

Shibbolethonyms, ex-exonyms and eco-ethnonyms in Aboriginal Australia: the pragmatics of onymization and archaism

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0. Introduction: ethnonyms and ethnonymic paradigms

There are some 300 language names in Australia which generally also name groups of people, and many more names for dialect or clan groups, running into the thousands. Quite a number of these names are opaque: they have no meaning other than that they are ethnonyms today, and none seems discoverable. Others have quite transparent meanings while still others can yield a meaning when subject to etymological analysis, which I call semi-transparent. Within the transparent and semi-transparent categories, three main types will be dealt with in this paper: **shibbolethonyms**, **directional exonyms** and **environmental ethnonyms**. The first term is based on the word *shibboleth*, which derives from an incident in the Book of Judges, chapter 12, in the Bible. The word *shibboleth* in ancient Hebrew dialects meant ‘ear of grain’. Some groups pronounced it with a [f] sound, but speakers of related dialects pronounced it with an [s]. In the story sentries asked each person to say the word *shibboleth*. The Ephraimites, who had no [f] sound in their language, pronounced the word with an [s] and were revealed as the enemy.

The purpose of the paper is to establish the existence of these three types of ethnonym, in order to introduce the new concept of an **ethnonymic paradigm**, exploring how such paradigms come into existence, develop and wither, with detailed exemplification from the situation in Australia.

A brief characterization of the three key terms is as follows:

- (1) **shibbolethonyms**: built from a distinctive word used by a group, usually with a suffix, e.g. *Pitjantjatjara* vs. *Yankunytjatjara* built on two words for ‘go’;

- (2) **directional exonyms**: built from cardinal direction terms and suffixes, like ‘southerners’ applied by neighbours but subsequently adopted as endonyms;
- (3) **environmental ethnonyms**: based on words for an environmental zone (dominant plant type, etc.), or on a major place name and a suffix.

Examples and regional case studies will be given for each type, and hypotheses proposed about the circumstances in which each of these types might arise.

In each type, we shall see that the passage of time can disturb the straightforward mapping between the original meaning and current reality, turning them into archaisms, which can be useful for historical study but confusing for users of the name. Change can occur in the following ways:

- (1) in **shibbolethnonyms**: the base-word in general vocabulary on which the ethnonym is built may change, while leaving the name-element related to the base-word unchanged: an archaism;
- (2) in **directional exonyms**: the conversion to an endonym makes the original referential pragmatics problematic—people who were “southerners” for another group are not “southerners” for themselves; the pragmatics of this process is explored below. A combination of the original term being in a foreign language, and language change, can obscure the etymology and lessen the salience of the mismatch between meaning of the element in the ethnonym and its more general meaning. Cardinal direction term roots have repeatedly changed reference in Australia, making the puzzle more complex (Breen 1993; McConvell 1996).
- (3) in **environmental ethnonyms**: ecological change and movement of groups can also alter environmental name-reference relationships. Again, a process of *archaization* can lessen current difficulties. For instance, the fact that a typical plant after which a group was named is no longer a major feature of the group’s environment is less jarring when the meaning of the word for the plant itself has become obscure and archaic. The archaic names can be valuable in the study of paleo-ecology.

Language and “tribal” names have undergone shifts involving movement from common to proper meanings and also interactions between

semantics and pragmatics in the past. This provides us with means of studying prehistory as well as comparing how well the typologies, origin hypotheses, and models of pragmatic change which are developed here for Australia match those of other continents.

The perspective explored here is one which is based on social pragmatics, and is diachronic. Names of groups of people emerge from situations where descriptive terms become applied conventionally to a particular social group or category. In Australia, these names derive overwhelmingly from their relative or absolute geographical location, or from a distinctive feature of their language. From a beginning in semantics—a descriptive term—the sense of the term comes to be primarily a matter of reference, i.e. a pragmatic one.

For some such terms, duality and even ambiguity between the common descriptive sense and the referential naming function may be maintained for some time after initial onymization begins (cf. Coates 2004). Eventually, there is usually a decoupling of the descriptive sense of the central element of the name from the reference of the name as a whole (as it applies to a group of people), as they become formally or functionally differentiated.

In some cases, the terms are drawn not from the language of the group to which the term is applied but from another language, usually of neighbours (i.e. they are exonyms). While the members of the named group may initially be aware of the meaning in the language providing the exonym, or may even be bilingual, the fact of the ethnonym being an exonym usually leads to more rapid decoupling of the descriptive sense and name reference. Eventually the original descriptive meaning becomes obscure or lost altogether. Even where the term is an endonym (i.e. from the language of the named group itself), the original sense of the term can become archaic, then opaque, as new descriptive terms take over in the everyday language.

The processes whereby ethnonyms are created, onymized, and become archaic and opaque are social in a double way: they refer to social groups (or sometimes, looser social categories), and they are created by social groups. In many of the cases in Australia, and elsewhere, the original coining of the term involves the creation of an **ethnonymic paradigm**, involving sets of related ethnonyms based on:

- salient contrasts in geography and environment
- in Australia in particular, variations in lexicon and grammar in the languages or dialects of the subsets of social groups (which are the source of **shibbolethonyms** as defined above)

The creation of such paradigms implies some kind of regional “speech community” in the wider sense, which may be multidialectal (involving closely related dialects) or multilingual (with distantly related languages), but which share a tradition of social multilingualism symbolized by the overt relation between their ethnonyms.

These patterns of relationship may well be universal. In this paper, they will be investigated in relation to predominant patterns of onymization of ethnonyms among Australian Aborigines. In the conclusion, the subject of whether Australian Aborigines can be said to show any particular type of variation on these patterns is discussed. As compared to other language groups in the world, language groups in Australia have tended to be, even before White settlement, very small in population (hundreds or a few thousand at most). Linked to that and to the hunter-gatherer lifestyle, the different language groups have tended to have quite intensive relations with neighbouring groups, including intermarriage and multilingualism. This may have a bearing on the nature of the ethnonym paradigm zones mentioned above. But while these may be created relatively readily, they are maintained as active, productive regional systems only under certain conditions—a point to which we return in the conclusion.

Some questions have been raised about whether ethnonyms are truly proper nouns or appellatives (Van Langendonck 2007, forthcoming, 160). These doubts receive some support in Australia from languages in which proper nouns such as personal names and place-names receive special morphological marking (e.g. *-nya* in the absolutive case in Pitjantjara/Yankunytjajara), but ethnonyms do not receive such marking. Perhaps it is typical for ethnonyms to behave as either proper nouns or appellatives.

