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EMU AND BROLGA, A KAMILAROI MYTH

Peter Austin and Norman B. Tindale

INTRODUCTION¹

The Kamilaroi (or Kamilaraay)² are an Aboriginal people who traditionally occupied a large tract of country in north-central New South Wales (Tindale 1974, Austin, Williams and Wurm 1980). The Kamilaroi language was spoken in several dialect forms and is closely related to Yuwaaliyaay (the Euahlayi of Parker 1896, 1978) and Yuwaalaraay to the west (see Austin et al 1980, Williams 1980). It is more distantly linked to Wiradjuri and Ngiyampaa of central New South Wales (Austin et al 1980, Donaldson 1980 – see Map 1).

Information about the Kamilaroi language has been collected sporadically for more than a century, beginning with early recordings in the 1850s. Highlights of these materials are Ridley (1875) and Mathews (1903). More recently, Tindale collected vocabulary items and kinship terms in 1938 (Tindale 1938); and Wurm worked with the last fluent speaker, Peter Lang, in 1955 (Wurm 1955). Dixon and Austin were able to check vocabulary between 1971 and 1973 (see Dixon (1984:217-8)). A description of the language utilising all available materials is being developed (Austin and Wurm (in preparation)).

To date, the only text materials available for Kamilaroi are Bible translations compiled by Rev. William Ridley during his mission among the people of the Namoi region (Ridley 1856, 1875 – see also Greenway 1911). No mythological texts have been published. We present here a Kamilaroi traditional story as recorded by Tindale in 1938. The text concerns Emu and Brolga and is part of a widespread Australian tradition.

Peter Austin studied at the Australian National University, completing a thesis on the Diyari language of northern South Australia in 1978 (published by Cambridge University Press in 1981). He has carried out linguistic fieldwork in Northern New South Wales (on Kamilaraay), in northern South Australia (Diyari and Ngamini) and the north-west of Western Australia (Kanyara and Mantharta language groups). His current research focus is the Western Australia languages for which he is preparing dictionaries, grammars and text collections. He is presently senior lecturer and Head of the Division of Linguistics, La Trobe University.

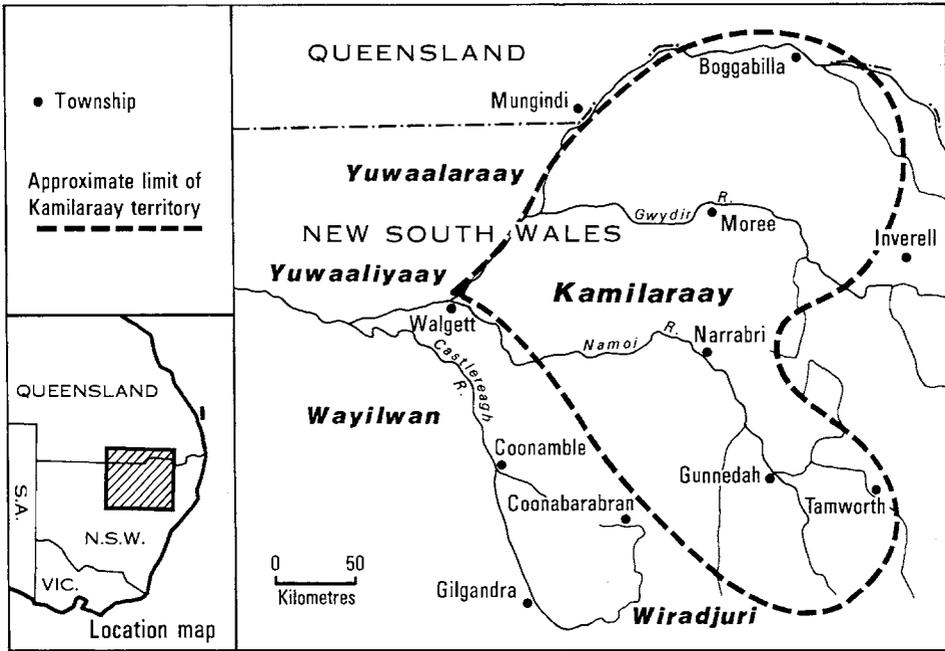
Norman B. Tindale studied linguistics at the University of Adelaide in a special course under Professor J. Fitzherbert, following earlier instruction in orthography under Baldwin Spencer in Melbourne. His data gathering commenced with the Ingura people of Groote Eylandt in the Northern Territory in 1921-22 and has included gatherings of texts within every State of the Commonwealth, including one Tasmanian text. Many of his parallel tribal vocabulary lists are currently being studied.

