

# Oenpelli Kunwinjku Kinship Terminologies and Marriage Practices

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the kinship terminologies and marriage practices of Oenpelli Kunwinjku (Gunwinggu) owners/speakers. These terminologies and marriage practices have been presented as symmetrical, the standard pattern in Australia. This paper shows that first preference marriages are asymmetrical, which is rare in Australia. It further demonstrates that first preference marriages do not produce a transitive terminology, which is even rarer in Australia. Though these patterns are unusual, this paper shows that the Oenpelli Kunwinjku marriage practices accord in a number of important aspects with the marriage practices of owners/speakers of other languages with asymmetrical terminologies, such as the Yolngu (Murngin) terminologies. These common aspects to marriage practices and terminologies are to be understood in light of a more general analysis of the correlations between kinship terminologies, marriage practices, and the construction of ranges and regional identities in Australia. There is significant variation in Australia as to whether people express a predilection for narrow or wide ranges. This paper shows that there are non-random correlations between predilections for particular types of range, marriage preferences, and types of terminologies. It also shows that terminologies and marriage preferences have a role in the construction of regional identities.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper has two inter-related aims. One is to present an account of Oenpelli Kunwinjku kinship terminologies and marriage practices. The other is to consider the more general relationship between kinship terminologies, marriage practices, and the construction of ranges (Stanner 1965) and regional identities in Aboriginal Australia. The depth of research into particular relationships among these factors varies considerably. The nature of connections, if any, between kinship terminologies and marriage practices has been much debated. There is frequent comment on the connection between marriage practices and the construction of ranges and regional identities, but little investigation of the comparative roles of different types of marriage practices. There has also been little investigation of connections between kinship terminologies and the construction of ranges and regional identities. In this paper, I provide evidence that there are a number of non-random correlations between kinship terminologies, marriage practices, and the construction of ranges and regional identities in Aboriginal Australia.

The kinship terminologies and marriage practices of owners and speakers of Kunwinjku at Oenpelli, and of Bininj Gunwok<sup>1</sup> owners/speakers more widely, have been extensively documented by the Berndts (Berndt & Berndt 1970, Elkin, Berndt & Berndt 1951 — the Berndts refer to the Kunwinjku as Gunwinggu). While the Berndts' accounts provide a general overview of Oenpelli Kunwinjku terminologies and marriage practices,

they do not delineate certain, central, aspects of these terminologies which relate to marriage practices.

On initial inspection of the overall spectrum of Australian kinship terminologies, one of the more obvious major distinctions is that between symmetrical and asymmetrical terminologies. The significance of the symmetrical vs asymmetrical distinction is debated (see Scheffler 1978). In symmetrical terminologies, the principal factor leading to the use of distinct kin terms lies in the sex of linking relatives: same sex vs opposite sex. Thus, for example, both one's mother's older and younger sisters are called 'mother' and their children are called 'brother/sister' — one's mother and her sisters are same sex. Both one's mother's older and younger brothers are called 'uncle' and their children 'cousin' — one's mother and her brothers are opposite sex. Cousin terms apply equally to the children of one's father's older and younger sisters. The great majority of Australian terminologies are symmetrical, and first preference spouses are referred to by a 'cousin' term. First preference marriages are equally possible through matrilineal or patrilineal connections.

A small minority of terminologies is asymmetrical, making distinctions either according to comparative age (e.g. father's older sister is distinguished from father's younger sister) or according to matrilineal vs patrilineal linkages. The well known Yolngu (Murngin) terminologies are examples of asymmetrical terminologies. In the Yolngu terminologies, the children of one's father's sister are clearly terminologically distinguished from the children of one's mother's brother. Depending upon the gender of EGO, first preference marriages are possible only through one or the other of matrilineal or patrilineal connections (patrilineal for female EGO, matrilineal for male EGO).

The Berndts present the Oenpelli Kunwinjku terminologies as symmetrical terminologies (1970:82–3). However, in terms of first preference marriages, they are in fact asymmetrical terminologies. As we will see, first preference marriages are only possible through patrilineal connections. The Berndts also describe Bininj Gunwok kinship reckonings, more generally, from the premise that there is consistency in usage among owners/speakers. However, if we examine materials from various areas associated with Bininj Gunwok, we find that there are significant differences in reckonings between various groups of owners/speakers. This paper considers some of these differences.

The structure of the asymmetry in the Oenpelli Kunwinjku terminology relates most directly to concerns about the desirable ages for a husband and wife at a woman's first marriage: that the husband should be significantly older than his wife.<sup>2</sup> While this age difference is much commented on, the significance of the related fact that a man's mother-in-law is therefore commonly of his own age cohort is little discussed (but see Hiatt 1984). Terms referring specifically to mothers-in-law are generally analysed as classing with terms referring to the parental generation level (e.g. aunt, father, mother, uncle). The structure of the Oenpelli Kunwinjku asymmetry implies that they can also be viewed as classing with terms referring to EGO's own generation level (e.g. brother, cousin, sister). This accords with the common age cohort relationship between a man and his mother-in-law. As we will see, there is evidence that this alternative 'EGO's own generation' perspective is more widely held.

This paper also considers the kinds of relationships that hold between marriage practices and terminologies within Australia. Radcliffe-Brown posited a direct causal relationship between marriage practices and terminologies. We may consider one of the most common types of symmetrical terminologies: Kariera terminologies. In Kariera terminologies, two kinds of kin are distinguished at each generation level (grandparents' generation, parents' generation, own generation, children's generation, grandchildren's generation). These two kinds of kin are known as 'cross' and 'parallel'. Parallel kin are connected to EGO by linkages of the same sex, whereas cross kin are connected by linkages of opposite sex. Thus one's mother's mother is a parallel grandparent, whereas one's father's mother is a cross grandparent. In Kariera terminologies, the first preference marriage partner is a 'cousin'.

Among owners of the actual Kariera language, it appears that a man's actual cousin was the spouse of first preference.

A man applies the term *ñuba* to the daughter of any *kaga* and any *toa*. He applies the term *kaga* to his mother's brother and the term *toa* to his father's sister. Therefore it is obvious that by the above-stated marriage rule a man may marry the daughter of his own mother's brother, or of his own father's sister. Such marriages of the children of a brother with those of his sister are common in this tribe. Indeed we may say that the proper person for a man to marry, if it be possible, is his own first cousin. In the genealogies collected by me I found that in nearly every case where such a marriage was possible it had taken place. (Radcliffe-Brown 1913:155-6)

Radcliffe-Brown assumed that the application of the kin-term 'cousin' to spouses who were not genealogically traceable cousins was by extension from the focal relative, and first-preference spouse, the actual cousin.

Scheffler (1978:51-68) shows that no such extension analysis can apply generally to Kariera terminologies. He demonstrates that there is no essential difference between the actual Kariera terminology and the Gumbaynggirr (Kumbaingeri) terminology. The Gumbaynggirr have the same terminological system as the Kariera, but do not permit marriage with the actual MBD. The Gumbaynggirr proscription of marriage to actual, close cousins is found in the marriage practices of many people, whose languages have Kariera terminologies. For example, in the Northern Territory, Kariera terminologies appear in the languages of the Daly-Katherine drainage basin: Jawoyn (Merlan 1990:235), Kamu, Kungarakany, Wagiman, Warray (own research), Batjjamalh, Malak-Malak, Marramaninjsji, Marranj, Marringarr, Marriithiyel, Matngele (I. Green pers.comm.), Murrinh-patha (M. Walsh pers.comm.), Ngan'gityemerri (N.Reid pers.comm.). All of the owners/speakers of these languages proscribe marriage to actual, close cousins.

Further, many of these terminologies in fact distinguish an actual, close cousin from an actual or prospective spouse. Thus, in Ngan'gityemerri, distant and marriageable cousins are *awawu* (female) and *naga* (male). Close and non-marriageable cousins are *pugali* (N. Reid pers.comm.) In Kamu, distant and marriageable cousins are *gapbi* (female) and *warang* (male). Close and non-marriageable cousins are classified as parallel kin: *akgal* 'sister' or *apbeny* 'brother' (own research).

While Scheffler demonstrates that extension analyses do not account for the classification of spouses as cousins, he does not deny that there are important connections between terminologies and larger social structures, including marriage practices (Scheffler 1978:85-7). Marriage practices across Australia show considerable uniformity: gerontocratic, polygynous marriage being a target of attainment for men everywhere (Merlan 1988). The potentialities for the degree of polygyny varied (Keen 1982), but the basic axes of achievement were common. However, there is one area where marriage practices showed significant, and non-random variation. This is in the proscription vs permissibility vs prescription of marriage to close vs distant kin. As we will see, close vs distant is determined in terms of both genealogy and geography.

For those peoples whose terminologies are asymmetrical, and whose marriage practices have been investigated with respect to 'close' vs 'distant', all exhibit a preference for geographically close marriage (Dyirbal, Oenpelli Kunwinjku, Ngarinyin, Thaayorre, Wik, Worora, Wunambal, Yir Yoront, Yolngu). All permit genealogically close marriage, and some prescribe it (Oenpelli Kunwinjku, Yir Yoront, Yolngu). Prescriptive marriage to genealogically close kin is rare in Australia. It seems therefore that there are connections between asymmetrical terminologies and preference for 'close' marriage. This paper also provides evidence that the common possession of particular types of kinship terminologies and/or marriage practices can be partly constitutive of regional identities.

## THE OENPELLI KUNWINJKU KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY AND MARRIAGE PRACTICES.

Like many Australian languages, Kunwinjku has a very complex inventory of terms which allow for fine-grained distinctions in kinship reference. This paper is concerned with the basic referential terminology. I do not examine avoidance, triangular, or vocative terminologies. Like most, if not all, Aboriginal people, Kunwinjku owners/speakers present a number of possibilities for marriage in order of preference. Among Kunwinjku owners/speakers at Oenpelli, the spouse of first preference is *kakkali*, and the spouse of second preference is *kanjok*.