Ethnonyms also behave differently from prototypical proper nouns such as personal names in other ways, perhaps in all languages in Australia, and beyond. It is possible to be ‘a little bit [ethnic/language group]’, for instance *Ngarinyman – piya*, ‘Ngarinyman-slightly’ if only one grandparent is Ngarinyman. It is not possible to be ‘a little bit John’.

These issues, while important, will not be investigated further here. The onymization process may be different, and not as thoroughgoing, in the case of ethnonyms as it may be in other cases. Nevertheless the case of ethnonyms is one of the most significant and widespread types of onymization and deserves cross-cultural study.

1.1. Australian Indigenous languages and their names

Using the criterion of mutual intelligibility to define *language* (as opposed to *dialect*), linguists have estimated that between 250 and 300 languages were spoken in Australia at the time of first European settlement in the late eighteenth century. The number of languages has since declined and now only 145 are still spoken, 110 of these being severely endangered, in the sense of being spoken fluently only by a handful of old people, and only 17 are “strong”—spoken by all age groups and learned by children (McConvell, Marmion and McNicol 2005). The languages never had very large speaker populations even before European colonization and its destructive impacts, the largest groups being several thousand at most, down to groups of 50-100.

There are several thousand distinct names of languages and “tribal” groups in the literature, but many of these are actually spelling variations on a much smaller set, since there has been no standardization of names and many idiosyncratic spellings have been used, and since some different names are known to be used to refer to the same group. Standard or reference spellings are being promoted through the AUSTLANG database prepared by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (<http://austlang.aiatsis.gov.au>). There are around 800 clearly distinct names in the database apart from these orthographic variants and synonyms, most of which are names of dialects of the basic 250 languages.

The great majority of these names function as both the name of the language (*glossonym*), and the name of the group which speaks the language or, as is common these days, which inherits affiliation with the language whether or not they speak it (*ethnonym*). So, for instance, the term *Warlpiri* means both a central Australian language and the people who speak and identify with the Warlpiri language.

In a smaller group of language/group pairs, the ethnonym is a morphological variant of the glossonym, so *Jirrbal* is a north Queensland

rainforest language, and *Jirrbal-ngan* (with a suffix) are the people identified with the language. Sometimes such a ‘people’ suffix is optional rather than obligatory in the ethnonym e.g. in the Victoria River District of the Northern Territory *Ngarinyman* or *Ngarinyman-purru* ‘people associated with the Ngarinyman language’. In just a handful of cases, two unrelated words are used for the glossonym and the ethnonym.

The fact that there is an imperfect fit between the denotations of glossonyms and those of their related ethnonyms, i.e. that more, or less, people have an ethnonym derived from language X than actually speak language X, has been reported for many places in the world (e.g. Lusakalalu 2003). This kind of complexity has also been commented on for some areas in Australia (e.g. Schebeck 2002; Sutton 1978), and societal multilingualism is another complicating factor. However, in most cases in pre-contact and early contact times, there is a straightforward mapping.

The other aspect of this relationship which has particular importance in Australia is the territory of the groups concerned. Rumsey (1996) has argued that the most important relationship is that between a stretch of land and the language with which it is associated. This association is usually ordained by mythological charter in which the “Dreamings” (mythological beings) begin and end the speaking of a particular language at boundary points, and thus endow the people of the enclosed territory with that particular language (see also McConvell 2004 for comment).

Elsewhere in the world, for instance in the Americas, it has been noted that colonial regimes and missionaries have been responsible for reorganizing and even creating language groups and ethnonyms among indigenous peoples. Indigenous groups themselves invented new names based on new colonial realities (Salomon and Schwartz 2000), or recombined and used old names in new ways (e.g. Davis 2001, Moore 2001). There is relatively little evidence for this in Australia, and some purported examples (e.g. Tindale 1974, 38) are incorrect, being in reality drawn from older indigenous tradition (McConvell 2002, 272). We shall concentrate here on fully indigenous traditions.

In what follows, most attention is paid to ethnonyms which are at least partially transparent to our analytical gaze, although getting to the bottom of their former meaning often calls on a great deal of regional linguistic and cultural knowledge. Some other ethnonyms

will no doubt remain for ever resistant to explication no matter what efforts are expended. Tindale makes the point (1974, 40) that whole ethnonyms which have no known meaning are undoubtedly ancient. In some cases where the same words/names occur in different parts of Australia, he regards this as resulting in from “tribal drift”, and holds out the possibility that the original meaning and the directions of migration may be reconstructed.

1.2. Types of ethnonym in the Victoria River District

Most of the detailed examples of ethnonyms in this paper are drawn from the Victoria River District in the Northern Territory. This area is a large area of mainly savannah woodland stretching from the edge of the semi-desert to the south, through the upper reaches of the Victoria River and other rivers to flood plains around the mouth of the Victoria, where rainfall is higher and vegetation denser.

Linguistically, the district is divided by the most important boundary in Australia, that between the Pama-Nyungan languages to the south and the non-Pama-Nyungan languages to the north. The Pama-Nyungan languages are all fairly closely related as members of the Ngumpin branch of the Ngumpin-Yapa subgroup (McConvell and Laughren 2004). The non-Pama-Nyungan languages belong to three different families: Jarragan in the west; Mirndi in the north-centre (the western branch, Jaminjungan) and Wardaman in the east.

Map 1 shows the language names and territories and Map 2 shows the typology of these names. They include the three main types discussed in this paper, with some sub-types.