Tindale wishes to indicate that he is not linked with the devising of the new system of orthography used in this paper. His preference still is International Phonetics for text material and Geo. II for geographical terms.

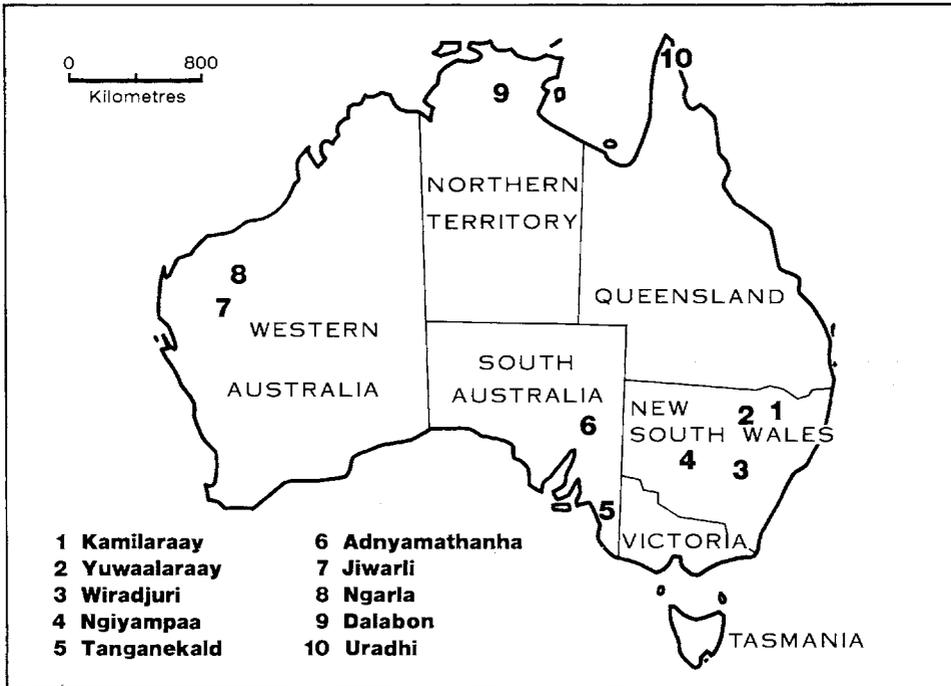
1 Peter Austin wishes to thank Burt Draper, Hannah Duncan, Ron McIntosh, Leila Orcher and Arthur Pitt for sharing their knowledge of Kamilaroi with him. Thanks are also due to R.M.W. Dixon and S.A. Wurm for access to their unpublished fieldnotes. This paper has benefitted from a number of helpful suggestions from Tamsin Donaldson.

2 The name Kamilaroi is spelled Kamilaraay in the transcription adopted by Austin (see Footnote 4 and Austin and Wurm (in preparation)).

EMU AND BROLGA



Map 1: Kamilaroi (Kamilaraay) and neighbouring languages.



Map 2: Distribution of Emu and Brolga/Bustard myths.

THE TEXT.

