

This item is Chapter 30 of

Language, land & song:
Studies in honour of Luise Hercus

Editors: Peter K. Austin, Harold Koch & Jane Simpson

ISBN 978-0-728-60406-3

<http://www.elpublishing.org/book/language-land-and-song>

Mustering up a song: an Anmatyerr cattle truck song

Myfany Turpin, Jennifer Green and Jason Gibson

Cite this item:

Myfany Turpin, Jennifer Green and Jason Gibson (2016). Mustering up a song: an Anmatyerr cattle truck song. In *Language, land & song: Studies in honour of Luise Hercus*, edited by Peter K. Austin, Harold Koch & Jane Simpson. London: EL Publishing. pp. 450-467

Link to this item:

<http://www.elpublishing.org/PID/2030>

This electronic version first published: March 2017

© 2016 Myfany Turpin, Jennifer Green and Jason Gibson

EL Publishing

Open access, peer-reviewed electronic and print journals, multimedia, and monographs on documentation and support of endangered languages, including theory and practice of language documentation, language description, sociolinguistics, language policy, and language revitalisation.

For more EL Publishing items, see <http://www.elpublishing.org>

30

Mustering up a song: an Anmatyerr cattle truck song

Myfany Turpin¹, Jennifer Green² and Jason Gibson³
University of Sydney¹, University of Melbourne² and Monash University³

1. Introduction

Long before bush balladeers such as Slim Dusty gave voice to a particular Australian rural experience, Aboriginal people from across Northern and Central Australia were using song to reflect on the rapid changes that came to their worlds in late the 19th and early 20th centuries. They captured major events and details of everyday life in their compositions, incorporating new themes into existing traditional song and dance styles. There were songs about the first and second world wars, about aeroplanes (Graham 1994), trains (Dixon & Koch 1996; Hercus 1994: 91-101) and buffaloes (Marett, Barwick, & Ford 2013). Other songs, many of which were recorded by Luise Hercus, commented on the new work regimes on pastoral properties. One example is the ‘Manager’ song, known widely across northern Queensland (Alpher & Keefe 2002). Even the less spectacular aspects of the newcomers’ lives did not escape the attention of these early bards who sang about station homesteads, ‘olden-time’ lamps and girls washing doors (Hercus & Koch 1999; Hercus 1994). In south-eastern Australia too Hercus recorded similar songs chronicling intercultural histories, like the Wemba Wemba song ‘Shearing on Tulla Station’ (1969: 95). Indigenous music provided ‘a site for creative and sustaining cultural responses’ to contact history (Donaldson 1995: 143) and it continues to be an important part of the intercultural dynamics of Australia (Ottosson 2012: 182).

In this paper we explore the multi-faceted dimensions of innovation and tradition in songs by examining the thematic content and musical structure of a song from the Northern Territory that relates to station life in the 1940s and 1950s. It was sung by a small group of closely related Eastern Anmatyerr women at Wilora (Stirling) community and recorded by Jenny

Green in 1983.¹ Referred to by one singer as the ‘Cattle Truck Song’, the song records events and individuals at a particular time when Aboriginal participation in the cattle industry was extremely significant.² The song is not regarded as being in any of the established women’s performance genres of the region, such as *awely* or *ilpenty* (Turpin 2011) and is simply referred to by Anmatyerr people with their word for ‘singing’ or the English word ‘song’. To our knowledge, no other Arandic song like this has been previously noted in the literature.

We demonstrate how the Cattle Truck Song is undoubtedly in the traditional Central Australian musical style (Ellis 1985; Ellis & Barwick 1987; Barwick 1989) but is innovative in its themes and performance contexts. The song is also noteworthy in the fact that, unlike other Arandic songs, including children’s songs (Green & Turpin 2014), it refers to events that bear no relationship to the *Altyerr* ‘Creation Time’ (Green 2012). The lyrics of the Cattle Truck Song are also easily identifiable compared to those found in songs of perhaps greater antiquity (Strehlow 1971; Turpin 2007). This is a feature it shares with recently composed traditional Arandic songs (Turpin 2015). Moreover, the Cattle Truck Song is not subject to a poetic convention known as ‘Syllable transfer’ (Hale 1984: 261), which is found in many Anmatyerr and other Arandic songs, and which we discuss below.

We begin our discussion by summarising the occurrence of similarly themed songs across Australia and by outlining the historical context of the Cattle Truck Song. We then discuss how the translation of songs is not a straightforward process, before moving into a detailed analysis of each verse.

