letter	wu, yu, ngu	transcribed in this order of preference

Standardised English translations

Standardised English translations have been adopted to enable computer database searches to be conducted. For example:

Original records			Standardised translation
little	small		little
throwing stick	spear thrower	woomera	spear-thrower
many	large	very	big

There are many such instances.

Glossary

Phonetics and phonology

Examples of the relevant consonants are given where appropriate.

Term	Stop	Nasal	Meaning	Source
alveolar	d	n	With the tongue touching or near the alveolar ridge (the ridgelike inward projection of the gums between the hard palate and the upper front teeth)	(*The Macquarie Dictionary* 1981)
apical			Pertaining to speech sounds formed with the tip of the tongue as articulator	(*The Macquarie Dictionary*)
bilabial	b	m	Pronounced with the two lips brought close together or touching	(*The Macquarie Dictionary*)
dental	dh	nh	With the tongue tip touching or near the upper front teeth	(*The Macquarie Dictionary*)
dorsum			Back of the tongue	(Dixon 1980:135)
laminal			Pronounced with the blade of the tongue as articulator (the blade being the upper surface and edges of the tongue from a short distance back from the tip)	(*The Macquarie Dictionary*)
lateral	l		e.g. English *l*—Involves 'the mid-part of a cross-section of the tongue touching the roof of the mouth, so that air escapes along the sides of the tongue'	(Dixon 1980:142)
nasal	m, n, ng		With the voice issuing through the nose	(*The Macquarie Dictionary*)
non-peripheral			Articulation in the middle of the mouth	(Dixon 1980:139)
palatal	dy	ny	Of the roof of the mouth, consisting of bone (hard palate) in front of a fleshy structure (soft palate) at the back	(*The Macquarie Dictionary*)
peripheral			Articulation at the extreme back or front of the mouth	(Dixon 1980:139)
post-alveolar			Behind the alveolar ridge, further from the teeth	(see 'alveolar')
retroflex			pronounced with the tip of the tongue: (of vowels) raised or tilted upwards, as the vowel in *burn* in common American pronunciation; (of consonants) curled back to touch the roof of the mouth	(*The Macquarie Dictionary*)
rhotic	rr [trill]	r [cont.]	r sounds (almost every Australian language has two rhotic phonemes—a trill or roll /r/ and a continuant /ɹ/ [ɹ with underdot]).	(Dixon 1980:144)
stop	b/p; d/t; g/k		An articulation which interrupts the flow of air from the lungs; a consonant sound resulting from stop articulation	(*The Macquarie Dictionary*)

velar	g	ng	With the back of the tongue held close to or touching the soft palate	(*The Macquarie Dictionary*)

Other special terms

affix	'any meaningful element (prefix, infix, or suffix) added to a stem or base' (*The Macquarie Dictionary* 1981).
suffix	'an affix which follows the element to which it is attached' (*The Macquarie Dictionary*); 'suffix' is generally used rather than 'affix' in this text.
Pama-Nyungan	The Pama-Nyungan languages are the Australian mainland languages that occur throughout the continent except the north and north-west; they share many common features, and are sometimes called the 'non-prefixing languages'. 'Pama' and 'Nyungar' are words for 'man' in north Queensland and south-west Western Australia respectively; the combined term denotes the continent-wide spread of these languages.

Frequently used abbreviations

Abbreviation	Significance	Classification
A	subject (transitive sentence: 'Agent', 'Actor')	grammar
ABL	ablative case (from)	grammar
ABSTR	abstractifier	grammar
ACC	accusative case (object)	grammar
AFF	affirmative	grammar
ALL	allative case (towards)	grammar
Awa	Awabakal	language
BB	Biyal-Biyal (Sydney language)	language
BEN	beneficiary	grammar
CAUS	causative	grammar
COMIT	comitative ('in company with')	grammar
COMPL	completed action	grammar
CONST	constant action	grammar
CONT	continuous action	grammar
Dark	Darkinyung	language
DAT	dative case (indirect object)	grammar
DFX	derivational suffix	grammar
Dg	Dharug	language
DgR	Dharug (Ridley)	language
DMN	demonstrative	grammar
du	dual	grammar
DUR	duration	grammar
Dwl	Dharawal	language
ELA	elative case (from: see ablative)	grammar
EMPH	emphasis	grammar
ERG	ergative case (subject of a transitive sentence)	grammar
ex	exclusive	grammar
FUT	future tense (e.g. I *shall* run)	grammar

Gdg	Gadang	language
GEN	genitive case (possessive)	grammar
Gga	Gundungurra	language
HUMAG	human agency	grammar
IMP	imperative	grammar
INCHO	inchoative (beginning)	grammar
INSTR	instrumental case	grammar
INTJ	interjection	grammar
Kre	Karree	language
LOC	locative case (at, place)	grammar
MOD	modifying suffix	grammar
n.d.	no date	traditional
NECES	necessity	grammar
Ngwl	Nganawal	language
NMLSR	nominaliser (converts a verb to a noun)	grammar
NNth	near north	language
NOM	nominative case (subject)	grammar
NP	noun phrase (noun, adjective, etc.)	grammar
Nrgu	Ngarigu	language
O	object	grammar
Ø	zero (used for 'no ending, no suffix')	grammar
PAST	past tense (e.g. I *did* run)	grammar
PastH	past historic tense (e.g. I *ran*)	grammar
PFX	prefix	grammar
pl	plural	grammar
PLUR	plural	grammar
PRES	present tense	grammar
PRIV	privative ('lacking')	grammar
PROP	proprietive ('having')	grammar
PURP	purposive	grammar
RECIP	reciprocal (to each other)	grammar
RFLX	reflexive (to oneself)	grammar
S	subject (intransitive sentence)	grammar
SFX	stem-forming suffix	grammar
sg	singular	grammar
TRS	transitive (sentence with object: dog chases cat)	grammar
Twl	Turuwul (Ridley's list)	language
VBS	verbaliser (converts a noun to a verb)	grammar

1	first person (I, we)
2	second person (thou, you)
3	third person (he, she, it; they-two, they-all)