Tindale carried out anthropological and linguistic research on Kamilaroi during fieldwork conducted as leader of the Harvard-Adelaide Universities Anthropological Expedition of 1938-39. On 18 June 1938 he began work with Harry Doolan³ and two other old Aboriginal men on Kamilaroi social organisation and language. In his journal (page 125), he recorded that on Tuesday 21 June he 'obtained the first part of the legend of the Brolga and the emu in text'. The following day, Wednesday 22 June, he notes that he:

obtained the rest of the legend of the Brolga and the emu in text from Harry Doolan, assisted by Stanford. The men were at first at difficulties with their own language because it has not been used by them for some years, except occasionally in conversation. After yesterday they thought out the details carefully and gave me a very useful text in the Kamilaroi of the Namoi River. The story resembles closely the emu and brolga story of the Tanganekald of the Coorong, S.A., in the first half; the sequel is different. I could not get any hints of localization of the legend. It is a camp fire story told by men to their children.

Tindale transcribed the story (journal pp.127-137) in the International Phonetic Alphabet (which had long been standard for writings of the Adelaide School) and obtained from Harry Doolan a word by word translation into English, and for the first nineteen lines plus lines 42 and 43 a running translation of each sentence.

In 1979, when on a visit with Tindale at his home in Palo Alto, California, Austin learned of the text and obtained a copy of it. Because of its uniqueness and historical importance, we decided to publish it in full in the present collection.

In the following, each sentence of the legend is presented in five lines. The first two are the transcription and word by word gloss, exactly as recorded by Tindale, except that the sentences are numbered and capitals at the beginning of sentences are not used (thus obviating the need to print upper case η). The third line is a respelling of the Kamilaroi words into a phonemic orthography devised by Austin,⁴ plus a division of the words into their likely morphemes, indicated by hyphens. The fourth line presents morpheme-by-morpheme glosses;⁵ this glossing is based upon analyses of all the available Kamilaroi material plus William's (1980) grammar of the closely related Yuwaalaraay language. Because no native speaker of Kamilaroi is presently available, the grammatical analysis and glossing must be seen as tentative and in some cases speculative. Where no interpretation could be suggested a ? is employed. The fifth line is the free English translation of each sentence; for the first nineteen sentences (and 42, 43) this translation was supplied by Harry Doolan. Austin has prepared a free translation for the remainder (sentences 20 to 41, 44-48) based on the grammatical analysis, and this is included in brackets. Harry Doolan provided some additional comments throughout the telling of the story and these are given in angle brackets.

³ A photograph of Harry Doolan may be found in Tindale (1976:18).

⁴ The spelling is intended as a practical orthography and follows usual Australianist conventions: *th* and *nh* represent lamino-dental stop and nasal respectively; *ng* is the velar nasal; *ny* is a lamino-palatal nasal; *rr* is a flap, and *r* a retroflexed continuant; *R* indicates that it is unclear whether *rr* or *r* is intended. Vowel length is indicated by doubling. Where a word occurs nowhere else in the Kamilaroi materials, it is preceded by *; spelling of these words is particularly doubtful.

⁵ Abbreviations used in the glosses are: ablat - ablative case; cont - continuous; dat - dative case; dl - dual; erg - ergative case; fut - future tense; habit - habitual; imper - imperative mood; loc - locative case; nfut - non-future tense; pres - present tense; prog - progressive; purp - purposive; rel - relative clause; sense - sensory evidence; tr vb - transitive verbalizer.

EMU AND BROLGA

'dinewan 'pular 'puralka

- | | | | | | | |
|----|---------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. | <i>'dinewan</i>
emu (female) | <i>'pular</i>
with | <i>puralka</i>
brolga (female) | <i>jana</i>
goes | <i>ɲilani</i>
gathering | <i>wuɕuka:ko.</i>
'wuɕuka |
| | <i>thinawan</i>
emu | <i>pulaarr</i>
two | <i>purralka</i>
brolga | <i>yana-ngila-nhi</i>
go-cont-nfut | | <i>wuthukaa-ku.</i>
root type-dat |

'The emu went with the brolga to gather wuthukaa roots.'

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|--|
| 2. | <i>'ɲeiruɲa</i>
They went over | <i>'mo:ɲi'lani</i>
digging up it |
| | <i>ngaarringa</i>
over there | <i>mawu-ngila-nhi</i>
dig-cont-nfut |

'They spent their time digging.'

- | | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| 3. | <i>bularu</i>
both | <i>'purula:ko</i>
many | <i>'kaingil</i>
children (possessed) |
| | <i>pulaarr-u</i>
two-dat | <i>purrulaa-ku</i>
many-dat | <i>kaaynkil</i>
child |

'Both of them had many children.'

- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| 4. | <i>'ma:lu</i>
one of them (i.e. the emu) | <i>winaɲani</i>
thought of it (the plan to trick the brolga) |
| | <i>maal-u</i>
one-erg | <i>winanga-nhi</i>
think-nfut |

- | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>jale</i>
as | <i>'ɲurago</i>
towards camp | <i>jana wondai</i>
went |
| <i>yalu</i>
again | <i>ngurra-ku</i>
camp-dat | <i>yana-waa-ndaay</i>
go-prog-rel |

'One of them thought of a trick (to play on the other) as she walked with him to camp.'

- | | | | | |
|----|---|---|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 5. | <i>jalu:</i>
ɲamil a 'rindai
"in the morning" | <i>'ɲa:ruma</i>
over there | <i>'puralka</i>
the brolga | <i>'ɲari</i>
was |
| | <i>yalu</i>
again | <i>ngami-ɲgari-ndaay</i>
see-morning-rel | <i>ngaarrima</i>
over there | <i>purralka</i>
brolga |
| | | | | <i>ngarri-y</i>
sit-nfut |

'Next morning she saw the brolga over the way.'

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 6. | <i>'puralka</i>
brolga | <i>kokoe</i>
asked: |
| | <i>purralka</i>
brolga | <i>kaka-y</i>
call out-nfut |

'The brolga asked.'

21. 'ŋa:, 'ki:r, boma'labekair."
 ah yes I killed them
 ngaa kiirr puma-laa-?
 ah yes kill-prog-?
 ['Ah yes I killed them.']
22. najil bula:r ijil ka: 'wa:na."
 now two only I fetch along
 nhayil pulaarr yiyal kaa-waa-nha
 now two only bring-prog-pres
 ['Now I have only two to bring along.']
23. "a! 'keiru:mai."
 ah you did it
 aa giirru-ma-ay
 ah truly-tr vb-nfut
 ['Ah you did it.']
24. "'maruwa'ðai 'jene jene je'le
 out here (like this) they walk
 marra-bathaay yana-yana-yla-y
 there-like go-go-prog-fut
 ['There they are walking along.']
25. 'maraa'ðai 'turali 'kaingal kul 'gar
 out here all my youngsters come
 marra-bathaay *thuRa-li kaaynkil-kalгаа
 there-like ?-fut child-plural
 ['There the children come.']
26. jalei gol! maruwa'ðai ŋaija 'puru'la
 "this way"! out here my whole lot of
 *yalaykul marra-bathaay ngaya purrulaa
 this way there-like I many
 'kaingal 'kar ke'reigul
 children I am leading
 kaaynkil kaa-?
 child bring-?
 ['This way over there I am bringing my many children.']

EMU AND BROLGA

27. *'ŋima* *'balaŋa* *janani* *pu'ralka*
 "away" went the brolga
**ngima-palanga* *yana-nhi* *purralka*
 away-? go-nfut brolga

['The brolga went away.']

28. *'ŋeir* *ta'la* *ŋari* *wailani.*
 long distance away remained "sat down" a long time
ngiirr *thala* *ngarri-yngayi-la-nhi*
 there somewhere sit-habit-prog-past

['She stayed away for some time.']

< The brolga is very sad at being tricked into killing her children. She remains away "twelve months" and returns. She sees the emu walking about gathering food as before. >

29. *'ŋa!* *ta'ta* *wanda* *ŋareia* *weilani.*
 ah where far away you remained a long time
ngaa *thala* *wantha* *ngarri-yngayi-la-nhi*
 ah somewhere distant sit-habit-prog-past

['Oh you stayed away a long time.']

