

Indexing personal names

Centrepiece to The Indexer, April 2007

C1 Australian Aboriginal names
C5 Turkish names
C9 Arabic names

*Geraldine Triffitt
Meral Alakus
Heather Hedden*

Australian Aboriginal names

Geraldine Triffitt

When describing Aboriginal Australians, one must remember that Australia before colonization was made up of many different peoples with different languages, social organizations and lifestyles. In order to understand the problems that can face the indexer in one aspect of the culture, personal names, it is necessary to explain something of the social organization and in particular the kin terms.

In the past most books did not identify individual Aboriginal people, but pictured 'an old bushman from the Pitjantjatjara tribe, Musgrave Ranges', 'a tribal nomad, Musgrave Ranges', 'Ernabella schoolboy' (Duguid, 1963) and so on. Now, however, artists' names occur in catalogues, and works written by Aboriginal authors are in libraries whose catalogues conform to global standards. Genealogical indexes such as the Aboriginal Biographical Index at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Canberra are important family history reference sources for people dispersed through government policy or economic necessity.

This paper will discuss aspects of personal names that indexers may face and which can cause difficulties. These are traditional personal names, nicknames, classificatory names or 'skin' names, taboo names, European names, and changes of names.

The indexer, of course, will index under whatever name the author has used. Linking different forms of the person's name through the reference structure may be more difficult. One cannot assume that every author who writes about Aboriginal Australians is culturally aware or mindful of cultural sensitivities.

Traditional personal or secret names

Traditionally, Aboriginal people had many names, with strict rules as to which could be used for address or reference. Stanner (1937) recognized 11 different forms of address and personal reference among Aboriginal people, including personal and secret names, kinship terms, names portraying social or age status, terms of membership of social divisions

or 'skin' names, circumlocutory and metaphorical terms, signs, expletives and nicknames.

My examples are mostly from the desert region of Central Australia, from my experiences and reading about the Warlpiri people. The Warlpiri live in communities north-west of Alice Springs. They are a creative people who include authors, internationally known artists and filmmakers. They have been the subject of many books written by non-Aboriginal people. Ancestral beings, ceremonies, the ownership and maintenance of the land, language and social organization all remain important in their lives, although there are differences in degree across the places of residence and the generations.

Names with religious and ceremonial significance, which had been given by relatives, were traditionally considered to be possessions of the owner and were not used for reference or address. Customs varied from tribe to tribe as to whether names were unique (Tiwi) or shared (Warlpiri).

Names were not given at birth, but a child who survived until two years old was given a unique name by a grandparent or significant family member. This usually had some association with the spirit world or place of conception, or with the child's clan or totem, and was a sacred name; it could also, however, be the name of a deceased relative. Other names were given at other milestones in people's lives – initiation, puberty, marriage or having children, or at ceremonial gatherings.

These names are unlikely to appear in print and will therefore not require indexing. However, adherence to name customs is changing. Françoise Dussart found differences among the Warlpiri in the usage of personal names. In Lajamanu and Yuendumu, Warlpiri personal names were widely used as terms of address and reference in the late 1980s whereas in 1962 Meggitt had observed that they were not used. In Willowra, a smaller Warlpiri settlement, personal names were used as terms of reference but not of address. The use of Aboriginal names is declining among the younger generation, who are given European names at birth.

Historically some personal names were used. At the time of settlement at Port Jackson, local people from the Eora clans Arabanoo, Bennelong, Pemulwuy and Colbee

attempted to establish cordial relations between the British and the Eora people. These names appear in historical records and descriptions of early settlement at Port Jackson.

Nicknames

What are often taken to be traditional personal names may in fact be nicknames. Nicknames are frequently given to describe idiosyncrasies, physical defects, events in the past or particular skills. A. P. Elkin wrote 'I have recorded a whole genealogy with the correct references to the spirit-home, local country, moiety and totems of over twenty individuals and with what purported to be their personal names, only to realize that in every case I had been given a nickname' (Elkin 1974: 154–5).