1.1 Aboriginal contact songs

Australian Aboriginal songs about settler society are numerous and widely distributed across Australia. Assistant Protector James Dredge, writing of Aboriginal people living close to Melbourne in the mid-1800s, noted ‘a species of historical song’ that concerned ‘the first appearance of the horse, bullock, wheelbarrow [cart], dog, sheep, flour’ and, of course, European people (quoted in Standfield 2015). In the 1960s Hercus made recordings of ‘contact songs’ in the Wemba Wemba language of New South Wales and Victoria (Hercus 1969: 99-106). Characterised as ‘transitional songs’ that were apparently not influenced by ‘European musical forms’, they often made reference to shearing, collecting dingo scalps, the legal system and missions. In the 1970s Carl von Brandenstein also documented songs in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, which referred to new forms of transport, including aeroplanes, camels, cars, trucks and trains (von Brandenstein & Thomas 1974). Other ‘old-style songs’ featured ‘mixed-language texts’. For example a ‘two-up’ gambling song composed in the 1930s employed English terms for new concepts or activities that often had specialized vocabulary (Donaldson 1995: 147).

¹ AIATSIS archive number Green_JG02 020315.

² The phrase ‘cattle truck’ may refer to a truck supporting a stock camp as opposed to a truck for carting cattle.

In the desert country of north-eastern South Australia, Luise Hercus's work on songs that feature interaction with settler society deserves particular attention (Hercus 1994; Hercus & Koch 1996, 1999). The presence of newcomers led to a 'new burst of activity in oral traditions' (Hercus & Koch 1996: 133). According to Hercus these songs were inspired by dramatic or humorous events and would be passed on, forming 'the beginning of a new tradition, different in style from the olden times chants' (Hercus 1994: 91). Some songs dealt with personal events – the first sighting of a rabbit, an injured Aboriginal stockman lying in a ditch, or a jealous wife (Hercus & Koch 1996).

Songs about living and working on cattle stations and about livestock were also commonplace. As early as the late 19th century W.E. Roth noted the performance in Western Queensland of cattle-themed 'corroboree' dances that were 'staged with full histrionic powers and accoutrements' (Roth 1897: 117). Baldwin Spencer likewise observed a 'buffalo corroboree' performed by the Tiwi of Melville Island involving 'a performer pawing the ground, and rushing wildly around with extended arms' representing horns (Trigger 2008). In Western Australia references to cattle have also been documented in both Junba songs from the Kimberleys³ and Tabi songs and dances from the Pilbara (von Brandenstein & Thomas 1974: 1, 14). In South Australia Catherine Ellis recorded an Antekerrenye 'Children's Bullock Corroboree' (Ellis & Ellis 1970) and a 'Bullock Droving Song from Tennant Creek'.⁴ In the Daly River region a 'public-dance-song' called 'Puliki' (Buffalo) was often performed for tourists (Marett et al 2013). Further east, both Yanyuwa and Garrwa songs make reference to life on the pastoral frontier (Bradley & Yanyuwa families 2016).

1.2 Anmatyerr participation in the cattle industry

Anmatyerr people began working in the cattle industry soon after the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line in the 1870s. By the late 1880s substantial camps of Aborigines were attached to almost every cattle station and telegraph station in Central Australia and by the 1890s Aboriginal labour at these sites was commonplace (Hartwig 1965: 447, 449). For example Spencer and Gillen's principal Anmatyerr consultant in 1901, Jack Arlpalywerrng Pwerrrerl, was employed by the local pastoralist on what was then known as the 'Stirling Creek' run.⁵ Most stations in the region began to expand between 1910 and 1930 and more Anmatyerr people came to work on or reside in close proximity to the station homesteads. As the settler population was very small, 'isolated and scattered' concessions were often made to accommodate Aboriginal people living on the new cattle stations (Scherer 1993: 19; Strehlow 1971: xxxiii).

Figure 1, drawn in 1929 by an Anmatyerr stockman who was working at Beetaloo Station, far away from his homeland, is a rare visual record of

³ Sally Treloyn, pers. comm. to M. Turpin, 2015.

⁴ See AIATSIS archive number Ellis_CA07 001838.

⁵ See annotation to item XP14578 in Spencer's photographic collection at Museum Victoria.

Anmatyerr participation in the industry.⁶ At these stock camps people from diverse locations would often share songs (Gibson 2015: 179; Harney 1947: 38, 79). Aboriginal participation in this industry began to decline in Central Australia in the 1960s and 1970s.



Figure 1: 'Mustering on Beetaloo and O.T. Stations N.A. [Northern Australia]' by an Anmatyerr stockman, 1929 (detail). Courtesy of the South Australian Museum.