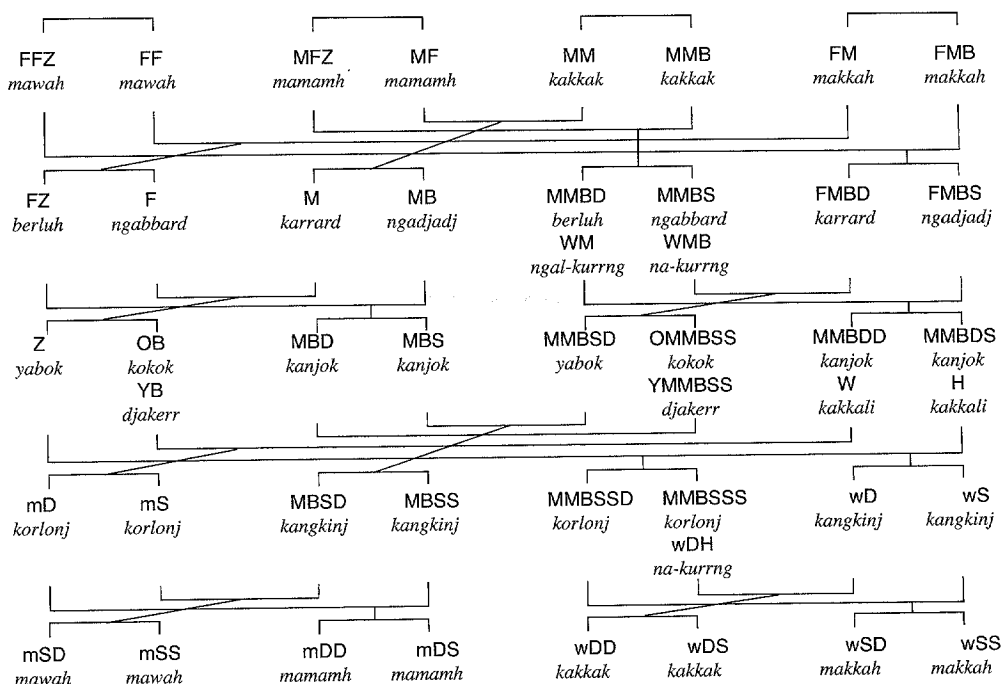


Table 1: Oenpelli Kunwinjku kin terminology

The Kunwinjku kinship terminology is presented systematically from the perspective of second preference marriage to *kanjok* in Table 1. As we will see, it appears to be impossible to represent the patterns which arise from first preference marriage in an equivalently systematic way. The classification in Table 1 is a symmetrical classification. The two most common types of symmetrical terminologies in Australia are 'Karia' and 'Aranda' terminologies. We have already seen that Karia terminologies divide each generation level into two kinds of kin. Aranda terminologies divide each generation level into four kinds of kin. These four kinds are traditionally described in terms of the males in the grandparental generation. In an Aranda terminology, one's father's father (FF), mother's father (MF), mother's mother's brother (MMB), and father's mother's brother (FMB) are all terminologically distinguished from one another. Equivalent distinctions are drawn in each of the other generation levels. In a Karia terminology, one's father's father and one's mother's mother's brother are referred to by the same kin term (FF = MMB), as are one's mother's father and one's father's mother's brother (MF = FMB).

The Oenpelli Kunwinjku terminology cannot be characterised in overall terms as either Aranda or Karia. The classification in the grandparents' and grandchildren's generations

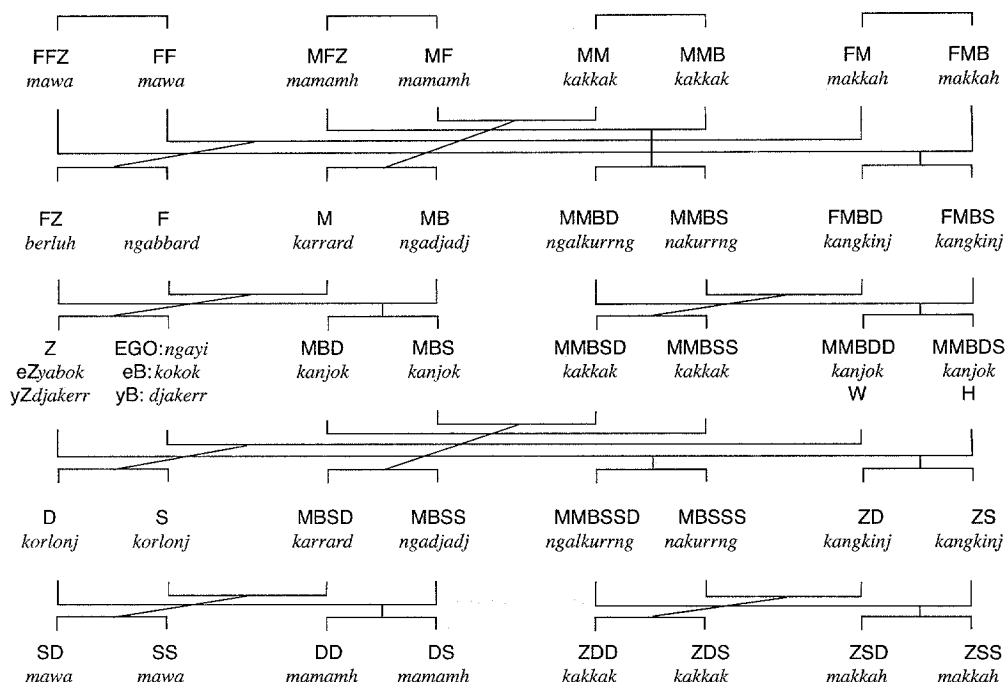
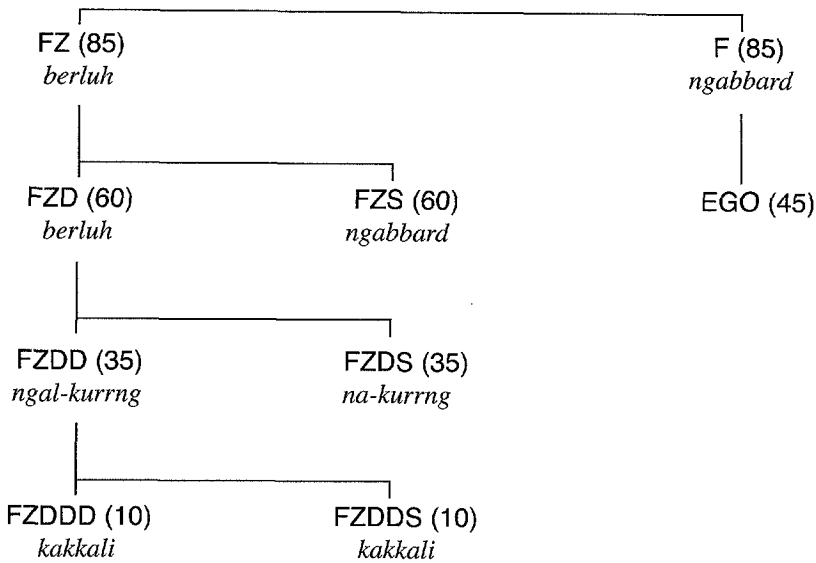


Table 2: Kunwinjku kin terminology

is Aranda-like. However, the classification of the other levels is Kariera-like. In the wider context of the use of Bininj Gunwok across Arnhemland, further variations are found. Thus Bininj Gunwok speakers towards Maningrida in the east use classification which is Aranda-like, other than at EGO's own generation (Table 2). This correlates with the fact that the other languages at Maningrida have Aranda classifications. However, Bininj Gunwok speakers at Barunga in the south use an entirely Kariera classification at all levels. This correlates with the fact that the neighbouring Jawoyn language has a Kariera classification. Speakers of Gundjeihmi, which is territorially intermediate between Barunga and Oenpelli, use both the Barunga and Oenpelli classifications.

Having presented an overview of the range of basic, referential kin terms, we may now turn to consider the patterning of first preference marriages, which are illustrated in Figure 1. A man's first preference marriage is to his actual FZDDD. The terminologies in Figure 1 show a substantial skewing from the terminology in Table 1, and the general patterns of terminologies in Australia. The Berndts present this pattern from the perspective of the potential mother-in-law (1970:95). 'Women seem to emphasise the matrilineal 'side' more than men do [in choosing sons-in-law]. In general, we found that they were most likely to cite as an ideal union one in which a woman gives her first daughter to her actual mother's mother's eldest brother's eldest son'. They also present it from the perspective of a man's father (1985:82) 'A man may urge his close sister's daughter's daughter, his *gagag* [kakkak], "Don't give your daughter to anyone but my son."' A considerable number of marriages in Oenpelli are and were first preference marriages.<sup>3</sup>

It does not appear that this pattern of first preference marriage produces a systematic terminology of the type modelled in Table 1, which is the staple of many descriptions of Aboriginal kinship terminologies. These systematic models reflect the transitive functioning of basic referential kin terms which is often explicitly presented by Aboriginal people. This



(Ages are based on a 40 year difference between father and child, and a 25 year difference between mother and child)

Figure 1: Oenpelli Kunwinjku first preference marriage

transitive reckoning may be illustrated with a familiar example involving two individuals A and B, where A calls B 'mother'. If A meets another woman C, whom they do not know, but who calls B 'sister', then A knows that the appropriate kin term to use in relation to C is 'mother'.

In actuality, there are many cases where A and C decide that 'mother' is not the appropriate term. The great majority of these cases involves a 'wrong' marriage somewhere. If there is a wrong marriage, then A and C will have different relationships, depending on the linkages that are followed to join them. Consequently, basic referential kin terms are often not transitive in practice. However, Aboriginal people consistently describe this situation as unorthodox. They prescribe an orthodox situation where everybody marries 'straight'. If everybody marries 'straight', then A and C will have the same relationship through all sets of linkages between them.