Nicknames given by Europeans, particularly pastoralists or police, were often derogatory descriptions of physical appearance or character attributes. Indigenous leaders or fighters against white settlement were often given nicknames; for example the Bunuba hero named Jandamarra was nicknamed Pigeon by the whites, and both names have been used in books written about him. Jackey Jackey was the nickname of Galmarra, who accompanied the explorer Edmund Kennedy to Cape York, and Jacky was an alias of Munangabum, leader of the Djadjawurung. Nicknames excused Europeans from trying to remember Aboriginal names.

Where both names are used in a text, preference should be given to the Aboriginal name with a reference from the English name. If only the English name is given, and the Aboriginal name is known, the latter should be a reference.

'Skin' names

'Skin' names or class names simplify the traditional kin terms based on generation, rights and obligations. Everyone, even outsiders, must fit into the social organization; people must have their places, and their responsibilities and relationships with others, clearly established. The social structure varies from nation to nation; some, such as Pitjantjatjarra, have four sections and others, like Warlpiri, eight subsections. 'Skin' names are likely to be found in Central Australia, Northern Territory and North-West Western Australia but not in the other states where traditional cultural practices have been lost.

Subsections are a relatively new phenomena, occurring since white settlement. McConvell (1985) believed that they originated from an area north of the lower Victoria River, Northern Territory and arose from the amalgamation of the terms in two different section systems.

The first night that I arrived at Yuendumu, where I was undertaking a Warlpiri language course, my fellow students and I were given our 'skin' names by three old ladies of the Yuendumu Grog Patrol, who nightly patrolled the community looking for evidence of prohibited alcohol. My name was Napaljarri. Immediately I was placed in the Warlpiri social system with its eight subsections, each corresponding to a particular name. The male name starts with J, the

female with N, and the names are: J/Napaljarri, J/Nangala, J/Nungarrayi, J/Nakamarra, Ju/Napurrula, J/Nampijimpa, J/Napangardi and J/Napanangka. As I was Napaljarri, I knew my mother and her sisters were Nangala, my father and his brothers Jungarrayi, my children Jupurrula and Napurrula, that I could marry Jakamarra from a different moiety but not Japangardi from my own moiety.

These are not surnames but classificatory names. The first question asked in a new community is: 'What is your "skin" name?' People are referred to or addressed by their 'skin' name. They parallel European surnames and are usually used in conjunction with European first names and often with European surnames.

The indexing problem

The problem confronting indexers is what to use as the heading. There is a convention that the 'skin' name is the heading for Aboriginal names, and the surname is the heading for non-Aboriginal people with 'skin' names. Thus in the National Library of Australia catalogue you find:

Napaljarri, Peggy Rockman [a Warlpiri author]
Laughren, Mary Napaljarri [a non-Aboriginal author].

However, the convention is not always applied consistently. In the same catalogue you will find both:

Ross Napaljarri, Kaye
Napaljarri, Kay Ross.

She was a Warlpiri linguist and teacher, now deceased. (Because she has died her name may also be taboo, which will be discussed later.)

This shows other problems besides the positioning of surname and 'skin' name: inconsistent spelling and the addition of grammatical inflection. The second example, taken from the statement of responsibility of a Warlpiri text, shows that Kaye was the author (or subject of the transitive verb) by using the ergative ending *-rli*. The unmarked form Napaljarri should be used as the name for cataloguing and indexing purposes. This presupposes that cataloguers have a sophisticated knowledge of Warlpiri grammar.

The encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia (Horton, 1994), on the other hand, has indexed personal Aboriginal names by first name:

Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri
Donald Graham Jupurrula
Emily Kame Kngwarraye

The *Aboriginal biographical index* has a variety of entries for Clifford Possum:

Possum, Clifford
Possum Tjapaltjarri, Clifford, ca.1932–2002
Tjapaltjarri, Clifford Possum

The entry for Kaye Ross Napaljarri is Napaljarri, Kay

Within the Aboriginal community many people share the same 'skin' name, and it is easier to identify the individual by using the surname as a heading. However, in the global situation of a book index or library catalogue, the reverse is true.