As was the case on many Northern Territory cattle stations, Aboriginal women also worked at Stirling Station in the stock camp as cooks and in other roles including mustering and tailing cattle (McGrath 1987: 50). Some women also formed relationships with non-Indigenous men in a role Ted Egan refers to in his song titled 'The Drover's Boy'. At Stirling Station an Aboriginal woman called Maud from Dorisvale Station lived with owner Stan Brown for many years (Ross & Whitebeach 2007).⁷ The main singer of the Cattle Truck Song, Hilda Price (Figure 2), was also a stockwoman at Stirling Station during Stan Brown's time. She describes how she graduated from larking around bareback on horses to being taught the ways of mustering:

When I was a bit older the boss gave me two saddle horses – my old boss – and I used to go around on them... We mustered the cattle barefooted – us mad kids didn't have any boots... My father would go back and get new trousers and shirt, boots and leggings, and a whip. [The boss said,] 'Well now we can teach your daughter about mustering so that she can go with you.' 'All right,' replied my father. So then I travelled round with my father. I was a stockman – a little girl, poor thing. (HP at Stirling, recorded by J. Green 15/5/83, translation from Anmatyerr)

⁶ This illustration was found amongst Norman Tindale's papers. The artist may have been Jimmy Campbell Pengart from the Angenty estate, to the north west of Ti Tree. He travelled to the Elliott and Beetaloo areas as a stockman (Don Campbell Peltharr, pers. comm. to J. Gibson 28/02/2006).

⁷ Stan Brown was the owner of Stirling Station in the 1940s and 1950s (Ross & Whitebeach 2007: 131).



Figure 2: Hilda 'Cookie' Price at Wilora community, 2002. Photo J. Green.

1.3 Translating the songs: some methodological issues

Despite the ease with which Aboriginal people were able to understand the lyrics of the Cattle Truck Song, it should be noted that songs, in general, can be translated in many different ways. The words and meanings in the minds of the original composers and/or singers may have different connotations for contemporary listeners. The tendency for songs to have multiple interpretations and significances is a well-known feature of many Aboriginal songs (Keogh 1996).

While the Cattle Truck Song was recorded in 1983, interpretations of the song texts by researchers were not undertaken until 2013-2015, when the recording was played to four groups of people, from the communities of Stirling, Ti Tree, Utopia and Alcoota, all of whom knew the original Anmatyerr singers. All recalled hearing the song many years ago and were able to identify the words in the song with remarkable ease and consistency. Alternative interpretations of the words equating to a single portion of text were offered for only a few lines.⁸ The Kaytetye and Anmatyerr consultants from Stirling identified actual historical figures and events in the songs, whilst those from other communities interpreted the meanings of the songs more generally. Thus, even in a song that does not relate to local totemic geographies, the meanings of the Cattle Truck Song are similarly intensely local (cf. Marett 2005:xv).

2. The Cattle Truck song

The original composers of the Cattle Truck Song are not known, however, as the verses refer to local historical events and are sung in everyday Anmatyerr,

⁸ This phenomenon is known as 'mondegreens' (Turpin & Stebbins 2010: 8) and it is especially common in oral cultures.

it is likely that the creators were Anmatyerr people residing in the vicinity of Stirling Station in the 1940s or 50s. Some of the context for the song has been provided by one of the singers, Hilda Price:

Lowie, Mavis and I [Hilda Price] sang the cattle truck [song]. This is how we performed this song. Our olden-time whitefeller bosses, they used to muster the cattle, here at Stirling. This is a song from Stirling Station. The people that worked for Old Stan Brown sang it.⁹

It is likely that people and events at Stirling Station and in its environs during Stan Brown’s time were the inspiration and subject matter of the song. Anmatyerr people recall that the Cattle Truck Song was performed by women for their own entertainment, and sometimes at the request of non-Aboriginal people in the region, including the Army personnel who were in the area in the early 1940s.¹⁰ According to others, songs of this type, with their occasional amorous innuendoes, were directed at non-Aboriginal stockmen, fencing contractors, and army employees who were encountered on cattle stations, on road maintenance camps or at places like the Bullocky Soak ration depot (which operated between 1945 and 1947).¹¹ Before exploring the content of the song lyrics we first show how the Cattle Truck Song is musically in the Central Australian style.

2.1 Form

The structure of the Cattle Truck Song resembles other Central Australian traditional songs. The performance consists of eight verses; the majority were sung more than once before the singers moved on to another verse. A verse in all its repetitions is called a small song and each of the smaller units of song is a song item (Barwick 1989: 13). Figure 3 shows that the first small song consists of three items of Verse 1, the second small song consists of two items of Verse 2, etc. As in many traditional Arandic performance genres, the number of song items in a small song varies, and the same verse can recur in different small songs in the one performance, such as Verse 1 (small songs 1 and 4) and Verse 4 (small songs 5 and 9).