30. *o!* *ŋiliminja* *jenewinje* *kamil* *winaŋa ŋaileigu*
 from here went off away so as not be thinking
**ngiiliminya* *yana-waa-nhi* *kamil* *winanga-yngayi-la-yku*
 from here go-prog-past not think-habit-prog-purp

['I went from here so as not to be thinking about them.']

< The brolga woman is feeding with her mouth, her arms are hidden behind her back. She is acting a part to trick the emu. >

31. *'ŋominja* *taldanei*
 why are you eating (as you are)
ngaa *minya* *tha-lta-nha*
 ah what eat-prog-pres

['Why are you eating so?']

32. *a!* *'borei!* *a* *werinja* *boŋon* *ginji a*
 oh sister it happened arms of me
aa **puuRi* ? *pungun* *kinyi*
 ah elder sister arm be-press

'karal *weinji.*"
 we cut off away

karra-layla-nyi
 cut-before-past

['Ah sister I cut off my arms.']

33. "*minjako?*"
 what for
minya-ku
 what-dat
 ['What for?']
34. "*jalai waðai maru taldaigo*"
 this way just like this I feed
yilaay-pathaay maru tha-lta-yku
 thus-like good eat-prog-purp
 ['It is good to eat like this.']
35. "*boŋon dali ba:ga*"
 arms feed not
pungun tha-li ?
 arm eat-fut
 ['I'll eat without using my arms.']
36. "*ŋa jei!*"
 "I see"
ngaayay
 all right
 ['All right.']
37. *'ŋindu baðai boŋon gara 'ŋilia*
 you arms cut it would be good
ngintu-pathaay pungun karra-ngili-ya
 you-like arm cut-cont-imper
 ['You cut off your arms like this.']
38. *'minjako 'wara*"
 what for do that
minya-ku ?
 what-dat
 ['What for?']
39. *o! maro waðai taldainda jele 'ŋeia*
 oh good like this eating will be like myself
maru-pathaay tha-lta-ntaay yila ngaya
 good-like eat-prog-rel like I
 ['Oh it would be good to eat like me.']

40. "ŋa! iralabaʒai jana wuindai
 ah! when like this I go back
 ngaa yilaala-pathaay yana-wuwi-ntaay
 ah this-like go-back-rel

['Ah I'll go back like this.']

41. 'ki:r! daijahumi koli:r ŋai 'weira ko:li
 yes I will ask husband mine if say
 kiirr thayaaluma-y kuliirr ngay ? kuwaa-li
 yes ask-fut spouse I genitive speak-fut

kei 'riar
 "he might"
 kiirru-?
 truly

['I'll ask my husband if he will say I can.']

42. "ŋa keir. karaŋeileigo tara woiŋindai
 oh yes cutting them off
 ngaa kiirr karra-ngili-yku ? -wuwi-ngintaay
 ah yes cut-cont-purp ? -back-rel

'jera:la
 bye & bye
 yilaalu
 later

'Oh, yes we will cut them off tonight.'

43. kulibarga jereganda
 three suns
 kulipaa-ka *yaRakan-ta
 three-loc sun-loc

'Three days later.'

44. "ja:ma 'gara ŋai"
 how cutting
 yaama-karra-ngay
 question-sense-

['How's things?']

45. 'ki:r boŋon 'karaŋilinji
 yes arms we have cut off
 kiirr pungun karra-ngili-nyi
 yes arm cut-cont-nfut

['Yes I cut off my arms.']

46. 'ɾa 'jei! ɾai waðai baragelei
 Good like this I'll fly
 ngaayay ngaya-pathaay parra-kila-y
 all right I-like fly-prog-fut

['All right I'll fly like this.']

47. 'dawunda jenelei
 on the ground you will go
 thawun-ta yana-la-y
 ground-loc go-prog-fut

['You will go on the ground.']