(1) **shibbolethnonyms:**

- a. an (old) interjection + *man* ‘makes sound’
- b. an (old) interjection (+ ‘people’ suffix)
- c. (old) word for ‘talk’
- d. unknown word + *-bung/-wung*, a suffix of variable meaning and debatable origin
- e. the word for ‘where’

(2) **directional exonyms:**

- a. ‘south’
- b. ‘south’ + suffix



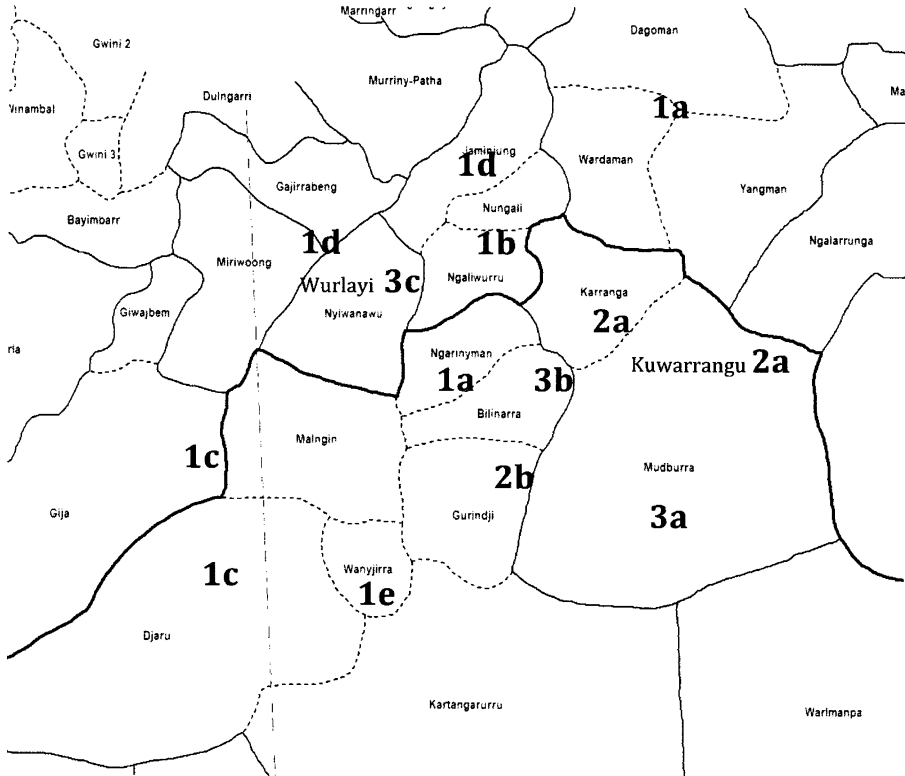
Map 1: Language groups of the Victoria River District.

The dark line indicates the boundary of the Pama-Nyungan language family (to the south) and non-Pama-Nyungan families (to the north). Thanks to Mark Harvey for the map, which also serves as the base map for Map 2.

(3) environmental ethnonyms:

- a. tree species
- b. rock/hill + dweller suffix
- c. a toponym

Jiyil or *Jiyil-jurrung* is another probable ethnonym based on a toponym *Jiyil* which is said to be the name of Wattie Creek. It is unusual



Map 2: Types of ethnonym in the Victoria River District. Refer to list of types in text for key. The dark line indicates the boundary of the PamaNyungan language family (to the south) and non-Pama-Nyungan families (to the north).

in this region for long creeks to have a single name, so it may be another case of extension of a toponym with originally narrower reference. But if so, that information is lost. *Jiyil* is a word for ‘spring’ in some languages of the region.

Nyiwanayawu is the name of an extinct group between western Ngarinyman and Miriwung. The *-wu* is probably a variant of *-wung* and thus belongs to group 1d. *Jiyilawung* is another neighbouring language. The root *jiyila* is probably a variant of the word *jiyil* ‘spring’ mentioned above. Tindale (1974) confused the *Jiyiljurrung* and the *Jiyilawung*, resulting in him misplacing several language groups on his map.

While there appears to be only one example of the type 3b, *Birlinarra*, there are in fact at least two others recorded, which are not

marked on the map. *Pirlingarna* ‘hill dweller’ is a synonym of *Kartangarurru*. The form *Bingongina* recorded by Tindale and others for a group in what is now considered to have been part of Mudburra territory is in fact *Pinka-ngarna* ‘river-people’. This may have been in a contrasting set of such environmental ethnonyms along with *Pirlingarna*. It is unclear what the ‘river’ or ‘creek’ referred to in this name is as the ethnonym has not been used for a long time.

The above environmental ethnonyms and the set 1a-c of shibbolethnonyms form what may be called “ethnonym paradigm zones” in which one term derives, or originally derived, its meaning in opposition to others in the set. This raises questions of what kind of process was involved in onymization if several terms in a paradigm are involved. This is discussed further in the conclusion to the paper.

The **ethnonym paradigm zones** do not coincide with linguistic groupings. 1a includes Wardaman and related languages and a Ngumpin language; 1c includes a Jarragan language and Ngumpin languages; 1d Jarragan languages and a Mirndi language. The shared suffixal morphology has its origin in one of the groupings: in Wardaman for 1a; in Jarragan for 1d.

In contrast, the directional exonyms (2) are found only in Ngumpin languages although their linguistic substance is drawn from Wardaman.

2. The types of ethnonym exemplified

2.1. Shibbolethnonyms

One pattern which seems to be more common in Australia than elsewhere is the use of a distinctive linguistic feature of the speech of the group to form the ethnonym, which is called a **shibbolethnonym** here (cf. Tindale 1974, 41-2). Change in the languages, however, can obscure or break the link between the item originally forming the core of the glossonym/ethnonym and the current reality of the language, rendering the name less “meaningful” (transparent) and more simply a label.

The shibboleths in Australia, when acting as part of a language or group name, are usually embedded in a context of morphology—that is they have a suffix (often meaning ‘having’ or the like, therefore ‘having [the meaning of the base]’), or are reduplications of the word, indicating that the group uses this word commonly or prominently

(especially to the ears of neighbours who do not use it). Some shibbolethonyms in North-East Arnhem Land do appear purely as the shibboleth word—in this region just a demonstrative ‘this’ or ‘that’ e.g. *Dhuwal*, *Djinba*.

The central import of such ethnonyms is ‘the people who say *x*’ where *x* is a shibboleth. When the shibboleth is no longer a current term in the language, the ethnonym is no longer a current description of the peculiarity of that group’s language. It can however be taken to mean ‘the people who used to say *x*’ for the purposes of historical linguistics. For instance, the Western Desert-speaking group that I worked with in the Pilbara in the late 1970s is named *Manjiljarra*. The suffix *-jarra* means ‘having’ and is used to form ethnonyms from distinctive words throughout a wide area of the Western Desert. The interpretation of this ethnonym is ‘the people who say *manjila* [for ‘get’]’. The problem is that in the 1970s the Manjiljarra did not say *manjila* for ‘get’ but *marra* instead. Both these forms are widely known in different dialects of the Western Desert—*manjila* is widely attested for dialects south of the Pilbara Manjiljarra. The most likely interpretation of these facts is that the Manjiljarra once used to say *manjila* but have since changed to saying *marra*. Consequently we can be sure that this group existed and bore this name at least since before the adoption of the new word for ‘get’. Dating this adoption is more difficult, but it seems to be before the lifetimes of the oldest people, and probably at least a generation before them, since they do not remember anyone using the older item within the group (although of course it may be used when people code-switch). The adoption may coincide with contact with a group who use(d) *marra*. This could provide some chronological evidence, as could the actual form of the verb root in the compound, but I will not pursue this here.