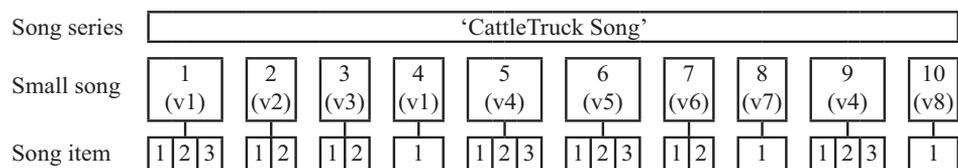


Figure 3: Structure of the Cattle Truck Song: eight verses are spread over 10 small songs comprising a total of 21 song items.

⁹ Translation from Anmatyerr, AIATSIS JG02_020315 2’29–3’00.

¹⁰ Clarrie Kemarr, pers. comm. to M. Turpin, 2015.

¹¹ Welfare reports attest to Anmatyerr people ‘congregating’ by the Stuart Highway and mingling with non-Aboriginal people working on road maintenance camps and station homesteads (Northern Territory Administration 1946, see also Littleton 2007).

All eight verses consist of two lines, each of which is repeated, forming a verse that is a quatrain (AABB). This ‘doubled’ text structure (Barwick 1989: 18) is the most common verse structure in ceremonial songs throughout the region. As in traditional Arandic songs, the song items in the Cattle Truck Song can commence with either line of the verse (A or B) and finish with any line in the quatrain. For example, the first song item in the performance begins with the A line of Verse 1 and lasts for one cycle of the verse (AABB), while song items 2 and 3 begin with the B line and last for 2.75 cycles of the verse (BBAABBAABBA) and 2.5 cycles respectively (BBAABBAABB).

2.2 Rhythm

Typical of other Central Australian Aboriginal songs, each of the 16 lines of the Cattle Truck Song are set to a rhythm that remains constant for all repetitions of the text (i.e. the text is isorhythmic). The 16 different text lines comprise a total of nine different rhythmic patterns. These are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Rhythmic patterns of the 16 lines of the Cattle Truck Song.

Rhythm	no. notes	no. beats	text line
	16	10	5B
	11	8	2A
	10	7	2B, 3A, 4A
	8	6	6A
	10	10	7A, 7B
	9	9	8A
	8	8	1A, 5A, 6B, 8B
	7	7	3B, 4B
	6	6	1B

From Table 1 it can be seen that the nine rhythmic patterns are made up of various arrangements of three different patterns, also known as ‘rhythmic cells’. Each of these is associated with a particular position within a line (initial, medial or final).

	1	2	3
	‘swing cell’	‘long note cell’	‘short-long’
Rhythmic cell			
Position in line	initial	medial	final
Note length	short	long	short + extra long

Figure 4: The three rhythmic cells used in the Cattle Truck Song.

All rhythmic lines end in the short-long cell and consist of a medial cell, which is a sequence of between 2-8 long notes. Six lines make use of the ‘swung cell’, which can be either 4, 6 or 12 notes. The use of a small number of rhythmic cells as building blocks to create rhythmic lines is common in traditional Arandic song (Turpin 2015). Two other constraints seen here are also common in traditional Arandic songs (Turpin 2007):

- (1) Rhythmic cells with more notes must not precede ones with less;
- (2) Lines must end with a long note.

The way that words and sounds are organised within a line has much in common with traditional songs. This includes the setting of each syllable to one rhythmic note (no more, no less), the omission of rounding on consonants and the placement of verbs in line final position only (Turpin 2007).

2.3 Lyrics

Two broad interconnected themes are encountered in the eight verses of the Cattle Truck Song: (1) vehicles and their driver; (2) more general observations of men and aspects of their personal appearance – black hats, bushy eyebrows and nest-like beards. We first discuss the verses that refer to vehicles, one of which may be the ‘Cattle Truck’.¹²

2.3.1 Verses that refer to a vehicle and driver

(1) Verse 1

<p>A</p> <p>x x x x x x x x</p> <p>he ya he ya ngkal pin nte kay</p> <p><i>ahey-ahey-angk-elp-aynt-ek</i> breath-PL.RDP-talk-INCP-CNT-PC</p> <p>‘Starting to make a noise, over and over’</p>	<p>B</p> <p>x x x x x x</p> <p>terr parr pa ni nyi lay</p> <p><i>rtwerrp arrpanenh-el</i> sand.hill every-LOC¹³</p> <p>‘On every sand hill’</p>
---	--

¹² We have omitted discussion of one verse that was not sung for a complete cycle, making it difficult to identify the entire text.