Following the convention of a 'skin' name for an Aboriginal person and the surname for the non-Aboriginal person is all very well if you know from the context in the book whether the person is Aboriginal or not. Some books use different formats for Aboriginal names. Hence the *Warlpiri dreamings and histories Yimikirli* (published in the United States) has all contributors with the 'skin' name at the end. On the other hand, names mentioned in *Kuruwarri Yuendumu doors* by the Warlukurlangu artists (1987) in Yuendumu have the 'skin' name as middle name and the surname at the end: Kay Napaljarri Ross, Paddy Japaljarri Stewart and so on.

The index to Wally Caruana's *Aboriginal art* has the following entries:

Possum Tjapaltjarri, Clifford
Tolson Tjupurrula, Turkey
Kngwarreye, Emily Kame (Kngwarreye is an Arandic 'skin' name)
Nelson, Michael Jagamarra

The National Gallery of Australia Library has catalogue entries for:

Tjapaltjarri, Clifford Possum
Nelson, Michael Jagamara.
Kngwarreye, Emily Kame

The *National Gallery of Australia annual report for 2005–2006* shows further inconsistencies:

Phillipus Tjakamarra, Long Jack
Tjungurrayi, George Ward
Ward Tjungurrayi, Fred

From the examples above, it can be seen that, for the indexer, the heading for someone with a 'skin' name and European surname is an unresolved problem. The best advice is to decide whether to follow the convention of differentiating between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal holders of 'skin' names or to use the 'skin' name as the heading throughout, or conversely use surnames as the heading. Consistency is the key.

Name taboos

In the traditional Warlpiri society there were many situations when personal names were taboo. Secret names should never be used in the presence of the owners, nor should the owners utter their names in the company of others. Close male age-mates who had been circumcised at the same time and place had prohibitions on the use of their names. In some cases the name of a man's wife could not be mentioned to him.

When someone died it was customary for the names not to be spoken until the funerary rites were completed, which could take months or years. Others with the same or a similar name could not use this name either. This could apply also to place names. The refusal to utter the names of dead relatives could remove the same word – for an animal, natural object or tree – from the group's vocabulary forever. How is this problem overcome? Synonyms may be used, words may be compounded or existing words given extended meanings. A corresponding term from an avoidance language may be used, or a term may be borrowed from a neighbouring language. Warlpiri, having a sophisticated sign language, may change the hand sign or more usually they use the special term *Kunmanjayi*, meaning 'no-name'. A similar term occurs in other languages (Nash and Simpson, 1981).

I have had personal experience of *Kunmanjayi* being used for place names. When I arrived in Yuendumu I was asked whether I had come from *Kunmanjayi* Piringi (Alice Springs). A young girl named Alice had just died in the desert after a vehicle had broken down, and her funerary rights were being observed.

Taboos as a result of a death have a temporal element. A name given as *Kunmanjayi* at the time of writing may be restored later. What happens when a death occurs in the period between the writing and the indexing of the book? Books on Aboriginal leaders, artists or sportspeople are particularly problematic because the names are so well known. In such cases, as well as discussion between author and indexer, there would need to be advice from the Aboriginal community. There is usually a literature production centre, producing books in the language of the community, which would also have to consider the problem.

It is now a convention to issue a warning to Aboriginal people at the beginning of a work that the book, film or TV production contains references to deceased persons. In the past it was thought that Aboriginal people would not have access to such works, and it was unnecessary to consider cultural sensibilities.

European names

Administrative procedures such as elections, census taking, social services or school registration all required a name to identify the individual, and for this reason European names were used. Nowadays the general custom is to give a child a European name at birth.

In 1955 the then Director of Welfare, H. C. Giese, wrote an Administrative Circular Memorandum about Aboriginal names. The Northern Territory faced difficulties when individual personal names had to be recorded. European names were widely used, but Giese warned that people who moved about might be given a different European name at each centre they worked in. He described the various forms of personal and group names, and how surnames were derived. They could be taken from the name of a white person or family with which the person was closely associated, they could be derived from place names, or they could come from the name of the local group, totem, subsection or language

group. Giese warned that bestowing surnames could lead to conflict with the social organization of the group, and stressed that the choice of surname must be discussed and approved by the group concerned.