Another case of lexical archaism in ethnonyms involves two neighbouring languages in North Queensland: Wargamay and Girramay. Dixon (1976, 212) follows earlier writers in suggesting that the element *-may* is related to the negative *maya* which is found in both languages, but not in languages to the north. However this does not explain the initial parts of these words, *warga* and *girra* respectively. Further, the structure attributed to the words—a kind of compound with the normally independent particle *may(a)* at the end, representing the most important distinctive part of the word, semantically—is completely alien to the languages as they currently exist, and not

reconstructable at an earlier stage either. Much more likely is the explanation that the suffix *-may* is related to the verb *may* found in these languages ‘call someone/something by name’ (and on a broader scale to words for ‘language’ found widely in North Queensland and beyond). That is to say these words originally meant ‘the people who called x *warga*’ and ‘the people who called x *girra*’. Here I have assumed that *warga* and *girra* have the same meaning but are contrastive in form. This is a common pattern which I called above an **ethnonym paradigm zone**. A well-known example is the Western Desert pair *Pitjantjatjara* and *Yankunytjatjara* where the initial parts of the respective ethnonyms are the gerund forms of ‘to go’ which contrast in form in the two dialects, but similar patterns exist in other parts of the world such as the *langue d’oc* and *langue d’oil* in France (with contrasting words for ‘yes’).

In the *Pitjantjatjara* and *Yankunytjatjara* case the contrast is a currently important contrast; in the French case the relevant items have been replaced or changed although dialect differences reflecting this medieval distinction remain. In the case of *Wargamay* and *Girramay*, however, the words which form the basis of the contrasting ethnonyms are lost from the language.

In the Victoria River district and in a quite wide region to the north-east, there are a number of ethnonyms that form a paradigmatic set based on shibboleths which are now archaic and obscure. The common element in these names is the suffix *-man*, as in *Ngarinyman*, *Wardaman*, *Daguman*, *Yangman*, *Wagiman* and perhaps *Warlmanpa*. The *-man* group of languages are not all closely linguo-genetically related—at least three families of languages are involved. *-man* (with an allomorph *-ban* following non-nasal consonants) is a normal productive suffix in *Wardaman* and some related languages forming adjectives and nouns from preverbs, found not just in ethnonyms. Merlan (1994, 217) decomposes it into an alternating particle (preverb) suffix *-ma~-ba* and a nominal suffix *-n*. *X-man* very commonly means ‘someone/something which makes the noise x’ and words of this type are also found in languages of other families such as *Jaminjung*/*Ngaliwurru* (Western Mirndi) and *Ngarinyman*, *Gurindji* and *Malngin* (Pama-Nyungan, Ngumpin-Yapa subgroup), such as *ngakpan* ‘frog’ (because they make the noise *ngak*).

Most of these words are loanwords from *Wardaman* into the neighbouring languages to the south-west. Adaptation has occurred in

the word *jegban* borrowed into Ngarinyman and Gurindji as *jikpan*, since the vowel /e/ is lacking in the three-vowel systems of the Pama-Nyungan languages. Whether *-man* itself has been borrowed as a productive suffix is more doubtful. Mudburra has a few words with a variant of the suffix *-mana*, such as *ngungngungmana* ‘nailtail wallaby’. This indicates that these loanwords were adopted into Mudburra before or at the time that the sound change which added final *-a* to consonant final words took place. This is a distinctive sound change in Mudburra alone of the Ngumpin-Yapa languages.

The ethnonyms with the *-man* suffix referred, at the time of their coining, to ‘the people who make the noise, or say *x*’ where *x* became the first part of the ethnonym. The fact that it is, today, difficult to establish what the first part of these words meant is an indication that the ethnonyms are old and come from an era where these words were not only regularly used but so salient as to be markers of ethnic identity. The fact that all these words are archaic and dimly remembered, if at all, tends to show that their age as a group is significant.

There are some indications that the first part of the ethnonyms—the archaic shibboleths—in this area were interjections. If so the use of the suffix *-man* ‘making a noise’ is quite appropriate as interjections are perceived as more like noises than other words. I was told that at one time people used the word *ngari* in this area as an interjection. This is probably cognate with the interjection *ngarti* which is used in other Ngumpin-Yapa languages, and appears to be shibboleth-ethnonym in the language name *Ngarti*. The change from *rt* to *r* between vowels is a regular sound change in the Eastern Ngumpin branch of Ngumpin-Yapa, part of a set of lenition changes. An interjection *ngardiyi* ‘good job’ is found in Wardaman, and *ngartiny* is used in Gurindji as a conventional interjection responding to joking about certain classes of kin (McConvell 1982). The final *ny* here may relate to the *ny* in the ethnonym Ngarinyman, and to the *ly* in the ethnonym Ngartilypa (alternative to Ngarti). I have not investigated the roots of the other *-man* languages; possibly *Wardaman* is connected to the widespread interjection in the region *warda* ‘oh dear’ but there is no folk explanation of this ethnonym (F. Merlan, personal communication).

The closest neighbours to Ngarinyman are Ngaliwurru, a Mirndi (non-Pama-Nyungan) language, and Nungali or Nungaliwurru, in whose names *-wurru* is a suffix meaning ‘group of people’. The contrast

ngali /nungali is a paradigm reflecting the absence of noun class (gender) prefixes in Ngaliwurru and their presence in Nungali, where *nu-* is a neuter prefix. The root *ngali* is recorded as an interjection meaning ‘all right’ by Bolt, Hoddinott and Kofod in a text as well as in vocabulary (1971, 132, 168) but it is not currently known by people I interviewed in the 1980s, or mentioned in a recent work on Jaminjung/Ngaliwurru (Schultze-Berndt 2000), suggesting that it has disappeared recently with the oldest people.