¹³ Morphological glosses and abbreviations used in this paper: ABL = ablative, ALL = allative, CAUS = causative, CNT = continuous action, DO&GO.BACK = do verb action & go back, ERG = ergative, INCH = inchoative, INCP = inceptive, LOC = locative, PC = past complete, PL = plural, POS = possessive, PROP = proprietive, RDP = reduplicated form, REL = relativiser, REP = repeated action, VOC = vocable, x = handclap. The spelling of Anmatyerr and pan - Arandic words follows Green 2010.

Verse 1 refers to a truck being driven, with difficulty, over some sandhills. The driver keeps trying to start the engine again after it falters. The truck is said to belong to Stan Brown, the owner of Stirling Station, and the sandhill nearby has been noted for presenting a serious obstacle for early motorists. Roy McFadyen (2005: 121) describes the stretch of the Stuart Highway between Ti Tree and Stirling in 1937 as ‘notorious’ and a place where every vehicle became ‘stuck’.

(2) Verse 3

A	B
we rte pe wa rna the ka	ni ngin tyi ngin tya le rre la ne ka
<i>wertep-warn-athek</i> woodheap-ALL-towards	<i>anwengentyengenty-arl-irr-erlan-ek</i> backwards-REL-INCH-CNT-PC
‘Towards the woodheap’	‘(It) kept on reversing backwards’

Verse 3 refers to a truck being reversed towards a woodheap. The woodheap is encountered in descriptions of Australian station homesteads as a place where labourers cut and stacked firewood for domestic use in the station kitchens and where they congregated for meals and conversation. Beckett (1978: 11) reports that the practice of Aboriginal people being served their meals ‘on the woodheap’ persisted in some parts of northern Australia until the 1950s. The woodheap provided a ready-made windbreak, a vantage point and a sanctioned outside space for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to interact that contrasted with the inner restricted domains of the station homesteads. Although borrowed from Australian English, the term *wertep* ‘woodheap’ has been absorbed into the Anmatyerr lexicon, as it has in neighbouring Kaytetye where it means ‘stockman’.¹⁴

An alternative interpretation given for the first word of this verse is *artep* ‘backwards’ where it is said to refer to a vehicle, presumably ‘the cattle truck’, reversing or rolling backwards as it struggles to climb over the sand hill. This meaning is consistent with the general meaning of the verse, as it is broadly synonymous with Line B. This interpretation requires syllable transfer, in this instance the insertion of a line-initial ‘w’. Although common in traditional Arandic songs, this process is not attested in any other line in this corpus, suggesting that the former interpretation, ‘woodheap’ was more likely to have been in the mind of the original composer. If this is indeed the case, the poetic style of Cattle Truck Song is different from Anmatyerr songs in traditional genres, which invariably involve syllable transfer.

The text of the B line in (2) was consistently interpreted. Most thought that the *anwengentyengenty* ‘backwards’ action referred to a vehicle, presumably

¹⁴ The Kaytetye form is *wertilpe* [wuɽɪlpə] (Turpin & Ross 2012). We thank Luise Hercus for alerting us to the English origin of this Kaytetye word (pers. comm. to M. Turpin 2014).

‘the cattle truck’. The exception was one consultant who said that it referred to a women’s dance style where a line of dancers would move forward and then backwards. This interpretation is not necessarily incompatible with the description that describes the movement of a vehicle, as it may describe a dance movement performed to accompany this verse.

(3) Verse 4

A	B
ku te therr ku te the lay	ta rra ngki lhe ngki lhe le la ne ka
<i>irrkwerteth-irrkwerteth-el</i>	<i>(itarr)-angk-elh-angk-elhil-erlan-ek¹⁵</i>
unfamiliar.speech-RDP-ERG	(drag)-talk-CAUS ₁ -PL.RDP-CAUS ₂ -CNT-PC
‘The man with the accent’	‘Trying to make it start’

Line A of Verse 4 refers to the driver of a vehicle who is *irrkwerteth-irrkwerteth*, speaking an unfamiliar language or with an accent that is hard to understand (Green 2010: 350). This is possibly a reference to Bill Abbott, one of the employees on Stirling Station in the 1940s. As Abbott was apparently a ‘well-educated’ man from England (Ross & Whitebeach 2007: 22) this verse may be referring to his distinctive English accent. Line B is based on a form of the compound verb *angelh-angelh-il-* ‘start something up’ (Green 2010: 103). It refers to a person trying to start a vehicle, turning the engine over again and again. As in verse 1 discussed above, where a verb *ahey-ahey-angk-* ‘pant, breathe heavily’ describes the noise an engine makes when it is under duress, the semantic extension of a common Anmatyerr verb such as *angk-* ‘speak’ beyond the range of human and animate entities to accommodate new settler ‘noises’ made by vehicles and other machines is also found in other traditional Indigenous songs (Ellis 1985).