No such connection between orthodox marriage and the transitive use of kinship terms holds for owners and speakers of Oenpelli Kunwinjku. The lack of connection may be illustrated by comparing Figure 2 with Figure 1. The EGO in Figure 2 is the father of EGO in Figure 1. It may be observed that the father of a man who makes a first preference marriage, makes no adjustment in his use of kin terms so that they would match to the usage of his son.<sup>4</sup> Thus the EGO in Figure 1 calls his FZD (=WMM) *berlu* 'aunt'. Under the general transitive logic of Aboriginal kin term usage, any individual that the EGO in Figure 1 calls *berlu*, the EGO in Figure 2 should call *yabok* 'sister'. The EGO in Figure 2 does not call his ZD *yabok*, rather he calls her *kangkinj* 'ZC', in accordance with her most immediate genealogical connection to him. This is not the only option available to the EGO in Figure 2. His ZD is also his SWMM, and by reckoning through his son he would call her *karrard* 'mother'.

The lack of match in the usage of kin terms between various EGOs and the alternate potential relationships which any single EGO has to certain other individuals make it apparently impossible to model kin term usage arising from first preference marriages with a

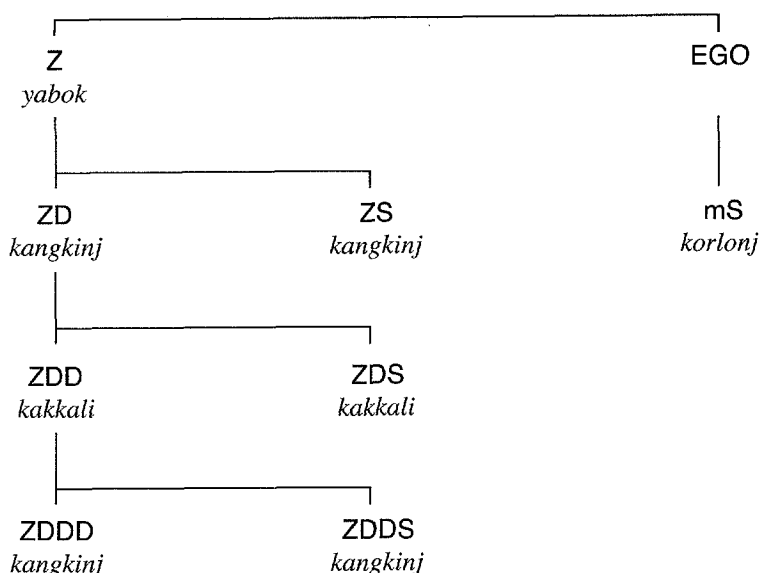


Figure 2: Oenpelli Kunwinjku first preference marriage from perspective of male partner's father

model of the kind in Table 1. These factors also mean that any assumptions as to the transitive extension of kin term usage in Oenpelli must be more strongly circumscribed than appears to be the case elsewhere in Australia.

The limits on transitive extension are further re-inforced by the fact that the skewing in Figure 1, while mandatory for actual, genealogical relationships is not restricted to these relationships. Figure 3 provides an example of the skewing, where there is no direct genealogical relationship between Bob, the male EGO, and Alice, his potential spouse. I am not certain as to the precise factors determining the use of this skewing beyond actual genealogical kin, nor do I know the precise details of why the skewing was adopted in this particular case. However, the fact that the skewing is prototypically applied to genealogical kin suggests that it would apply only in cases where there were close linkages. It seems likely that there would be a range of factors affecting the determination of whether linkages were sufficiently 'close' for the skewing to be applied.

Keen summarises the factors affecting the classification of kin as 'close' or 'distant' among Yolngu owners/speakers.

Yolngu generally counted inherited kin and kin found through common distant connections among the 'distant' (*barrku*) or 'partial' (*ma:rr-gangga*) kin relations as opposed to 'close' (*galki*) and 'full' (*dhangang*) kin. But just who counted as 'close' or 'full' kin depended on context, although in general they were those related by direct genealogical ties. ...

Shapiro (1981:38–9) defines 'full' kin in terms of relationship of groups ('sibs') to Ego's group. I found, however, that the contrast of 'full/partial' depended partly on context, for there were no strict criteria. In general the contrast marked genealogical proximity — full kin were close kin. It is certain that not all members of the group of a 'close' kinsperson were necessarily classified as close. One man at Milingimbi, for example, classified people of two lineages of his sis-

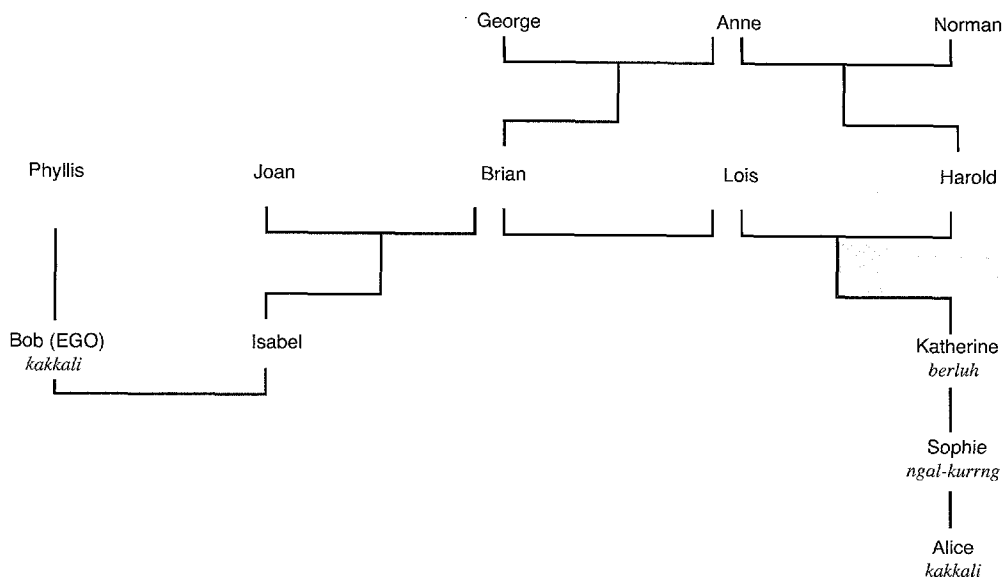


Figure 3: First preference marriage with no genealogical connection

ter's child's group, who had very indirect genealogical links to him, as 'partial' kin. Genealogical and related spatial distance among close relatives may be assessed also. In a discussion recorded by Heath a Yolngu man referred to his *waku* (wC/ZC) as 'close' and his *gaminyarr* (mDC/BDC) as 'distant' (Heath 1980:67). (Keen 1994:81–2)

In the case of Figure 3, linkages can be classed as 'close' from a number of perspectives. There are close affinal links between Bob and Katherine. The clan estates owned by Katherine, Sophie, and Alice are all either adjacent to or geographically close to that owned by Bob. There is, and had been, intensive daily interaction among all the individuals in Figure 3, both at Oenpelli and elsewhere. Further research is required to determine whether there is a comparative ranking among these factors.

There are two other factors to note about Figure 3. One is the use of different kin terms by Bob to his wife Isabel (spouse terms) and his wife's close step-sister Katherine (*berlu* 'aunt'). The use of different terms by a man to his wife and his wife's sister is highly unusual in terms of the general patterning of Aboriginal kinship systems. The Falkenbergs in their extensive study of the variable categorisation of affinal kin among the Murrinh-patha found only one case of a man categorising his wife's sister differently from his wife (Falkenberg & Falkenberg 1981:116–7). The example they describe involved an irregular marriage, with the wife's sister remaining in her standard classification because this standard classification was the correct classification in terms of her own marriage. Neither of these factors was operative in the case shown in Figure 3.

The second point to note concerns the actualisation of a potential marriage under this terminology. We may consider the potential marriage in Figure 3, which would in fact have been a third marriage for Bob. This potential marriage was what may be termed a 'real' potentiality in that Alice was close to marriageable age and Bob was in generally reasonable health. I discussed the potential marriage with Bob's mother, Phyllis, who stated that Bob was too old (he was 45–50), and that she would not give Alice to him. I did not discuss the



marriage with others who almost certainly viewed themselves as having rights, but it is evident that the actualisation of a first preference marriage was no less subject to the effects of time and contesting wills than other marriages.

### ASYMMETRICAL TERMINOLOGIES

The terminological skewing for first preference marriage in Oenpelli is unusual. I have not encountered references to a directly comparable skewing elsewhere. Nonetheless, it shares commonalities with other terminologies which are unusual in Australia, such as the Yolngu terminologies. One of these commonalities is its inherently asymmetric nature.

Before comparing the Oenpelli Kunwinjku terminologies with other asymmetric terminologies, it is firstly necessary to distinguish between apparently and genuinely asymmetrical terminologies. One terminology that is commonly cited as asymmetrical is the Karadjeri terminology, which is said to permit marriage only to matrilateral cousins (Berndt & Berndt 1985:76). However, Scheffler (1978:208–39) demonstrates that it is not an asymmetrical terminology distinguishing patrilateral and matrilateral cousins as classes. Rather, it is a symmetrical terminology involving a distinction between distant and marriageable cousins vs close and non-marriageable cousins. It is the basis of the distant vs close distinction that is of interest for the Karadjeri terminology.