2.2. Directional exonyms

There is another common type of ethnonym in this region (and in many places in Australia) based on directional terms. Along the northern fringe of the semi-desert and desert across the western part of Australia, terms meaning ‘people from the south’ predominate, for example *Yurlparija* in the eastern Pilbara, indicating Western Desert-speaking people. This can be fairly taken to imply that the most noticeable and salient groups appearing from elsewhere are those from the arid regions to the south. This pattern is clear not only in the recent historical period, but was probably a constant trend in prehistory also (see McConvell 2000 for models of this). Tindale (1974) discusses a number of cases like this and calls *Yurlparija* a “false” tribal name. While he does not discuss why he categorizes this term in this manner, it is probable that it is because it is not necessarily a self-identification by the group, but a lumping together of several groups or transitory bands by others under a generic directional term.

Issues have arisen over just this kind of term in recent native title cases (lawsuits about claims to land by Aboriginal people), where groups of people have been identified by names meaning ‘southerner’, ‘westerner’ and the like in early records, and where these groups are no longer recognized as having a distinct identity or having had any rights in land today. It may be that such identifications in the historical record refer to visitors, sub-groups or bands, not to a language group at all. On the other hand, as we shall see, some such directional terms develop into real ethnonyms by which groups identify themselves over time. In distinguishing between ‘false’ and true ethnonyms of this type, linguistic evidence can be crucial.

This transition between terms acting as descriptive labels such as ‘southerners’ and becoming true proper names of languages and/or

groups is an example of the process of onymization. The use of a descriptive term frequently to refer to a group or their language can shift towards a real change in the meaning of the item to refer to the group primarily, with less emphasis on the descriptive meaning of the word as originally used. Contexts of speech are usually needed to clarify which kind of meaning is active or dominant in different cases.

In the Victoria River District too, there are a number of ethnonyms which originally meant 'south' or 'people from the south' in northern languages. What is interesting about these is that they have gone so far beyond being "false" ethnonyms they are not recognized as having the 'southerner' meaning by those who use the terms today. They incorporate archaic elements, which implies that they have a certain age, no doubt greater than 200-300 years. They have also had their sounds adapted in the process of being borrowed from other languages with different phonologies. This provides pointers to their prehistory. Further, the variation in these names provides evidence of them having undergone differential change since borrowing, hence evidence of relative age of the terms, and potentially even of absolute age.

The terms in question are

- *Karranga*, the Mudburra term for a language group to their north-west,
- *Karrangpurru*, the Ngarinyman term for the same language group,
- *Kuurrinyji*, the term for a group around the Victoria River headwaters (= *Gurindji* in the literature), and
- *Kuwarrangu*, a north-eastern dialect of Mudburra

All these terms are derived from the Wardaman directional term *kor-rong* 'south'. A significant point is that Wardaman has five vowels, including /o/, whereas all the languages using these ethnonyms today have three vowels, not including /o/. There are several ways in which languages which do not have /o/ can nativize it when it arrives in a loanword. The above forms use most of these possibilities. A common strategy is to shift to the nearest vowel. Since /o/ is mid-way between /a/ and /u/, either /a/ or /u/ may be chosen. In Arnhem Land, where Yolngu (Pama-Nyungan) languages with three vowels abut on to five-vowel languages and borrow from them, similar divergences occur.

The terms *Karranga* and *Karrangpurru* have nativized /o/ to /a/. In the case of *Kuurrinyji* /o/ has shifted to /u/, although in this case it is long /u/ (/uu/). The long vowel may be selected because the quality of long /u/ is often lower, and therefore closer to /o/. The fact that the vowel has gone in two directions is strong evidence that the Wardaman term *korrong* is the source. In the case of *Kuwarrangu*, the first /o/ has been replaced by a combination of both /u/ and /a/ (/uwa/), a process similar to one familiar in language change, known as vowel-breaking. *Karrangpurru* comes directly from the Wardaman form *Korrongburri* including the ‘people’ suffix *-burri* with a change in the final vowel, possibly due to slight vowel-harmony effects in Ngarinyman (cf. Merlan 1994, 590). The additional *-a* on the Mudburra term *Karranga* (as compared to the original *korrong* or the Ngarinyman stem *karrang*) results from a general change mentioned earlier which has affected Mudburra alone of the languages of the region, including the ethnonym *Mudburra* itself (as discussed further below). I call this change A-AUGMENTATION. It has affected roots which were historically consonant-final. In this respect it is like other augmentation processes (adding *-pa* or *-u*) affecting other languages in the Ngumpin-Yapa subgroup like Warlpiri which outlaw final consonants.

The Gurindji term *Kuurrinyji* comes from a combination of the Wardaman term for ‘south’ with a suffix: **korrong-ji*. Here we have not only the vowel adaptation /o/ > /uu/ discussed above but assimilation of *ng* to a following *j* (*ngj* > *nyj*) and fronting of the preceding vowel /u/ > /i/ because of the following palatal. These changes must be ordered in this way since the change /u/ > /i/ would only plausibly happen after *ng* > *ny*. The fact that two such changes have occurred in sequence implies some greater age for this ethnonym than for those which are closer in form to the original. (For typographical convenience, orthographical symbols are used for consonant processes, here and below. – Editor.)

The suffix *-ji* is not a common Gurindji suffix. It is only found in a few words like *ngarin-ji* (= ‘meat *-ji*’, ‘good hunter’). It could be that it is an old suffix in the Ngumpin languages to which Gurindji belongs, since it occurs more frequently in Walmajarri (a western member of the group) *X-ji* meaning ‘a person associated with the activity X’. Or it could be from Wardaman or a closely related language. In fact Wardaman has the term *Gorrong-jila* meaning ‘southerners’ and some other terms with the suffix *-jila* meaning ‘originating from

x direction'. Merlan mentions that the Mudburra are a primary referent of this term as used by the Wardaman today (1994, 590). The loss of the syllable *-la* or its later addition in Wardaman still require explanation, but once again this difference from modern forms implies that the term is of an appreciable age.

The use of a term 'south' or 'southerner' from a northern language for several languages in the region has interesting implications for prehistory. It means, for one thing, that Wardaman and the other languages have been in a similar geographical position in relation to each other since these ethnonyms were borrowed. As we have seen above that must be long enough to allow for other sound changes to have occurred.