(4) Verse 5

A
nga ta pa ntya pa ntya ke nha
<i>anngayt pwenty-pwenty-kenh</i>
eyebrow stripe-RDP-POS
‘(The vehicle) belonging to the man with the bushy eyebrows’

¹⁵ Brackets represent a less certain speech equivalent or gloss in the song text.

B

x	x	x	x	x x x x
man ta	na ku	la ku ri tyi rr	pan ta nga rra	nal pin te ka
<i>unmernt-ant akwel</i>		<i>akewentye- (irrantangarran)</i>		<i>alp-(?)-ek</i>
dust-ONLY supposedly	rise	(?)		go.back-(?)-PC

‘Dust rising as it/he goes back’

Verse 5 refers to Tom Roberts, a linesman who worked for the Postmasters-General’s Department (and then Telecom Australia) at Barrow Creek Telegraph Station from 1952 until 1986 and became known as the ‘Mayor of Barrow Creek’.¹⁶ In Kaytetye he was nick-named Anngayte Ntate ‘bushy eyebrows’ (lit. ‘eyebrow’, ‘hunting hide’). Some speakers thought the text of line A to be *anngayt* ‘eyebrow’ compounded with either *pwenty* ‘stripe, mark’ or *panty* ‘blanket’. Others interpreted the text of the line as *annga artepenty* ‘heavy browed’ (*annga* ‘eye’, *artepenty* ‘ridge’). This comical description of Roberts recalls Hercus’s description of the Wangkangurru ‘mysterious giant’ referred to as Wintipilpa, meaning ‘Only Eyebrows’ (Hercus & Koch 1999: 73). The verse refers to the cloud of dust that rises up as Roberts drives his vehicle by at high speed. In Line B, a consistent translation ‘dust rising’ was given, and although the middle section of text is not known, *akewentye-* is a Kaytetye verb stem meaning ‘to rise (of dust)’.

(5) Verse 8

A				B			
x	x	x x	x x x x	x x	x x	x x	x x
rra lta	ntya ntya	rra lta ntya	ntye la	ra ri	la ra	ri lal	pe ka
<i>arralt</i>	<i>(antyanty) arralt</i>	<i>(antyanty)-el</i>		<i>ar-ar-erl-ar-ar-erlalp-ek</i>			
beard	(long) beard	(long)-ERG		see-REP-CNT-see-REP-DO&GO.BACK-PC			

‘The man with the long beard’

‘Kept watching as he drove back’

Verse 8 refers to a man looking out for something as he drives along. Some speakers identified the A line as *arralt-antywerl* ‘long beard’. *Arralt* is the everyday Anmatyerr word for beard and while *antyanty* is unattested in Anmatyerr, it may be based on *antywa* ‘nest’. No contextual meaning of the song has been obtained.

¹⁶ Sydney Morning Herald, 8 Feb 2004. See also ‘Australian Heritage Places Inventory’ entry for Barrow Creek at <http://www.heritage.gov.au/cgi-bin/ahpi/record.pl?RNE151> [accessed 2016-03-01]. For one of those who interpreted the songs Tom Roberts was a very familiar figure, as he was her husband’s boss and they worked closely together.

2.3.2 Verses that refer to male station workers

There are two verses that refer solely to a man. While three of the verses considered previously also refer to men, in these verses they are associated with driving a vehicle. In contrast, many of those who offered interpretations of the two verses below considered them to sexual connotations.

(6) Verse 2

<p>A</p> <p>ka pe rta ne ka rla nte ke rra the ka</p> <p><i>kapert an-ek-arl antekerr-athek</i> head sit-PC-REL south-towards</p> <p>‘The one with the headwear (glanced) south (?)’</p>	<p>B</p> <p>le ngerr pa ke ta rle tne rla ne ka</p> <p><i>arleng-arrp (akert-el) irn-erlan-ek</i> distant-only (edge-LOC) stand-CNT-PC</p> <p>‘The one standing on their own in the distance’</p>
--	---

Verse 2 refers to a man who is wearing a hat and glancing to the south, as if looking back to a lover. Anmatyerr speakers referred to him as a ‘lover boy’, although the actual identity of the person is now known. Instead of the everyday word for hat, the lyrics contain *kapert anek-arl* ‘the one with headwear’.