As previously discussed, owners/speakers of languages with Kariara terminologies in the Northern Territory proscribe marriage to close cousins. Among owners/speakers of these languages, 'closeness' appears to be reckoned in terms of links to either or both of the father and mother of any potential spouse. However, among Karadjeri owners/speakers, 'closeness' is reckoned primarily in terms of linkages to the mother of any potential spouse. This kind of focus on the female in-law is found throughout Australia (Merlan 1997:122). The spouse of first preference is the child of a distant aunt. Consequently for all owners/speakers of Karadjeri, marriage to one's own aunt's children is proscribed. However for inland owners/speakers of Karadjeri, marriage to one's own uncle's children is possible if their mother is a distant aunt. Coastal owners/speakers proscribe this kind of marriage because of the close links to the father of the potential spouse.

The Karadjeri terminology and marriage practices may be contrasted with genuinely asymmetrical terminologies, such as the Yolngu terminologies. Keen sets out the Yolngu first preference marriage pattern.

A proper marriage was that between a man and woman who were in the relation of *dhuway* (the man) to *galay* (the woman), the relation of 'FZS' to 'MBD', and the preference was for marriage between genealogically close cross-cousins who were, by implication, of groups whose countries were geographically close. (Keen 1994:88).

For a man, the *galay* spouse of first preference is the daughter of *mukul rumaru* who is the wife of his own MoBr. His own FaSi is *mukul ba:pa*, and her daughter *dhuway* is not a possible spouse. A distant *dhuway*, presumably the daughter of a distant *mukul ba:pa*, is a possible spouse (Peterson 1971:179).

Scheffler (1978:287–326) analyses the Yolngu terminologies as being generally similar to Kariara terminologies. They differ from more standard Kariara terminologies in the ranking of particular extension rules which determine the application of particular kin terms. He analyses *mukul rumaru* and *mukul ba:pa* as subclasses of an overall *mukul* class of father's sisters (ibid.:301). The term *mukul rumaru* distinguishes the class of first preference moth-

ers-in-law, with distant *mukul ba:pa* being a possible mother-in-law. However, as Keen points out, Scheffler's hypothesis of an overall *mukul* class fails to accommodate the differences between Yolngu and Karadjeri practices.

Scheffler posits a superclass 'FATHER'S SISTER' which included the categories *mukul ba:pa* (FZ) and *mukul rumaru* (MMBD, potential WM). The fact of the matter is, however, that despite the common element *mukul*, a man cannot legitimately marry *dhuway*, the daughter of *mukul ba:pa*, whereas *galay*, the daughter of *mukul rumaru* is the only proper spouse category. (Keen 1988:109).

Unlike Karadjeri owners/speakers, Yolngu owners/speakers do not prescribe marriage to the daughter of a distant aunt. If they did, then the daughter of a distant *mukul ba:pa* would be a spouse as equally acceptable as the daughter of a *mukul rumaru* married to one's own MB. Rather the marriage preferences are as stated by Keen, and the daughter of distant *mukul ba:pa* is simply one of a number of possible but less preferred spouses (Warner 1930:231–2 provides a list of possible, but non-preferred marriages). If there is a second preference marriage among Yolngu owners/speakers, then it is to classificatory mothers (Keen 1982:628). Unlike Karadjeri owners/speakers, Yolngu owners/speakers do systematically differentiate matrilineal cousins as a class from patrilineal cousins as a class.

Genuinely asymmetrical terminologies are rare in Australia. Further, there is not in fact a single uniform type of asymmetry. The discussion has thus far focused on terminologies displaying matri- vs patri-lateral asymmetries. There are other types of asymmetries. In addition to the Yolngu terminologies, the following terminologies are asymmetrical.

- a) Larrakia: similar to Yolngu — distinguishes matrilineal from patrilineal cousins — men marry matrilineal cousin *ngaladik*, women marry patrilineal cousin *naw* (Warner 1933:73–4)
- b) Ngarinyin, Worora, Wunambal: These terminologies are unusual in that they show a tendency for all persons within a single agnatic line to be called by the same kin term (Rumsey 1981:181). The kin term for the preferred spouse is *marringi*, which is the kin term for all women in the FM line. Among the women referred to by this term, FMBSD, FMBD, FMBSSD are potential first preference spouses (Blundell & Layton 1978:232).
- c) Yir Yoront: similar to Yolngu — distinguishes matrilineal from patrilineal cousins — men marry matrilineal cousin *warn*, women marry patrilineal cousin *mar* (Alpher 1991:99, 285–7, 306, 588–9)
- d) Dyirbal: In these terminologies, comparative ages are the central factor. A potential spouse is the grandchild of EGO's parents' older siblings of the opposite sex (e.g. FeZDD, MeBDD), or the child of EGO's grandparents' younger siblings of the opposite sex (e.g. FMyBD). In either case, the first preference spouse does not belong to EGO's generation, but belongs either to the generation of EGO's children or parents. Similarly potential/actual in-laws are not of the generation of EGO's parents, but either of EGO's own generation or EGO's grandparents' generation (Dixon 1989:256–62).

Some of the terminologies used by Wik and Kaanyju owners/speakers from western Cape York have been presented as involving matri-/patri-lateral asymmetries. However, upon closer inspection, it appears that they are terminologies of the Dyirbal type with comparative ages being the central factor of importance. McConnel (1940:437) states the Archer river Wik Mungkan prohibit marriage with the FZD, and enjoin it with the MBD (more specifically with the MyBD). McConnel notes that the Kendall-Holroyd Wik Mungkan do not prohibit marriage with the FZD, as do the Wik Ngatharra and Wik Nganycharra. She states that the Kaanyju show the reverse preference to Archer river Wik Mungkan, enjoining marriage with the FZD, and prohibiting it with the MBD. McConnel

(1934:332) also states that the ideal marriage among Wik Mungkan owners/speakers is with the actual MBD.

Thomson (1972:18–9) reports to the contrary that marriage is prohibited with the actual MBD, and that the preferred marriage partner is a distant ‘cousin’. Thomson gives the following denotations for the principal ‘cousin/spouse’ terms:

moiya, moi [muuy] — MBC, FZC, MMBDC, MFZDC, FMBSC, FFZSC, FMZDC, FFBDC, MMZSC, MFBSC

kort [kuuth] — W, WB, BW, BWB; C of prospective WM or wBWM (Thomson 1972:17).

As Scheffler (1978:153) observes, this pattern of denotations establishes that *muuy* is the superclass term for ‘cousin/spouse’, with *kuuth* being a subclass term referring to a man’s actual or potential G+1 affines. The Wik Mungkan dictionary (Kilham et al. 1986) agrees with Thomson in reporting that the preferred spouse is a distant cousin. However, it disagrees with Thomson in the description of the reference of the Wik Mungkan ‘cousin/spouse’ terms. The definitions of these terms in the dictionary are given as follows.

*kuuth* — real cousin. The children of a man say *kuuth* to the children of his younger sisters. The children of a woman say *kuuth* to the children of her younger brothers. People who call each other *kuuth* or *muuy* who are not too close (who are not first cousins), but a little distant can marry each other. Children of the same sex real cousins can marry. *Kuuth* will call a man or woman *muuy*. ... A husband may refer to and address his wife as *wanch kuuth*.

*muuy* — real cousin. The children of a man say *muuy* to the children of his older sisters. The children of a woman say *muuy* to the children of her older brothers. *Muuy* will call a man or woman *kuuth*. People who call each other *kuuth* or *muuy* who are not too close (who are not first cousins), but a little distant can marry each other. Children of the same sex real cousins can marry. (Kilham et al. 1986:386–7).

A woman may call the man she lives with *pam muuy* (ibid.:380).

On the basis of the dictionary discussions, it would appear that the denotations of *kuuth* and *muuy* can be summarised as the following: *kuuth* — child of parent’s opposite sex and younger sibling. *muuy* — child of parent’s opposite sex and older sibling. The first preference spouse for a man is a distant *kuuth*, and for a woman, a distant *muuy*. Similar denotations and marriage preferences appear to hold for owners/speakers of Wik Ngathan (Sutton 1978:253–60). There are indications in both McConnel (1940:438–9) and Thomson (1972:19) that terminologies in marriages, which are not first preference marriages, are adjusted to the terminology of first preference marriages.

Sutton (pers.comm.) reports that the preference among Wik Ngathan and Wik Ngatharra owners/speakers is for marriage to a ‘distant’ cousin. However, there were a number of marriages to an actual MyBD in genealogies from the period before intense European influence. There was a strong preference for marriage to a partner from a geographically close clan.

Similar patterns are found among Thaayorre owners/speakers, who own country between Wik and Yir Yoront owners/speakers. Taylor (1976:41) reports that Thaayorre prescribe marriage to MyBD, and explicitly state a preference for marrying into a neighbouring clan. Indeed the preference for close marriage over-rides the preference for marriage to spouse in the preferred kin category — ‘Men who lack a partner of the right marriage cate-

gory in neighbouring clan usually marry 'wronghead' close to home rather than marry a partner in the right category from some distant clan' (ibid.).

Evidently, further research is required to consider the denotations of kin terms in the various Wik language varieties and Kaanyju. Further research is also required into the nature of marriage preferences among owners/speakers of these languages. It seems likely that there is and was a degree of variation in both of these.

### CLOSE VS DISTANT MARRIAGE

The distribution of preferences for 'close' vs 'distant' marriages within Australia is not random. Preferences for geographically close marriage are only reported from well-resourced areas which would have had the greatest population density in pre-contact Australia: coastal, sub-coastal, and riverine areas. It should, however, be noted that the converse proposition does not hold. A preference for geographically close marriage is not reported from all well-resourced areas. The materials on Kurnai language owners/speakers from Gippsland show that first preference marriage involved a target of some degree of geographical distance.