48. 'ɾaija bala 'parai poɾon baijai
 I myself flying arms will fly
 ngaya-pala parra-y pungun-paraay
 I-only fly-fut arm-having

['Only I will fly with my wings.']

NOTES ON THE TEXT

Tindale (1938:137) has the following notes from the storytellers:

formerly both the emu and brolga had large families; the old emu took two with her and hid the others in a patch of bush. The emu tricked the brolga (and) that is why the brolga only lays two eggs today.

The brolga when he has his wings folded does not show them very much.

After she had had her revenge, she danced and jigged with happiness — the brolgas still do this."

A story almost identical to this Kamilaroi myth is presented in Parker (1978:17-20) as 'Dinewan the Emu and Goomblegubbon and Bustard'. A Yuwaalaraay version of the text is given on pp.187-9. Williams (1980:131) presents the story of emu and brolga as told to her in Yuwaalaraay by Arthur Dodd in 1978; it is a very brief text which corresponds to the first half of the one told by Harry Doolan.⁶

⁶ Robinson (1966:196-7) contains a text in English entitled Dinnawun and burrelga, related to him by Maria Boney, 'Yoalarai' (i.e. Yuwaalaraay) tribe.

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A mythological story similar to this is also known to descendants of the Wiradjuri who formerly occupied the country to the south of the Kamilaroi. Len ('Bushy') Kirby of Murrin Bridge has published a story entitled 'Emu and Native Companion' (Kirby 1982) which describes the trick played by brolga on emu, though no mention is made of the emu's hiding her children. Tamsin Donaldson (personal communication) recorded a text in English entitled 'The native companion and the emu' from Isobel Edwards of Darlington Point on 17th July 1980. Mrs Edward's text is almost identical to the Kamilaroi story except that the respective tricks of brolga and emu are presented in the opposite order to that presented in the text above.

The themes of these New South Wales texts recur, with some variations, across the continent. Reed (1978:114-7) presents an Emu and Brolga story from the Murray River region and Massola (1971:43) has one from south-eastern Australia (no more detailed localisation is given). In Massola's version the Emu burns (rather than cuts) her wings off and then tricks Brolga into killing (and eating) her children. The order of events is thus reversed from the Kamilaroi text, but the same as in the story collected by Donaldson. Tindale is preparing for publication a Tanganekald (South East of South Australia) legend similar to the Kamilaroi text. In one version of the Tanganekald story there is a contest between the two birds, involving an attempt at revenge by the brolga who causes a marine flood over a large area of land favoured by the emu. In South and Western Australia we find texts dealing with emu and bustard (wild turkey), rather than brolga. Schebeck (personal communication) recorded an Adnyamathanha (Flinders Ranges) myth in which emu and bustard appear as sisters (see also Mountford 1976). Events similar to those found in the Kamilaroi text occur. Austin has also recorded a traditional text of the Jiwari (Gascoyne region, Western Australia) involving emu and bustard (see Butler and Austin 1985). In this story the two birds test who can fly best and who can run best. Emu's legs stick out when he⁷ flies but he is able to run fast, so he is advised by bustard to cut off his wings. There is no trickery involved in the Jiwari text and no mention of emu tricking the other bird into killing his children.⁸ A Cape York peninsula version of the story in the Yadhaykenu dialect of Uradhi told by Willie Somerset is presented by Crowley (1983:391-7). Again, emu and bustard are involved and similarities to the Kamilaroi text are striking, for example, the first line (in translation) reads '[There were] two of them going for scrub yams.' The bustard tricks the emu into burning her wings off and in return the emu tricks bustard into killing her children (cf. the reversal of themes in the texts recorded by Donaldson from a person of Wiradjuri descent and by Massola). Fire is again mentioned in a story entitled 'Nurrun the emu and manor the plain turkey' presented in English by Bozic (1972:57-9). Interestingly, the emu and bustard are described as a married couple; unfortunately there is no location given for the text but it is possible that 'Nurrun' is intended to represent Wiradjuri *ngurruny* 'emu'.