(7) Verse 6

<p>A</p> <p>me ka twirr pe la ki rte lay</p> <p><i>mwekart irrpwerl-akert-el</i> hat black-PROP-ERG</p> <p>‘The man with the black hat’</p>	<p>B</p> <p>ki ta the le ri la ne ka</p> <p><i>akert-they-el ar-erlan-ek</i> edge-ABL-LOC see-CNT-PC</p> <p>‘Looked from around the corner’</p>
---	---

Verse 6 similarly refers to a ‘lover boy’, described as a drover by some (possibly because of his black hat). In this verse we find the everyday word for hat, *mwekart* and the entire B line is a phrase that is pragmatically equivalent to ‘making eyes at someone’. An alternative interpretation of the first half of Line B was given by an Anmatyerr speaker as a previously undocumented word *anngertetyel* ‘look furtively or out of the corner of your eye’. This explication is consistent with the general gist of the song as being flirtatious, and may refer to the ‘lover boy’ casting a quick or stolen glance in the direction of his intended amorous conquest.

3. Conclusion

The 1983 recording of the Cattle Truck Song may have been the last time this song was performed. Some 30 years later, our enquiries with Anmatyerr and Kaytetye speakers have illuminated the ways that songs are interpreted and reinterpreted within a framework of familiarity with traditional genres. Like other newly composed songs, this song uses everyday language, but unlike many of those songs, the text is not subject to syllable transfer. This may be an innovation or simply a Kaytetye influence, as traditional Kaytetye songs do not use syllable transfer to the same extent as other Arandic languages. Both Anmatyerr and Kaytetye are spoken in the multilingual environment of the community where the song originated.

While the verses are semantically transparent in comparison to many traditional songs, understandings of their deictic reference—the people, places and events to which they refer—is most developed in those with local historical and geographic knowledge. The potential for these songs to be reinterpreted is, however, readily apparent. Plausible alternatives are given, such as the traditional ‘backwards’ dancing explanation of Verse 3, and in time these interpretations may take root and become commonly accepted. Such processes of re-contextualising songs are a feature of traditional genres across the Arandic region and beyond (Tonkinson 1978: 102, Keogh 1995).

The rhythmic and metrical features of the Cattle Truck Song resemble traditional Arandic genres of song. This is evident in the song’s form, the use of a small number of rhythmic building blocks, the constraints on their arrangement within the line, and the tendency for verbs to be line-final. On the other hand, this song is not said to be in any of the established women’s performance genres of the region. The Cattle Truck Song falls somewhere on a cline between ‘tradition’ and ‘innovation’ and demonstrates how notions of the ‘olden-time’ or ‘traditional’ become increasingly problematic as more is known about a variety of song genres from Central Australia. While the text of the Cattle Truck Song was ‘new’ when composed (possibly over six decades ago), in terms of musical style it fits with an established form that antedates colonisation.

Like the Cattle Truck Song, verses in the established women’s performance genres include new songs that are prompted by inspiration from ‘a single sociocultural’ or intercultural field of settler society (Smith & Hinkson 2005: 158; Sullivan 2006). A notable example of this is the inclusion of several verses in the Alywarr Antarrengeny awely series that recall an event involving a Toyota during a Land Claim field trip in the 1980s (Turpin & Ross 2013). These often humorous songs about ‘modern settings’ are evidence of Aboriginal song-making as part of a constantly evolving and continuous tradition (Hercus & Koch 1996: 82; Hercus 1994: 91). Having worked on cattle stations in the Stirling region for generations, Anmatyerr people did not simply observe this industry but rather actively engaged with and shaped it. These interactions led to a particular type of creative subjectivity arising out of sociocultural change and interaction (Merlan 2005). In this case aspects of everyday life on cattle stations were consciously adapted and integrated into song.

The Cattle Truck Song provides a useful point of comparison for future studies of innovation within traditional song styles. It also adds to the existing anthropological literature on Aboriginal interactions with the pastoral frontier (Hokari 2002, McGrath 1987). Like other songs created in this intercultural environment, the Cattle Truck Song is based on detailed observations of people in the new work regimes, including their appearance, clothing, voices and vehicles. Central Australian station life in the early to mid-20th century provided ample new material that was reflected in song and it provided a new audience for the performance of musical expressions of the time.