When a young man wanted a wife ... he looked about among the damsels of his tribe, but his friends did not wish him to marry among his own people, they did not want him to marry among the *womba bajerberk*, that is, the girls of our tribe *in globo* (overall). They prefer his going to a neighbouring tribe, or to look after a visiting damsel whom they would call *lowajerak* (a stranger whom they might fear), *jerak* being the verb to fear. They always preferred to marry their children to strangers. I will never forget the deep distress of a woman when told that her brother wished to marry a girl of his own tribe. She thought he would be sure to die, or that something dreadful would happen. (Bulmer 1994:8)

All the males of the family bore in succession the surname "Gluin-kong" ... Wives were obtained from *e, f, h, l, n, p, q*, [the letters refer to particular named groups of people], but not from Tatungolung, because these lived on the same lake; nor from such as *i* or *o*, as being too distant; nor from the adjoining Brabrolung, with whom they were not friendly. The present Gluin-kong tells me he could not marry a woman of *c* for his mother was of that division (Fison & Howitt 1880:226)

It was a general rule, also, that the inhabitants of the same river were considered too nearly related to intermarry, but we find an exception in the divisions *f* and *g*, which adjoin. ... Gluinkong states that the men of his island did not like to travel far from the lakes in search of wives, while the women of his family ran off with men who came from distant places (Fison & Howitt 1880:230)

These descriptions evidently do not provide a satisfactory description of the role of geography in the marriage practices of Kurnai owners/speakers. While the materials clearly establish some degree of geographical distance as desirable, they also suggest that it had some regional limits.

In this respect, and no doubt in many others, there is a difference between Kurnai owners/speakers, and the owners/speakers of languages with asymmetrical terminologies. All of these languages are associated with well-resourced areas, where geographically close marriage is an expressed target, at least within the limits of the available information. There is no information on the geographical aspects of the marriage practices of Larrakia owners/speakers, and there does not appear to be much prospect of obtaining such information. Consequently, I do not consider the Larrakia terminology further.

A preference for geographically close marriage is not limited to peoples owning languages with asymmetric terminologies. In describing marriage practices at Maningrida, Hiatt (1965:25) states that 'marriages within and between communities were equally acceptable, and both types occurred. Most inter-community marriages were between neighbouring peoples'. This indicates a preference for geographically close marriage. The kinship terminology of Gidjingali owners/speakers at Maningrida is an Aranda terminology (Hiatt 1965:44). Marriage patterns in south-western Arnhemland also show a preference for geographically close marriage (F. Merlan pers.comm.), and again the languages of this area have Aranda or Kariera terminologies.

We have seen that the Yolngu prefer marriage to partners who are both genealogically and geographically close. The Yolngu preference is in fact for the actual MBD. Warner (1958:64) states 'A man always tries to obtain his actual mother's brother's daughter; if he cannot get her, he tries to marry someone as near to her in consanguinity as possible.' Keen (1982:629) states that in a sample of 50 Yolngu marriages, a third of the men married their actual MBD.

This preference for the actual MBD is also true of Yir Yoront owners/speakers. Sharp (1934:416-7) reports that 'The preferred marriage is with my own mother's brother's daughter, and the genealogies show that this ideal is realized in a large majority of cases.' Geographically close marriage is preferred among Yir Yoront owners/speakers (B. Alpher pers.comm.). We have seen that geographically close marriage is preferred for Wik and Thaayorre owners/speakers to the north of Yir Yoront.

Among the Oenpelli Kunwinjku, we have seen that the preference is the actual FZDDD. There is also a preference for geographically close marriage. Berndt & Berndt (1970:94) report that 'in an ideally correct marriage ... husband and wife ... speak the same dialect of the same language — not just Gunwinggu in a general sense, but the same kind of Gunwinggu.' This statement is framed in terms of close language varieties, but it must be interpreted as indexing the desirability of geographically close marriage, through the medium of the inherent placement of language varieties in the landscape.

I have collected and examined genealogies (Keen 1980, Spencer 1914:47-52) from the Oenpelli area involving marriages in the late 19th and very early 20th centuries. In nine of these marriages it is possible to identify the primary languages and estates owned by both partners. It is impossible to know if these were first marriages for the women involved. However, life history materials I collected involving these women suggest that these marriages must have been very early in their marital histories. In three marriages the partners owned adjacent estates. In four marriages the estates owned by the partners were separated by a single intervening estate. In the remaining two cases, there was a greater distance. In five of the marriages, the partners owned different primary languages and in four they owned the same primary language. As such, there is no evidence for a norm of linguistic endogamy in the Oenpelli area, and in discussions on marriage, people do not state that there is or was such a norm.

Berndt & Berndt provide evidence of a preference, on the part of senior in-laws, for geographically close marriage in Oenpelli, in their discussion of a contested betrothal.

The girl was an only child. Her mother and mother's brothers from Djalbungur (Wadjag gunmugugur) and mother's 'mothers' from Gurudjmug (Djelama gunmugugur) wanted to marry her to a Gurudjmug man, a close nagurng of her mother. Her father (and his brothers), opposed them because, the father said, 'She wasn't born in the south, where you come from, but here in the north among us. We don't want her to go to another country where she can't give meat and such things to her fathers...' (Berndt and Berndt 1970:97).

It is probable that preference for genealogically close marriage occurs only in areas where there is a preference for geographically close marriage. This is true of the Oenpelli Kunwinjku,

Yir Yoront, and Yolngu. Radcliffe-Brown does not provide any information on the geographical character of Kariera marriage practices, other than that there was a norm of clan exogamy (Radcliffe-Brown 1913:159). However, given that the preference is for the actual MBD, this implies a pattern of repeated marriage between particular clans. It seems most unlikely that there would be a pattern of repeated marriage between particular geographically distant clans.

A number of peoples whose practices favour geographically close marriage, but do not enjoin genealogically close marriage, permit genealogically close marriage. We have seen that this is the case for Wik Ngathan. It is also the case for Gidjingali.

A man's FZ or any other woman of her patrilineal group and genealogical generation might give her daughter to him if he had no prospects of receiving a wife through orthodox bestowal. People said she did so out of pity for her BS, and they insisted that men did not have formal rights to their cross-cousins. (Hiatt 1965:71)

Dyirbal owners/speakers prefer geographically close marriage (Dixon 1980:38–9), and they permit genealogically close marriage.

There appears to have been a general preference for marriage not to have been with too close a relative — the child of an actual cross-cousin (sharing two of the same grandparents as EGO) would be less preferred as spouse than the child of a classificatory cross-cousin who is in fact quite distantly related (Dixon 1989:266)

Geographically close marriage is also the first preference of Ngarinyin, Worora, and Wunambal owners/speakers.

We see that the twelve clans ... are generally exchanging women with clans whose estates are located geographically close to their own estate. For many of those clans, the exchange patterns are known to be with clans whose estates are immediately adjacent to one another. In fact, informants recognize this spatial aspect of marriage exchanges by stating that women in a clan should be given to 'side-by-side' countries. (Blundell & Layton 1978:240).

Marriages are conceived of as involving exchanges between clans. Ideally, each clan receives wives from two clans, and gives them to two clans (ibid.:232–7). Given this pattern of repeated exchange between selected clans, first preference marriage partners may be genealogically close, though this is not enjoined (A.Rumsey pers.comm.). Blundell & Layton (ibid.:236) provide figures showing that approximately 80% of marriages in the period c.1880–1932 conformed to the norms of clan exchange.

However, for marriages other than first preference marriages, the preference is for spouses who are both genealogically and geographically distant (A. Rumsey pers.comm.). The Ngarinyin, Worora, and Wunambal, therefore, show a particularly interesting combination of preferences for both 'close' and 'distant' marriage. The preference for close marriage forms part of the system of practices, including the kinship terminologies, which emphasise the role of the clan in this area. The preference for distant marriage can be viewed as the default marriage preference.

Marriage to partners who are both genealogically and geographically distant is generally enjoined in some areas, and contrasts saliently with the preferences for close marriage so far examined. Myers describes the importance of distance as a factor in marriage considerations among the Pintupi.

Distance is the key, as one young Papunya man made clear in explaining why he could not marry a girl he admired from his own settlement. They were, he said,

“from one *ngurra*.” In the Pintupi view, they are “too close” (*ngamutja*, “from nearby”), and one’s spouse must be “from far away” (*tiwatja*).

The convention of marrying only those who are not currently considered “one countryman” assures (in the next few generations) renewed contact, visiting, and coresidence among those who are kin to each spouse. This arrangement renews, as well, rights to use the land, and maintains thereby a regional network. A current generation’s affines become the next generation’s “one countrymen.” Pintupi marriages do not represent a pattern of repeated, and continuing alliances between groups, as do marriages in North Australia ... They serve instead to reproduce a more general relatedness among individuals within a region. (Myers 1986:175)

Marriage establishes not only immediate relations of production but also, by creating ties between distant people, establishes relations of production and access to land within a larger ecological region. Myers (1986:71)

Given the difficulties and vagaries of the desert country owned by Pintupi people, it is obviously desirable that individuals should have access over a geographically wide area. The preference for geographically distant marriage is one of the principal practices in the construction of individual social ranges as geographically broad.

It should be noted here that I am using the term ‘range’ in a somewhat different, though related sense to that originally given it by Stanner (1965:2), who defined range as ‘the tract or orbit over which the group, including its nucleus and adherents, ordinarily hunted and foraged to maintain life’. Stanner’s definition proceeds from the perspective of a ‘group’, presumably relating to Radcliffe-Brown’s notion of a ‘horde’ (a set of people ordinarily foraging together). The existence of such groups/hordes is more than problematic in Australia (Hiatt 1966), and I am using ‘range’ with a meaning ‘the tract or orbit over which an individual ordinarily expected access to hunt and forage’.

The situation over much of northern Australia, which is well resourced, is very different from that reported for the Western Desert. Perhaps the polar opposite of the situation in the Western Desert are the residential patterns recorded from eastern Cape York. Chase & Sutton report that individuals had very limited ranges.