However, Gurindji (Kuurrinyji) is not immediately south of Wardaman in the historical period: it is separated from it by Karranga, Birlinarra and Jiyiljurrung (the latter, who dwelt around Wattie Creek, now absorbed by Gurindji). These groups all speak an Eastern Ngumpin Pama-Nyungan language, and use the root *kurla-* for 'south' which can be shown to be inherited from Proto-Ngumpin-Yapa **kurla-*, and the root can be shown to go back even further in Pama-Nyungan to a root **kura-*. The regular sound change of lateralization, *r > rl* (*r* being a retroflex glide and *rl* a retroflex lateral) is a shared innovation in Ngumpin-Yapa (McConvell 1996, McConvell and Laughren 2004). This implies quite strongly that:

- a) either at one period these intervening groups spoke Wardaman or a language like it and applied a similar term for 'southerner' (based on *korrong*) to their 'southerners', at that time the pre-Gurindji on the Victoria River headwaters; later language shift to the Pama-Nyungan (Ngumpin) languages could have taken place among the intervening groups,
- b) or the Gurindji language was originally immediately south of Wardaman, but later moved further south or the other languages moved in between, north of Gurindji. Perhaps Karranga people spoke Wardaman and later shifted to the kind of "mixed" Wardaman-Mudburra that neighbouring old people say they spoke in historical times.

If either of these scenarios is the case, then the hypothesis that the Mirndi languages formerly occupied the zone where the Eastern Ngumpin languages lie (McConvell 1996, 1997) would need to be

for ‘stone’ is also used to mean ‘hill’. This polysemy is found in Warlpiri and widely in Pama-Nyungan languages of the west, and was no doubt present in proto-Ngumpin-Yapa. A quite different polysemy is found in the non-Pama-Nyungan languages to the north of Pama-Nyungan in this region where ‘head’ is extended to mean ‘hill’. In Wardaman, the same stem is used but the two meanings fall into two different noun classes: *yi-bam* ‘head’; *wu-bam* ‘hill’. This polysemy is now found in the Eastern Ngumpin languages under the influence of the non-Pama-Nyungan languages to the north, so *ngarlaka* and *walu* both mean ‘head’ and ‘hill’ even though the second of these roots is an inherited Pama-Nyungan item which would have meant ‘head’ but not ‘hill’ in proto-Ngumpin-Yapa.

The isopolyseme—that is, the boundary between the ‘stone-hill’ and ‘head-hill’ polysemy zones—has shifted from being at one time coincident with the Pama-Nyungan/non-Pama-Nyungan boundary to running south of this boundary and between Eastern Ngumpin and Yapa. The old polysemy, however, is retained as an archaic feature in the ethnonym *Birlinarra* and place-names.

This evidence about the ethnonym *Birlinarra* means that it is old. The reference to the environment to which the language group belongs (hills/stone) also means that it has almost certainly been associated with the same area as long as this name has existed. At the time when this name began to be used, it is clear that the group spoke a Ngumpin-Yapa language with patterns distinctive of a time when non-Pama-Nyungan (and Wardaman in particular) influence on the language was not strong. This would tend to indicate that the Wardaman influence and borrowing was through the contact of neighbours (adstratum) and occurred later than the time when *Birlinarra* speakers settled there. If the *Birlinarra* were originally Wardaman speakers who shifted language altogether as a group, one would expect the substratum influences to kick in at that time and would not expect such patterns as the typical Pama-Nyungan ‘stone/hill’ polysemy discussed above to be retained, as they have been, for some time after the language shift occurred.

2.3. Environmental ethnonyms

Ethnonyms based on distinctive environmental characteristics of the area where a group lives are common in many regions of Australia.

In a large part of eastern Queensland local group names, for instance, are formed with environmental roots with the suffix *-barra* which is a suffix meaning ‘associated with’ in at least some languages. The environmental roots in these ethnonyms are either words for typical flora of the area, words for typical soil or landscape of the area or major site names (toponyms) in the area. These are generally not ethnonyms at the level of language groups or tribes.

In the Victoria River District this pattern has already been identified in the previous section in the ethnonym *Pirlinarra* which originally meant ‘hill-dwellers’. There are two other terms, not currently in use, of a similar kind, mentioned in a previous section also, *Pirli-ngarna* and *Pinka-ngarna* ‘hill dweller’ and ‘river dweller’ respectively.

Naming after dominant vegetation in the Victoria River region is not widespread but does occur with the ethnonym *Mudburra*. This was originally the name of a tree which is found in the original heartland of the Mudburra in the north-eastern Tanami Desert. It is somewhat archaic in that only a few old people know this now. In Ngarinyman, another Eastern Ngumpin language, unaffected by A-AUGMENTATION, this tree was named by the cognate term *Mutpurr* but once again this is barely known today. However there is a site name *Mutpurrarni* in Ngarinyman country which is based on this tree-name. This place-name has the common structure of Ngarinyman and Gurindji place-names of a certain age:

Mutpurr	-a	-rni
Tree species	LOCATIVE	STILL/ONLY
‘place where Mutpurr was’		

This place-name structure is discussed further in McConvell (2000b) where it is shown that it is archaic and provides the basis for a linguistic stratigraphy of place-names. Palaeobotany and palaeoecology could also play a role in dating this place-name and perhaps along with it the ethnonym *Mudburra*. Both these terms must date from a time when the plant was a significant part of the environment in certain areas.

Another ethnonym based on flora is the term *Kayilarriny*, which is said to be a secondary name for the group *Karrangpurru* (the primary name being a directional exonym), whose language is no longer spoken. *Kayilarriny* is the name of the food known as ‘bush onion’, which was particularly abundant in this area.

There is one name for the eastern Ngarinyman speakers, *Wurlayi*, which is said to be a name of a particular site, but extended to a larger area around that site and to the group of people and their language. This type of process is further discussed in the next section.

Ethnonyms and toponyms interact with each other in intimate ways in processes of change. In recent history, Indigenous place names in Australia have shifted reference from one place to another, often due to the intervention of non-Indigenous people and their manipulations. However, as argued in McConvell (2003), this is not a peculiar outcome of internal colonialism alone. A fundamental and arguably universal process is involved: a type of metonymy which we may call **spatial synecdoche**—the extension of a name of a specific place or area to a wider zone around it.

Spatial synecdoche is not a matter of shifting between referents of terms alone but is mediated—perhaps necessarily—through associations of groups of people with a stretch of land. Thus in the above case of *Wurlayi* in eastern Ngarinyman country, it would have been a group of people closely associated with the site *Wurlayi* who ranged over a wider area, and this circumstance led to the extension of the name to the area and the people.

In McConvell (2003), cases are discussed in which the notional “centre” of such an extended toponym changed, causing the original toponym to shift or become ambiguous in its narrow denotation. While this is more obvious when the process is carried out at least partially in the European domain, the Aboriginal domain is not immune to such processes.

