**Guwar, the language of Moreton Island**, and its relationship to the Bandjalang and Yagara subgroups: a case for phylogenetic migratory expansion?

***Abstract***

This thesis presents an anthropological explanation for the distribution of Aboriginal languages in sub-tropical eastern Australia. This is achieved through positing a phylogenetic migratory expansion hypothesis. The hypothesis maintains that Aboriginal languages reached the extent of their distribution by the migration of ethnicities, speakers of the same language, and that this co-extensive with the expansion of languages and was the primary dynamic of Aboriginal societies in the classical era.

Guwar, a detached language of the Bandjalang sub-group confined to Moreton Island off the coast of southern Queensland, is employed as a test case to examine the feasibility of the hypothesis. Consistent with the location of Guwar on Moreton Island and the phylogenetic migratory expansion hypothesis it is maintained that Bandjalang’s distribution once exceeded the limits found at the inception of European settlement. Bandjalang’s expansion once extended to include the Brisbane River Valley and Moreton Bay. The subsequent migratory expansion of another language-speaking population, Yagara, into this area, forced the retreat of Bandjalang speakers south of the Logan River and onto Moreton Island.

The thesis investigates the hypothesis through the following procedure. The phylogenetic integrity of Bandjalang is examined. This establishes that Bandjalang was a language sub-group. Next follows the case for Bandjalang having attained the limits of its distribution through migratory expansion. The relationship of Bandjalang dialects, the subsumption of pre-existing populations, and mythological reference demonstrate this probability. The case for Bandjalang’s migratory expansion once having extended into country immediately afterwards occupied by Yagara speakers is explored. Crowley (1978) first called attention to the atypical concentration of diverse Bandjalang dialects on its northern boundary with Yagara. This diversity is consistent with Yagara having followed Bandjalang speakers into the Brisbane River Valley, in the process dispossessing them. This forced the Bandjalang speakers of the area south of the Logan River. Their accommodation in a more restricted area accounts for the diversity noted by Crowley. Following Bannister (1982) the dialects contiguous to Yagara are called the Mibiny dialects. These represent a discrete dialectal group within Bandjalang, one of their distinctive features being a disproportionate percentage of lexicon in common with Yagara. This indicates the historical contact hypothesised. Guwar is shown to be a Bandjalang language. Moreton Island, where it is spoken, is some fifty kilometres from the Bandjalang main and Yagara was spoken in the intervening country. This circumstance is adduced as evidence to indicate that Bandjalang once occupied all this intervening country, and that the Ngugi, the speakers of Guwar, are a remnant of this population that was forced onto Moreton Island as a result of Yagara expansion. Evidence for this assertion is found in the high percentage of borrowed Yagara lexicon and grammar in Guwar.

The phylogenetic origin of Yagara is examined. Yagara is shown to be related to the East Queensland Border (EQB) language group. These languages are located immediately to the west of the Great Dividing Range. It is hypothesised Yagara migrated east across the range into the Brisbane River Valley. Evidence for a Bandjalang substrate is found in toponymy. Contact between Yagara and the Bandjalang dialects Mibiny and Guwar is indicated by deep and pervasive language borrowing, in mythology and in the adoption by the latter of forms of Yagara’s distinctive kinship system. Various ethnographic commonalities suggestive of a close and common history between Yagara and the Bandjalang dialects are examined. The ethno-historic record of colonial Moreton Bay discloses a continuation of behaviours consistent with migratory expansion into the colonial era. Regional ‘higher order’ social relationships are also regarded as evidence for deep-seated extra-linguistic contact. The conclusion is made that the migratory expansion hypothesis best explains the language distribution of the region, and the social interaction of ethnicities recorded in the ethnography. The thesis concludes by noting the wide, probably universal, application of the migratory language hypothesis to classical era Aboriginal Australia. Some of the general features implied in migratory expansion are enumerated. The conclusion is drawn that, unlike previous anthropological and linguistic theories that have emphasised the profound time depth and relative inertia of classical era Aboriginal societies, the truth is more likely to lie closer to the expectations of European history, that is, vigorous and contested growth in a relatively shallow timeframe.

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