Thomson (1934) reported the remarkable sedentism of the coastal groups from this area of coastal Cape York, and this is confirmed by present-day informants who spent their younger days in traditional camps. Specific camping sites for a group over an annual period had a total range of only several kilometres of beachfront and immediate hinterland. (Chase and Sutton 1987:76).

Rigsby & Chase report that there was a considerable degree of overlap between the ranges of individuals.

Local groups or bands in the classical social organisation included men and women of different clans. The focal male leaders of local groups centred their residence and group movements on lands of their own clan estates, for example, Thomson’s notes and genealogies identify the focal men of the Yintjingga local group in 1928–1929 as several older Mbarrundayma clan men and their resident sister’s sons of the Mumpithamu clan. (Rigsby & Chase 1998:199).

While not as circumscribed as Eastern Cape York, individual ranges in the Oenpelli area appear to have been comparatively limited and to have shown a high degree of overlap.

the Gunwinggu pattern of living was traditionally semi-nomadic — 'semi-' because the region in which they moved was usually circumscribed. (Berndt & Berndt 1970:102-4)

Men did not keep only to their gunmugugur [clan] territory, but from our accounts they showed a preference for spending much of their time there and in immediately adjoining areas — as a few of them still do. And it was in such a territorial constellation that other people would expect to find them. (ibid.:107)

The preference for geographically close marriage is self-evidently a central and essential component in the construction of geographically narrow ranges, which are the preferred target across much of northern Australia.

### THE STRUCTURE OF ASYMMETRIES

At first glance, the various asymmetrical terminologies fall into three distinct groups. The Ngarinyin, Worora, and Wunambal terminologies focus on the clan and agnatic groupings. The Oenpelli Kunwinjku, Yir Yoront, and Yolngu terminologies focus on matrilineal vs patrilineal linkages. The Dyirbal, Wik and Kaanyju terminologies focus on comparative age differences. However, I will show that comparative age is also a central factor in the Oenpelli Kunwinjku, Yir Yoront, and Yolngu terminologies. The major distinction in asymmetric terminologies is therefore between the Ngarinyin, Worora, and Wunambal terminologies and the others.

Throughout most, if not all, of Australia, there was a strong preference for a woman's first husband to be significantly older, and generally at least the age of her mother. As we have seen the areas associated with Oenpelli Kunwinjku, Yir Yoront and Yolngu are all areas where marriage to genealogically close relatives is enjoined. In this situation, it is generally likely that a man's MBD will be younger than his FZD. Keen (1982:636-7) shows that a pattern of an average 40 year gap between father and child and an average 25 year gap between mother and child will result in the MBD being on average 15 years younger than a male EGO. The preference for MyBD among Thaayorre owners/speakers accords even more strongly with the preference for a significant age gap between husband and wife.

The same age-based preference for the MBD as spouse was found among Kariëra owners/speakers. However, they differ from Yolngu and Cape York groups in also allowing the FZD as a legitimate spouse.

As the natives themselves put it to me, a man must look to his *kaga* to provide him with a wife by giving him one or more of his daughters. The relative who is most particularly his *kaga*, ... , is his mother's brother, who may or may not be at the same time the husband of his father's sister. It is to this man that he looks first for a wife. If his own mother's brother has no daughter, or if she is already disposed of, he must apply to other persons who stand to him in the relation of *kaga*, to the husband of his father's sister for example. He may have to go much further afield and apply to some distant *kaga*, but this is only the case when there are available no nearer relatives. Thus we may say that the man who is pre-eminently *kaga* ... is his mother's brother; the woman who is pre-eminently *toa* is his own father's sister who should be the wife of the *kaga*; consequently the woman who is pre-eminently a man's *ñuba* is the daughter of his own mother's brother, or failing this, of his own father's sister. It is this woman to whom he has the first right as a wife. (Radcliffe-Brown 1913:156)

The Oenpelli Kunwinjku first preference for the actual FZDDD also accords with this preference. Keen states that a FZDDD will be on average 35 years younger than a male EGO



(Fig 1), based on the previously mentioned average 40 year gap between father and child and average 25 year gap between mother and child. From the viewpoint of gerontocratic marriage, an average difference of 35 years would appear to be desirable. It would allow a 45 year old man to claim a 10 year old wife. Keen (1982:637) states that 'A model of marriage between a man and his FZDDD in each generation shows that the age difference between such persons is reproduced at each generation.'

The use of the terms *berlu* 'FZ' and *ngal-kurrng* 'mWM' in the Oenpelli Kunwinjku asymmetry also appears to correlate with the age factors in marriages. Scheffler (1978:487-92) analyses the Oenpelli Kunwinjku terminology as basically a Kariera terminology, where the *ngal-kurrng* term distinguishes a particular sub-class of the overall *berlu* class. It is true that these two terms can be used in reference to the same individual. Thus among Oenpelli Kunwinjku, if a man marries *kanjok*, the daughter of a *berlu*, he will in most cases refer to his actual mother-in-law as *ngal-kurrng* (Berndt & Berndt 1970:100). Among Gundjeihmi owners/speakers any *ngal-kurrng*, including one's own mother-in-law, may alternatively be referred to as *berlu* (N. Evans pers.comm.). However, it should be noted that Gundjeihmi owners/speakers sometimes make use of a completely Kariera terminology, and that Gundjeihmi owners/speakers do not nowadays make use of the asymmetry which is standard among Oenpelli Kunwinjku owners/speakers.

Despite these examples of overlapping reference, there are other factors which suggest that *ngal-kurrng* should not be viewed as a subclass term with *berlu* as a superclass term. Firstly, among Oenpelli Kunwinjku owners/speakers, behaviour towards a *berlu/ngal-kurrng* mother of a *kanjok* spouse is not the same as behaviour towards the *ngal-kurrng* mother of a *kakkali* spouse.

*De facto* *gagali* [*kakkali*] and *nagurng* [*na-kurrng*]-*ngalgurng* [*ngal-kurrng*] are expected to behave substantially as if their bonds were 'real' — that is, as if they were based on genealogical ties. A man has the usual obligations toward his actual mother-in-law, his wife's mother, including partial avoidance, but what is uncertain is how far he and she are obliged or entitled to use the special *gungurng* [*kun-kurrng*] vocabulary in speaking together. It is the only proper medium of conversation in this affinal relationship, but ideally it is restricted to 'real' *nagurng-ngalgurng*, where the genealogical connection is traceable or implied (Berndt & Berndt 1970:100)

A similar difference in behaviours is found among Gidjingali owners/speakers.

I mentioned that there were special restrictions on social intercourse between a man and his WM or potential WMs. The one exception was when a person married his FZD. The relationship between a man and his FZ was familiar and affectionate, and it did not change if he married her daughter. He continued to address his WM as *baba* [FZ]. (Hiatt 1965:72)

For Oenpelli Kunwinjku owners/speakers, the first preference *ngal-kurrng*, who appears in the asymmetry, cannot be alternatively referred to as *berlu*. Rather, this first preference mother-in-law is the daughter of a woman called *berlu*. As such, she is, by the general logic of kinship terminologies, a cousin rather than an aunt. And indeed, this is exactly how she is referred to in Kriol. If a Kunwinjku speaker is asked for the Kunwinjku equivalent of the Kriol term *cousin*, then the first response is *na/ngal-kurrng* and not *kanjok*. This response pattern is in fact found throughout the western Top End and eastern Kimberleys, regardless of whether the language has a symmetrical or an asymmetrical terminology. If a language has a specific term for mother-in-law, and you ask for the equivalent of the Kriol term *cousin*, the first response will be the term for mother-in-law, and not a term which you would otherwise understand to mean 'cousin'.

The term *kanjok* is translated as cousin if a Kunwinjku-Kriol translation is requested. The term *ngal-kurrng* can be specifically distinguished in Kriol as the poison cousin. Again, this pattern is found throughout the western Top End and eastern Kimberleys. However, most analyses of kinship terminologies would predict that the mother-in-law should be known as the *poison auntie* rather than the *poison cousin*. This predicted Kriol term appears in Wik Mungkan where the mother-in-law is known as *poison aunt*, and the father-in-law as *poison uncle* (Kilham et al. 1986:382, 385).

The evidence therefore suggests the prototypical mother-in-law for Oenpelli Kunwinjku speakers is a type of cousin, and not a type of aunt. Further, it appears that this view of the mother-in-law has some more generally applicable basis. If we return to consider the general conditions of age relations in Aboriginal Australia, then this more general basis becomes evident. In Aboriginal Australia, the prototypical aunt is the actual FZ, who will belong to an age cohort senior to EGO. The prototypical mother-in-law, on the other hand, very commonly belongs to the same age cohort as a male EGO. Thus prototypical 'aunts' and 'mothers-in-law' are commonly women at two very different stages of life. When marriage practices have a first preference for actual kin, as they do among the Oenpelli Kunwinjku, it is even more likely that the first preference mother-in-law will be of the same generation as a male EGO (Fig 1).

In considering the significance of this prototypical age difference, it is necessary to examine the general semantics of English kinterms, as this is central to Kriol translations of Aboriginal language kin terms. English kinterms are usually defined in terms of reproductive relationships to EGO, as are kinterms generally: i.e. 'aunt' is the sister of my father or mother, etc. There has been much debate as to whether this is the correct or appropriate way of defining kinterms, either in English or more generally. I do not address this debate, but merely note that reproductive relationships have been central to analyses of the semantics of kinterms, whether correctly or otherwise.

There is, however, another general aspect of the meaning of English kinterms, which has not been a central focus of attention; that of comparative age relationships. Kin terms in English have age implicatures, as illustrated by the following sentences.

She's my cousin, but she's (much) older than me.  
 ? She's my cousin, but she's the same age as me.  
 She's my cousin, but she's (much) younger than me.