4. Summary and comparison of the ethnonym types identified

Hypotheses arising from the survey of processes of onymization of ethnonyms in Aboriginal Australia may be usefully compared to some others arising from elsewhere in the world. Gruenthal, in a study of Finnic ethnonyms (1997), suggests that ethnic classifiers incorporating topographical terms like ‘people of the land/ hill/shore/island’ were used in multiethnic territories where language boundaries are not very sharp and the speakers have always had close contact with other ethnic groups or spoke their languages. Such **environmental ethnonyms** were “antonymic” in a loose sense—they work in paired oppositions, e.g. ‘shore’ vs. ‘island’ Many other ethnonyms arrived in the region

already as proper nouns and were borrowed, e.g. from Baltic and Germanic, so could probably be described as exonyms. Many such proper nouns originally referred to a smaller area, i.e. only a part of their present-day denotation, and these types of ethnonyms sometimes closely resemble place-names: (Finnish) *Inkeri*, *Karjala*, *Suomi*, *Vatja*, *Viro*. At least one of the exonyms was based on a directional term familiar from our discussion of Australia:

Estonian *Ugandi* (> (Latvian) *Igaunija*) may originate from the Old Russian common noun **ug* ‘south, southern land, southern wind’ (~ (Russian) *jug*, *juga* ‘dry; fog; hot’, *juzhnyj* (*uzhnyj*) ‘southern, south’ ~ (Ukrainian) *jug* ~ (Old Church Slavonic) *jugŭ*, (Bulgarian) *jug* ‘south, southern wind’, etc.). Originally, the name may have been used as a contrastive antonym, e.g. (a) from a particular geographical standpoint: (the people of) the South (Estonia) *in contrast with* (the people of) the North (Estonia) or, even (b) (the people of the South (Estonia) *in contrast with* the people using this ethnonym and their habitat.

(Gruenthal 1997, 11)

Regarding antonymic systems, these are the same as or similar to the **ethnonym paradigm zones** identified in Australia, and in particular the environmental type, where ‘hill people’ and ‘river people’, for instance, are paired ethnonyms. Plant species and actual toponyms may play a role in these too. The dual ‘antonymic’ type seems to be simply a subtype of sets which may involve larger numbers of parallel contrasting terms.

For the **directional exonym** or ‘southerner’ type of ethnonym, which is also very common in Australia, as we have seen, there is a suggestion that this could be antonymic also, contrasting with ‘northerner’ in the sense of a person from the north of the relevant part of the country. However the second suggestion, that the ‘southerner’ label reflects the standpoint of the coiners of the ethnonym, is closer to the picture painted in the description of Australian systems. The ethnonyms of this type in the Victoria River District are all built on a root from a northern non-Pama-Nyungan language: the people referred to are ‘south’ of ‘us’, the original naming group, rather than ‘south’ versus ‘north’ in a separate area. Such ethnonyms are not therefore normally, or perhaps not commonly, part of an ethnonym paradigm zone: we might look in vain for a ‘northerner’ term to pair with the ‘southerner’.

They are exonyms for a particular salient group on one side of the naming group, which may be then adopted by the named group.

Other linguistic evidence suggests that the eastern Ngumpin (Pama-Nyungan) languages moved north in recent millennia, encroaching on former territory of non-Pama-Nyungan groups. We might suggest a further hypothesis about directional exonyms, to be tested around Australia and elsewhere: one of the reasons for “salience” which produces such directional exonyms and perhaps leads to their diffusion is the fact that the group named is noticeable because it is “moving in” from a particular direction, rather than just keeping to themselves in that direction.

Adoption of exonyms by a group particularly when the exonyms are deictics, pragmatic “shifters” whose meaning depends on standpoint, requires explanation also. People would not tend to call themselves ‘southerners’ in a foreign language from the north, under normal circumstances. Arguably, though, they might tend to do so if the following circumstances obtained:

- (a) they are already living on or moving into the country of the north-erners; or
- (b) they are no longer aware of the meaning of the exonym—especially if they are no longer in touch with or understanding the language of the original northern name-bestowers.

Both kinds of situations seem to exist in Australia for directional exonyms. For the terms derived from ‘south’ in the Victoria River District, it is probable that both (a) and (b) occurred, as successive phases. As argued in section 5. above, the Wardaman language became separated from at least some of the groups with the ‘southerner’ term derived from Wardaman, and this, combined with the different forms of the terms due to adaptive and internal sound change, has made the ethnonyms opaque to the users, rendering easier their total acceptance as endonyms.

Turning now to the category of **shibbolethnonyms**, these seem to be relatively rare outside Australia, and where they occur (as in the *langue d’oc* and *langue d’oil* examples mentioned earlier) denote dialects of a single language. This is also true of some widely known regions which display this pattern of glossonymy/ethnonymy in Australia such as the Western Desert dialects (with a variety of shibboleths including demonstratives, and the verbs ‘go’ and ‘get’) and the Yolngu languages of north-east Arnhem Land (mainly demonstratives). In the

Victoria River District, however, this is mainly not the case: the languages taking part in each shibbolethnonym paradigm zone are often not even of the same language family, let alone being related dialects. The one exception is *Wanyjirra*, a name based on a distinctive form of ‘where’ which contrasts with other forms like *Wanyjika* in the same Gurindji/Jaru dialect chain; this is a defective ‘paradigm’ since currently no other language is named in this way.

One other shibbolethnonym paradigm set appears to be based on an exclamation which may also be used adjectivally: **ngarti(yi) ~ngali* ‘(it’s a) good (thing that X)’. It is uncertain whether these two roots are in fact connected etymologically, but they function similarly:

ngarti in *Ngarti* (a language to the south outside the Victoria River District)
ngari(ny) in *Ngarinyman* (with the *-man* ‘typical sound’ etc. suffix) and the regular lenition sound change *rt > r*
ngali in *Ngaliwurru* (‘ngali’-people)
nu-ngali in *Nungali(-wurru)*

The name *Wardaman* is partially connected to this paradigm, but the meaning of the explanation *warta!* is ‘oh dear’, almost the opposite to *ngarti*; further ethnonyms like *Takuman*, *Wakiman*, etc. need to be investigated to shed light on this.

Another set in the west which remains fairly transparent are the terms derived from ‘talk, language’ *Jaru*, *Malngin* (from the stem of *ma-* ‘say, talk’) and *Kija*; an earlier term used in the same area *Marnu*, is also the gerund of *ma-* ‘say, talk’ in Ngumpin languages.