Changing from European to Aboriginal names

In recent years changes in attitude to Aboriginal culture and in government policies, together with the rise of an Aboriginal professional and middle class, have encouraged Aboriginal people to express their identity by incorporating Aboriginal personal names or taking up clan, totem or place names. This was a common occurrence in the 1990s when many well-known authors or leaders changed their names.

Hence Kath Walker changed her name to Oodgeroo Noonuccal (named after her tribe on Stradbroke Island, Noonucal). Her catalogue entry is Oodgeroo Noonuccal, 1920–1993. Colin Johnson became Mudrooroo, 1938–, after he had changed to Mudrooroo Narogin (place name) or Mudrooroo Nyoongah (Western Australian tribe). The former chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), Lowitja O'Donoghue, took back her Aboriginal name in place of the name Lois which the missionaries had given her. (A large number of Aboriginal children were raised in missions and given European names by missionaries.)

For the indexer, the heading is the chosen Aboriginal name with a reference from the former name unless the author has used the European name throughout. Then the reverse is true.

Summary

When indexing Australian Aboriginal names, the priority is to follow usual indexing rules and give the name in the form that the author uses, with the heading an inversion of surname and first names. There is a difficulty when both 'skin' names and European surnames have equal status. Then a decision should be made as to the style used and this should be consistently applied.

Where a deceased person has been given a synonym or term meaning 'no-name', then there needs to be discussion with both the author and the person's community as to how to refer to him or her.

Name changes and nicknames require a reference structure, but care should be taken about referring to traditional personal names. This is another area where the community should be consulted.

Gone are the days when Aboriginal people were considered unlikely to read what was written about them. Now there is great interest in family history, documents are searched for evidence in native title claims, and libraries are visited for thesis or essay material. Libraries and archives have protocols for accessing and copying Aboriginal works. Copyright and ethics are important issues in research by non-Aboriginal researchers. Authors, editors, indexers, designers and publishers now need to have a much greater understanding of and sensitivity toward indigenous cultures.

References

- Aboriginal biographical index. Canberra : Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. Online and manuscript.
- Caruana, Wally (1993) *Aboriginal art*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Duguid, Charles (1963). *No dying race*. Adelaide: Rigby.
- Dussart, Françoise-F. (1988) Notes on Warlpiri women's personal names. *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, **86**(1), 53–60.
- Elkin, A. P. (1974). *The Australian Aborigines*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson.
- Giese, H. C. (1955) Aboriginal names. Northern Territory Administration. *Circular Memorandum* no. 41.
- Horton, David (ed.) (1994) *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press for Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.
- McConvell, Patrick (1985) Time perspective in Aboriginal Australian culture: two approaches to the origin of subsections. *Aboriginal History* **9**(1), 53–80.
- Meggitt, M. J. (1962) *Desert people: a study of the Walbiri Aborigines of Central Australia*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson.
- Nash, David and Simpson, Jane (1981) 'No-name' in Central Australia, in C. S. Masek, R. A. Hendrick and M. F. Miller (eds), *Papers for the parasession on language and behavior, Chicago Linguistic Society*. Chicago, Ill.: Chicago Linguistic Society.
- Ryan, J. S. (1995). Australian Aboriginal personal and place names, in E. Eichler et al (eds), *Namenforschung: ein internationale Handbuch zur Onomastik*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Stanner, W. E. H. (1937). Aboriginal modes of address and reference in the north-west of the Northern Territory. *Oceania* **7**(3), 300–15.
- Warlukurlangu Artists (1987) *Kuruwarri: Yuendumu doors*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.

Geraldine Triffitt is a librarian with linguistic qualifications. She worked at the National Library of Australia 1972–1984 and was appointed the Bibliographer (Linguistics) at the library of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies in 1986. Since her retirement in 1997 she has been a contract cataloguer and indexer. She was co-compiler of OZBIB: a linguistic bibliography of Aboriginal Australia and the Torres Strait Islands (Pacific Linguistics, 1999) and compiled the Supplement 1999-2006 (Mulini Press, 2006). She established the ACT Region Branch of the then Australian Society of Indexers and was Branch President for several years. Email: gtriffitt@netspeed.com.au