? She's my aunt, but she's (much) older than me.  
 She's my aunt, but she's the same age as me.  
 She's my aunt, but she's (much) younger than me.<sup>5</sup>

There is an implication that cousins are in the same age cohort as EGO, and it is very marked to assert this as being contrary to expectations. Similarly, there is an implication that aunts are of the age cohort immediately senior to EGO, and again it is very marked to assert this as being contrary to expectations.

I argue that Kriol speakers are aware of both the 'reproductive relationship' and 'age cohort' aspects of English kinterms, and that their translations of Aboriginal language kin terms may give prominence to either factor. We may illustrate this by considering the full range of Kriol usages of the term *cousin*. We have seen that Kriol speakers use the term *cousin* for certain types of in-laws, and for cross cousins. Kriol speakers also use *cousin* in compound terms to describe parallel cousins: *cousin-brother* and *cousin-sister*. Kriol speakers are generally aware that English speakers use the terms, *brother*, *sister*, and *cousin*, to distinguish lineal from collateral kin, and not parallel from cross kin. The use of *cousin* to refer to cross-cousins, and in the compound terms to refer to parallel cousins, depends on the 'reproductive relationship' meaning. *Cousins*, *cousin-brothers*, and *cousin-sisters* may be of very different age-cohorts to EGO.

On the other hand, I argue that the use of the term *cousin* to translate specifically in-law kinterms, focally the mother-in-law & son-in-law dyad, depends on the 'same age cohort' meaning of this term, and not on the 'reproductive relationship' meaning. Given the universal preference for the construction of affinal relationships with cross rather than parallel kin, it is to be expected that in-laws will be cousins, rather than brothers or sisters.

While a man and his mother-in-law may often belong to the same age cohort, the kind of relationship that holds between a man and his mother-in-law is marked by obligation and deference on his part, which are paralleled by the kinds of deference and obligation he owes to older men and women. There are grounds, therefore, for viewing mothers-in-law as both 'aunts' and 'cousins'. I would suggest that they are often viewed as both, simultaneously and irresolubly.

There are two factors which favour the general terminological classification of mothers-in-law with aunts, as cross-kin of the parental generation level. One is the salience of the avoidance behaviours, which class the mother-in-law with senior generation kin. The other factor is the emphasis on the orthodox transitive applicability of kin terms. If the mother-in-law is terminologically classified with aunts, then the general transitive application of kin terms is unproblematic. If the mother-in-law is classified in EGO's own generation, then the transitive application of kin terms is problematic, as previously discussed for Oenpelli Kunwinjku. Similar problems arise with the Dyirbal terminologies, which also classify in-laws as belonging either to EGO's own generation or to the grandparental generation (Dixon 1989).

It is in the context of these factors that the common element *mukul* in the Yolngu terms *mukul ba:pa* 'FZ' and *mukul rumaru* 'wM, MBW' is probably to be understood, even though the relationships that hold between a male EGO and women called by these two kin terms are very different.

#### CORRELATIONS BETWEEN TERMINOLOGICAL SYSTEMS AND MARRIAGE PRACTICES.

There are a number of correlations evident between terminological systems and marriage practices, but few of these are absolute.

- a. Asymmetric terminologies are only found in areas where geographically close marriage is enjoined, and where marriage to genealogically close kin is permitted. However, there are areas where geographically close marriage is enjoined and where marriage to genealogically close kin is permitted which are associated with symmetric terminologies (e.g. Gidjingali).
- b. In the small number of cases where marriage practices enjoin first preference marriage to genealogically close kin, then the terminologies are mostly asymmetric (Oenpelli Kunwinjku, Yir Yoront, Yolngu). However, the marriage practices of Kariera owners appear to have enjoined first preference marriage to a genealogically close relative and the Kariera terminology is symmetric.

There is a direct causal connection between the prescription or permission of genealogically close marriage, as is the case with all the asymmetrical terminologies, and the attainment of geographically close marriage. The prescription or permission of genealogically close marriage permits a pattern of marriage between the same neighbouring groups to be repeated at each generation level. We may compare this with situations where geographically close marriage is prescribed, but genealogically close marriage is proscribed, as among owners/speakers of Jawoyn. In this situation, it is not possible to repeat marriages between the same groups at each generation level. It is possible to alternate marriage preferences by generation. So, for example, for a male EGO, the preferred spouse could be a member of his FM's group, but members of his M's group would be proscribed spouses.

However, it is most unlikely that an alternating system of this type would lead to the construction of ranges, on average as narrow as those found in systems permitting genealogically close marriage. The general practicalities of finding a spouse entail that people must on average marry over a wider geographical range in areas where some groups of geographically close people are proscribed on the basis of genealogical closeness, than in areas where nobody is proscribed for this reason.

The other correlations cannot be explained in such directly causal terms, partly because the available materials are too limited to allow for the full testing of hypotheses. However, it is possible to propose some lines of enquiry. One factor which appears to be of importance is a central tension in Australian marriage practices. In systems such as those found in Australia which positively specify potential spouses, there is always a tension between the size of the pool of potential spouses available to each individual man, and the number of men competing for each individual woman. The wider the class of women designated as potential spouses within a particular terminology, then the greater the pool of men legitimately competing to marry each individual woman within that class. The more narrowly the class of potential spouses is constructed, then the fewer the men who can legitimately compete for each woman.

Given that polygynous marriage was a target of attainment for men, it appears reasonable to posit that most men would desire both to specify as wide a class of legitimate potential spouses for themselves as possible and to restrict the legitimate competition from other men for each individual spouse. However, these two desires cannot both be satisfied within Australian terminological systems. It is therefore unsurprising to find that there is variation across Australian terminologies in the size of class of potential spouses that they delineate.

It appears that the terminologies delineating the widest range of potential spouses are those of certain Western Desert peoples, and other peoples of western South Australia. These terminologies are notable for the fact that they do not distinguish parallel from cross kin. This means that there is a very wide class of EGO's own generation relatives who are potential first preference spouses, provided that they are 'distant' (Elkin 1940). It appears that this very wide potential class, not distinguishing distant cross from parallel kin, extends to owners/speakers of other Western Desert varieties which do allow for a cross vs parallel distinction (Scheffler 1978:98).

Of the widely attested types, Kariera terminologies delineate the broadest category of potential, first preference spouses, as they allow for marriage to all cousins, with the exception that close cousins are terminologically distinguished as non-marriageable in many systems. Aranda terminologies delineate a more limited category of first preference spouses, as they divide the preferred second cousin spouse from first cousins. However, for most owners/speakers of languages with Aranda terminologies, while first cousins are not the first preference spouse, they are second preference spouses (Berndt & Berndt 1985:51,<sup>6</sup> Maddock 1981:65).

The exact degree of 'secondness' and how this is marked, varies somewhat. For Gidjinali owners/speakers, marriage to a first cousin *arragudja* is equally respectable to marriage to a second cousin *mangga* (Hiatt 1965:71). The terminology of Bunuba is Aranda, and in generic discussions of kinship terminology, Bunuba owners/speakers distinguish the first cousin *gurndayi* from the second cousin *manggayi*. However the usage of these terms does not in many cases reflect concerns of genealogy, but rather those of distance. Distant first cousins may be termed *manggayi*, and are marriageable. Conversely, some second cousins may be termed *gurndayi* (Rumsey 1982:161).

All the asymmetrical terminologies are like Aranda terminologies, in that in comparison to a Kariera terminology, they delineate a more limited class of first preference spouses. However, the marriage practices of Yolngu and Kunwinjku Oenpelli owners differ from those of owners of Aranda terminologies in that they involve a much clearer differentiation between first preference and other kinds of spouses. Marriages to 'cousins' not designated by the 'spouse' terms are not second preference marriages of the same degree of legitimacy

as marriage to an *arragudja* among the Gidjingali. We have already seen that this is the case with the Yolngu terminologies. The Oenpelli Kunwinjku do allow a second preference within the broad *kanjok* 'cousin' class. However, Berndt & Berndt provide evidence that this is definitely a second preference marriage.

Otherwise, minor departures from the ideal marriage type do not attract much notice in the ordinary way. They are most likely to come to the surface in arguments and quarrels. A husband and wife in such circumstances have a ready-made grievance that either of them can use, even after years of marriage. They can accuse each other of being only *ganjul* [*kanjok*] and not real *gagali* [*kakkali*], adding (for instance), 'Those [named] are my *gagali* — I should be married to them, not to you!' 'My mother didn't give me to you [or vice versa]; you're not the right husband [or wife] for me!' (Berndt & Berndt 1970:101).

We may compare the Gidjingali, Oenpelli Kunwinjku, and Yolngu terminologies:

Gidjingali: First preference marriage to certain *mangga* (2nd cousin). Second preference marriage to other *mangga* and to *arragudja* (1st cousin) of equal respectability to first preference.

Oenpelli Kunwinjku: First preference marriage to *kakkali* (FZDDD). Second preference marriage to *kanjok* (cousin), not of equal status to first preference marriage.

Yolngu: First preference marriage to *galay* (matrilateral cousin). Marriage to a distant *dhuway* (patrilateral cousin) apparently possible, but only one of a number of low preference marriage possibilities — not a secondary marriage preference.

One vexed question here is to what extent 'marriage practices' and the meanings of particular kin terms are to be distinguished from one another. Thus is *arragudja* simply 'first cousin' or is it 'first cousin and perfectly acceptable marriage partner'. Similarly is *kanjok* simply 'cousin' or is it 'cousin and possible but not preferred marriage partner'? I do not attempt to resolve this question, but simply note the Oenpelli Kunwinjku and Yolngu terminologies are associated with a much clearer differentiation of the class of first preference spouses from other types of spouses than is the case with Aranda terminologies.

Most discussions of marriage preferences do not detail the degree of legitimacy of second and lower preference marriages. This includes the available materials on marriage practices of other asymmetric terminologies. Consequently, it is not possible to determine whether the marriage practices of owners of asymmetric terminologies may be distinguished systematically from those of owners of Aranda terminologies in involving a much clearer differentiation of the class of first preference spouses.