Evidently, the Kamilaroi text is one version of a widespread mythological complex involving several motifs:

- 7 There is no indication in Jiwari of the sex of the protagonists. The masculine English pronoun is intended in its unmarked sense. A running competition story is also found in Merritt (1983:14-15) where a myth involving emu and curlew (not brolga or bustard) is outlined. Merritt is of Wiradjuri descent.
- 8 Donaldson has brought to our attention Pritchard (1929[1975]) which contains a partial emu and bustard text in pidgin English from the Ngarla area (northern Pilbara).

- (a) emu and brolga (or bustard)
- (b) competition (and in some places trickery)
- (c) mutilation of emu by cutting or by fire
- (d) brolga (or bustard) murdering her children.

These themes and texts containing them, are as widely distributed across the Australian continent, if not more so, as the well-known eaglehawk and crow myths (see Map 2).⁹

The following are specific comments (mainly linguistic) on the Kamilaroi text:

1. line 1 – *pulaarr* is the usual word for ‘two’. Its occurrence between the two nouns here seems to indicate a use as a conjunction. *wuthukaa* is a type of edible root which grows in the black soil plains. Williams (1980:191) translates it as ‘tar vine’.
2. line 3 – the occurrence of dative *-ku* on *purrulaa* does not appear to be correct because the sense is ‘of the two [there were] many children’.
3. line 8 – preceding lines 8, 10, 12 in the margin Tindale wrote ‘emu’. Preceding lines 9, 11, 15 in the margin is ‘brolga’.
4. line 10 – the root of the verb in this sentence is not to be found in other Kamilaroi materials. The use of the relative clause form here suggests it is offered as a reason ‘because I cannot (continue to) feed them’ (see also lines 12, 39, 40).
5. line 12 – the element *-thila-* cannot be analysed here. The verb *wuu-* is in the *rr* class and derived forms normally involve this consonant, rather than *th*. It is possible that a continuous form *-rrila-* was intended.
6. line 14 – this example shows a bound subject marker affixed to the negative particle. The medial *l* is morphophonemically deleted.
7. line 15 – the vowel length of the oblique stem formant is not certain, but compare Ngiyampaa *-kiiN-* (Donaldson (1980:123)).
8. line 17 – in the margin Tindale wrote ‘brolga to husband’.
9. line 18 – the word *maneir* is unclear; normally ‘why?’ is based upon *minya* ‘what’.
10. line 19 – in the margin Tindale wrote ‘old man brolga’.
11. line 20 – in the margin Tindale wrote ‘emu’. The analysis of this sentence is somewhat tentative but it is likely that it is a greeting consisting of *yaama*, the question introducer, plus *-karra*, a clitic indicating a statement based upon sensory evidence. A parallel construction is found in Ngiyampaa (see Donaldson, 1986: 139). Identification of the final syllable is unclear. There it is written as *-ngal* and in line 44 as *-ngay*. Austin recorded a Kamilaraay greeting *yaamangay*, which seems also to contain *-ngay*.
12. line 21 – in this margin Tindale wrote ‘brolga’. The analysis of *bakeir* is unclear. It may contain *kiirr* ‘truly’.
13. line 23 – in the margin Tindale wrote ‘emu’.
14. line 25 – the verb in this sentence is not found in other Kamilaroi materials.
15. line 27 – a suffix *-palanga* is also found in Williams’ text (1980:131). She was unable to gloss it.
16. line 29 – in the margin preceding lines 29, 31, 33, 36, 38, 40 and 45 is ‘emu’. Preceding lines 30, 32, 34, 37, 39, 44 and 46 is ‘brolga’.
17. line 37 – under *baɰai* Tindale has *’waɰai*, like this, ‘better go, had better’.
18. line 42 – in the margin Tindale wrote ‘emu husband’.
19. line 43 – the usual Kamilaroi term for ‘sun’ is *yaraay*.

⁹ See Maddock 1978 for a comparison of myths of this type (which he calls ‘Southern’) and Dalabon texts featuring the emu.

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