The languages of the north-west section of the region, whether of the Jarragan or Mirndi family, have names with the suffix *-pung~-wung*, but the stems are less clear in import:

Miri-wung
Kajirra-peng
 **JaminjV-wung > Jaminjung*
Nyiwana-wu(ng)

It is possible to use the stem *miri* alone as in ‘talk *miri*’. Possibly the stems in this set once formed a paradigm and had the same or similar reference. Evidence for this seems to have been lost, indicating perhaps a greater time-depth for these language-names than for others in the region.

The **ethnonym paradigm zones** are mainly in the north of the Victoria River District and their origin states may be correctly characterised as ‘mutual naming’ networks (Labov 1972; Davies 2005). However the fact that suffixes are drawn from a language other than that of the named group in the case of peripheral members of zones probably indicates that these were originally exonyms. The ‘southerner’ directional ethnonyms, on the other hand, forming a band of exonyms south of their origin language, Wardaman, are not part of a paradigm zone and were not in all probability part of a ‘mutual naming’ network in origin. It is possible that there was a relationship between the Wardaman ‘interjection + *man*’ style of naming, applied to close and familiar neighbours, and the directional exonymic style, applied originally to less familiar groups, possibly threatening intruders.

5. Conclusions

This paper has shown how Indigenous ethnonyms in Australia, and in particular in the Victoria River District of the Northern Territory, are of three main types:

- **shibbolethnonyms**: built from a distinctive word used by a group (sometimes but not necessarily a phonological variant of the same root);
- **directional exonyms**: built from cardinal direction terms and suffixes, subsequently adopted as endonyms;
- **environmental ethnonyms**, with a root denoting an environmental zone (dominant plant type, etc.) or a major place-name and a suffix.

As in other parts of the world, the processes of coining the terms have become obscured by loss of terms from the general vocabulary, and by sound- and meaning-change, but they can often be recovered from current evidence available in the languages.

This paper has also attempted to make a contribution to accounting for the historical pragmatics of these processes. Probably more emphasis is given to shibbolethnonyms here than elsewhere in the world, in particular groups of such names forming paradigms between languages which are not necessarily closely related genetically. These, however, have fairly readily lost their transparency with the passage of time in the Victoria River District, and their roots no longer function as meaningful elements.

This contrasts with other regions of dialect diversity in a single language or closely related group such as the Western Desert Language and the Yolngu languages of North-East Arnhem Land. Here various elements like demonstratives which form shibbolethonyms are readily understood as being based on such items. While this does not seem to prevent such items from changing form and meaning and bringing about mismatch with the onomastic system, it may well place constraints on such processes.

In contrast to this kind of formation of **ethnonym paradigm zones**, it has been proposed that directional ethnonyms may be associated with a unidirectional (non-mutual) naming system based on social distance and perhaps encroachment from the direction used in the name. As the named group becomes established in the new location, and the directional meaning of the term becomes opaque, it is adopted as an endonym.

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Summary: Shibbolethnonyms, ex-exonyms and eco-ethnonyms in Aboriginal Australia: the pragmatics of onymization and archaism

There are some 300 language names in Australia which generally also name groups of people, and many more names for dialect or clan groups, running into the thousands. Quite a number of these names are opaque: they have no meaning other than that they are ethnonyms today, and none seems discoverable. Others have quite transparent meanings while still others can yield a meaning when subject to etymological analysis, which I call semi-transparent. Within the transparent and semi-transparent categories, three main types will be defined and analysed in this paper: *shibbolethnonyms*, *directional exonyms* and *environmental ethnonyms*.

The purpose of the paper is to establish the existence of these three types of ethnonym, in order to introduce the new concept of an *ethnonymic paradigm*, exploring how such paradigms come into existence, develop and wither, with detailed exemplification from the situation in Australia.

Résumé: Shibbolethnonymes, anciens exonymes et ethnonymes environnementaux chez les aborigènes d’Australie: pragmatique de l’onymisation et archaïsme

Il ya quelque 300 noms de langues en Australie qui sont généralement aussi le nom de groupes de personnes, et beaucoup plus de noms pour les groupes de dialectes ou de clans, des milliers. Bon nombre de ces noms sont opaques: ils n’ont pas d’autre signification que celle, unique, d’ethnonymes aujourd’hui, et aucun ne semble explicable. D’autres ont une signification tout à fait transparente; d’autres encore peuvent produire du sens lorsqu’ils sont soumis à l’analyse étymologique: je les appelle semi-transparents. Dans les catégories transparents et semi-transparents, trois principaux types seront définis et analysés dans le présent article: *shibbolethnonymes*, *anciens exonymes* et *ethnonymes environnementaux*.

Le but de cet article est d’établir l’existence de ces trois types d’ethnonyme, afin d’introduire le nouveau concept d’un *paradigme ethnonymique*, explorer comment ces paradigmes naissent, se développent et disparaissent, avec des exemples détaillés tirés d’Australie.

Zusammenfassung: Shibbolethnonyme, Ex-Exonyme und Öko-Ethnonyme im Australien der Aborigines: die Pragmatik von Onymisierung und Archaismus

Es gibt ungefähr 300 Sprachnamen in Australien, die gleichzeitig Gruppen bezeichnen; die Namen für Dialekt- und Clangruppen gehen in die Tausenden. Eine ganze Reihe dieser Namen ist ungeklärt: sie haben keine Bedeutung außer dass sie heute Ethnonyme sind, weitere Bedeutungen scheinen sich nicht feststellen zu lassen. Andere Namen besitzen recht transparente Bedeutungen, und bei wieder anderen können Bedeutungen festgestellt werden, wenn sie

einer etymologischen Analyse unterzogen werden—diese nenne ich semi-transparent. Innerhalb der transparenten und semi-transparenten Kategorien werden in diesem Paper drei Haupt-Typen definiert und analysiert werden: *Shibbolethnonyme*, *direkt ausgerichtete Exonyme* und *Ethnonyme der Umwelt*.

Ziel des Papers ist es, die Existenz dieser drei Typen von Ethnonymen zu begründen, um das Konzept eines *ethnonymischen Paradigmas* vorzustellen und zu untersuchen, wie solche Paradigmen entstehen, sich entwickeln und wieder verschwinden. Dieses soll anhand detaillierter Beispiele der Situation in Australien geschehen.