From a pan-Australian perspective, the available materials suggest that there is an association between the extent of ranges, the size of the class of potential spouses and the size of the pool of men competing over each individual marriage. The largest class of potential spouses and thereby the largest set of competing men is found in areas of the Western Desert where the construction of geographically wide ranges is mandated. The smallest class of potential spouses and thereby the smallest set of competing men appears to be that found in areas associated with Yolngu varieties where the construction of geographically narrow ranges is mandated.

However, as we have seen no direct causal connection can be drawn between range size and size of the spouse class. Rather the connection appears to be one involving the appearance vs non-appearance of options. The possibility of a narrowly delimited spouse class arises only in areas which have a preference for narrow ranges which in turn are found only in the well-resourced parts of Australia. These options are absent in poorly resourced parts of Australia, for which only comparatively wider ranges and wider spouse classes are reported. Comparatively wider ranges and comparatively wider spouse classes are also options in the well-resourced areas of Australia, and in a certain sense appear to be the default options.

The reasons why the options of comparatively narrower ranges and spouse classes are adopted in particular areas remain to be investigated. Keen (1982) provides a detailed comparative study of the differences between Gidjingali and Yolngu marriage patterns, focussing on the high rates of polygyny among Yolngu in comparison with Gidjingali. Keen identifies a number of factors as contributing to this difference, including the wider allowance for 'straight' marriage among Gidjingali. This allows for a wider range of potential claimants in a woman's first marriage (Keen *ibid.*:631, 638). This suggests a study of comparative polygyny rates would be of interest.

## KIN TERMINOLOGIES AND REGIONAL IDENTITIES

We have thus far been considering marriage practices and kinship terminologies only from the perspective of each individual marriage. However, marriage practices must also be considered from a group perspective. It is necessary to investigate whether the common possession of a particular type of marriage practice and/or kinship terminology correlates with the common possession of other practices and systems of nomenclature. If there is such a correlation, then the common possession of a particular type of marriage practice and/or kinship terminology can be viewed as partly constitutive of a regional identity.

This is the case in the Oenpelli area. The particular asymmetrical pattern found in the Oenpelli Kunwinjku terminology appears to have been characteristic of other kinship terminologies in the area extending north and west towards the coast from Oenpelli (Amurdak, Gaagudju, Garik, Iwadja, Marrgu). There are two other cultural patterns, whose long term geographical distribution correlates strongly with the range of the skewing. One is the Ubarr set of ceremonial rituals, which is autochthonous to this area (Berndt & Berndt 1970:124). The other is a system of phratry names (Berndt & Berndt 1970:61-6), which linguistic evidence argues to be of some antiquity across much the same region as the skewing. Phratry terms in the various languages of the region are set out as follows.

Phratry 1: Amurdak *warri-wudjali*, Gaagudju *Ø-yarmangiiru* (Masc), *njing-garmangiiru* (Fem), Garik *man-djirra-wudjali*, Kunwinjku *yarri-burrik*

Phratry 2: Amurdak *warri-arnkurk*, Gaagudju *Ø-yarrangaalbu* (Masc), *njing-garrangaalbu* (Fem), Garik *man-djirra-wuli*, Kunwinjku *yarri-karnkurk*

Phratry 3: Amurdak *warri-arninj*, Gaagudju *Ø-yarraadjawa* (Masc), *njing-garraadjawa* (Fem), Garik *man-balnggidj*, Kunwinjku *yarri-yarninj*

Phratry 4: Amurdak *warr-ugarr*, Gaagudju *Ø-yarrabarnaadjinggi*, *Ø-yarrabarnaadju* (Masc), *njing-garrabarnaadjinggi*, *njing-garrabarnaadju* (Fem), Garik *yarri-wurrgan*, Kunwinjku *yarri-wurrgan*

Phratry 5: Amurdak *warri-marrangadj*, Gaagudju *djimburrwoodju* (Masc & Fem), Kunwinjku *djoned*

A number of the phratry names are evidently related to one another, either in part or in whole, both within and between languages. However, the relationships are irregular, both within and between languages. The commonalities cannot therefore reflect recent borrowings, as these would show only regularities. The one exception is the Garik term for Phratry 4, which is evidently a recent borrowing from Kunwinjku. Sources from early contact list only the first three phratry names for the Cobourg Peninsula area, where Garik is found (Earl 1842:240-1, Spencer 1914:46).

The substantial geographical co-incidence of these three, unrelated patterns suggests a greater density of contact between people within the area than in other directions, at least for some periods of time. The common possession of the kinship skewing both partly constitutes this regionalised density of contact, and partly indicates the potential for re-newing the regionalised density of contact. It should be noted however, that there is no autochtho-

nous name, in any of the languages of the area, referring to this regionalised density of contact. Consequently, it is an inchoate regional identity in comparison to identities reified by a name, such as 'upriver' people or equivalent named regional identities.

In other areas of Australia, particular types of kinship terminologies and/or particular patterns of marriage practices correlate with regional identities. One factor of considerable importance in determining regional identities is that of ecologically based oppositions. Sutton (1978:115) provides evidence for a coastal vs inland distinction in regional marriage patterns among Wik owners/speakers. This coastal vs inland distinction is also reported for marriage patterns in north-east and north-central Arnhemland (White et al. 1990:178). It seems likely that investigation of other oppositions suggested by Sutton (1990:75) of river vs hinterland, and plains vs hills, would also establish distinctions in marriage patterns.

There are also correlations with regional identities determined by language names. Merlan indicates that there was a regional aspect to marriage among Jawoyn language owners.

It would appear that marriage among people who considered themselves to be affiliated with the same identity [the Jawoyn regional land-language identity] of this kind was previously more common than it is now. Genealogical documentation in preparation for the Katherine Land Claim of all those people considered Jawoyn showed a much greater proportion of Jawoyn married to partners also recognised as Jawoyn in earlier generations, as compared with more recent marriages. (Merlan 1998:120).

The range of possible correlations between kinship terminologies and marriage practices, and other kinds of regionalised practices and named identities remains to be fully explored. The precise motivations for the various patterns of regionalisation also remain to be fully explored (see Keen 1997, Peterson 1976 for discussions of regional identities).

## CONCLUSIONS

The kinship terminologies and marriage practices of Oenpelli Kunwinjku speakers/owners are of interest on a number of grounds. The asymmetry in the Oenpelli Kunwinjku terminologies is of a kind otherwise unreported. The form of the asymmetry overtly raises issues about the kinship status of mothers-in-law, as belonging to EGO's own generation and/or to the parental generation, which are otherwise only overtly raised by the Dyirbal terminologies. Covertly, this issue appears to be one of more general significance, as suggested by translations of the Kriol terms 'cousin' and 'poison cousin' with specifically 'in-law' kin terms across the western Top End and eastern Kimberleys.

This in turn raises issues for consideration with respect to the super- and sub-classing of kin terms and their significance. As Rumsey (1981) demonstrates, super- and sub-classing are contextually dependent, and not reducible to a single pattern. It appears that context can be extended to include generational and behavioural factors. While mothers-in-law may class with aunts for some purposes, they do not necessarily do so for all purposes.

While the particular structure of the asymmetry is unique, it classes broadly with the other, more well known, asymmetries found in kinship terminologies of Australian languages. The structure of the asymmetry revolves around the considerable discrepancy between the ages of a girl and her husband in her first marriage, as do the other asymmetries, apart from the 'clan' type asymmetry.

The Oenpelli Kunwinjku asymmetry also classes broadly with all of the other asymmetries in that its geographical associations do not appear to be entirely random. Asymmetrical terminologies appear only in areas where genealogically close marriage is permitted or prescribed. Prescription or permission of genealogically close marriage is in turn found only in areas where there is a preference for the construction of geographically narrow ranges, an

option which is itself restricted to the better resourced areas of Australia. A preference for geographically narrow ranges is reported for many of the better resourced areas of Australia, and permission of genealogically close marriage appears to be not uncommon in these areas. Both prescription of genealogically close marriage and asymmetric terminologies are rare, even in the better resourced areas.

It is not possible to provide any definitive account as to why asymmetric terminologies might be adopted in particular areas because of limitations in the available materials. As we have seen Oenpelli Kunwinjku and Yolngu terminologies are associated with a clearer distinction between the class of first preference spouses and other spouses than is the case with other terminologies. Further research is required to determine whether this is true of other asymmetric terminologies. One effect of more clearly distinguishing the class of first preference spouses is to narrow the class of legitimate spouses, and to thereby narrow the pool of men legitimately competing for each individual woman. The effects of this remain to be fully investigated.

The full extent of the correlations between kinship terminologies, marriage practices and regional identities also remains to be explored. We have seen that common possession of the Oenpelli Kunwinjku skewing is one of the factors constituting a regional identity, though in this particular case a somewhat inchoate identity, as it is un-named. Kinship terminologies and marriage practices appear to co-incide with other regional practices or named identities, such as ecological zones or land-language associations. The particular factors relevant in each correlation require further research.

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#### NOTES

1. Biniŋ Gunwok is the name for the overall technically defined language which includes the language varieties known as Kunwinjku. Biniŋ Gunwok includes a number of other named language varieties.
2. This paper focuses on first preference marriages as these are central to terminologies. Given that a woman's first husband was significantly older than her, most women were likely to have more than one husband in the course of their life. The patterning of second and subsequent marriages can be quite different from that of first marriages. Any study of overall marriage practices would necessarily encompass the practices accompanying these marriages. However, they lie beyond the scope of this paper.
3. S. Etherington (pers.comm.)
4. This information was confirmed by S. Etherington.
5. The preceding question mark is used to indicate sentences which are odd without being completely unacceptable.
6. The Berndts present this point in terms of subsections.

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