Acknowledgements

This research has been supported by two Australian Research Council grants: DP110102767 and FT140100783. We acknowledge the Anmatyerr singers who performed these songs: Hilda Pwerl Price ('Cookie') and Lowie Pwerl Price†; Amelia Kemarr Wilson† and Mavis Price†. We also thank the Kaytetye and Anmatyerr speakers who assisted with song interpretation: Amy Ngamperle, Norman Pwerl Price, Michael Price, Lucy Kemarr Price†, Clarrie Kemarr Long, Eileen Pwerrerl Campbell, Gloria Petyarr, Peggy Ampetyan and Don Peltharr Campbell†. A preliminary version of this paper was presented at the Australian Languages Workshop in Canberra, 6th March 2015. We thank Åse Ottosson and two anonymous referees for helpful comments on a draft of this paper.

References

- Alpher, Barry & Kevin Keefe. 2001. Playing songs can be dangerous. In J. Simpson, D. Nash, M. Laughren, P. Austin and B. Alpher (eds.) *Forty Years On: Ken Hale and Australian languages*, 465-475. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics.
- Barwick, Linda. 1989. Creative (ir)regularities: The intermeshing of text and melody in performance of Central Australian song. *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1, 12-28.
- Beckett, Jeremy. 1978. George Dutton's country: portrait of an Aboriginal drover. *Aboriginal History* 2, 2-31.
- Bradley, John & Yanyuwa families. 2016. *Wuka Nya-Nganunga Li-Yanyuwa Li-Anthawirriyarra: Language for us, the Yanyuwa Saltwater People: A Yanyuwa encyclopedic dictionary*. Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing.
- Brandenstein, C. G. von & A. P. Thomas. 1974. *Taruru: Aboriginal song poetry from the Pilbara*. Adelaide: Rigby.
- Dixon, R. M. W. & Grace Koch. 1996. *Dyirbal song poetry: The oral literature of an Australian rainforest people*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press.
- Donaldson, Tamsin. 1995. Mixes of English and ancestral language words in southeast Australian Aboriginal songs of traditional and introduced origin. In L. Barwick, A. Marett & G. Tunstill (eds.) *The essence of singing and the substance of song: Recent responses to the Aboriginal performing arts and other essays in honour of Catherine Ellis*, 143-158. Sydney: Oceania Publications, University of Sydney.

- Ellis, Catherine J. & Albert M. Ellis. 1970. *Andagarinja: Children's Bullock Corroboree*. Port Moresby: Dept. of English, University of Papua and New Guinea.
- Ellis, Catherine J. 1985. *Aboriginal music: Education for living*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press.
- Ellis, Catherine J. & Linda Barwick. 1987. Musical syntax and the problem of meaning in a Central Australian songline. *Musicology Australia* 10, 41-47.
- Gibson, Jason. 2015. Central Australian songs: A history and reinterpretation of their distribution through the earliest recordings. *Oceania* 85 (2). 165-182.
- Graham, Trevor. 1994. *Ka-Wayawayama: Aeroplane dance*. Lindfield: Film Australia.
- Green, Jennifer. 2010. *Central & Eastern Anmatyerr to English Dictionary*. Alice Springs: IAD Press.
- Green, Jennifer. 2012. The Altyerre story—'Suffering badly by translation.' *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 23 (2): 158-78.
- Green, Jennifer & Myfany Turpin. 2014. 'If you go down to the soak today... an Arandic children's game.' *Anthropological Linguistics* 55(4), 358-394.
- Hale, Kenneth. 1984. Remarks on creativity in Aboriginal verse. In Jamie C. Kassler & Jill Stubington (eds.) *Problems and solutions: Occasional essays in musicology presented to Alice M. Moyle*, 254-262. Sydney: Hale and Iremonger.
- Harney, W.E. 1947. *North of 23°*. Sydney: Australasian Publishing.
- Hartwig, M. C. 1965. *The progress of white settlement in the Alice Springs district and its effects upon the Aboriginal inhabitants, 1860-1894*. PhD, Adelaide: University of Adelaide.
- Hercus, Luise. 1969. The languages of Victoria: A late survey in two parts. *Australian Aboriginal Studies*; No. 17, Linguistic Series; No. 6. Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.
- Hercus, Luise. 1994. Songs from Southern Central Australia. In Martin Duwell & Robert M. W. Dixon (eds), *Little Eva at Moonlight Creek and other Aboriginal song poems*, 91-123. St. Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press.
- Hercus, Luise, & Grace Koch. 1996. A native died sudden at Lake Allallina. *Aboriginal History* 20, 113-150.
- Hercus, Luise, & Grace Koch. 1999. 'Wire Yard': A song from Near Lake Eyre. *Aboriginal History* 23, 72-82.
- Hokari, Minoru. 2002. Reading oral histories from the pastoral frontier: a critical revision. *Journal of Australian Studies* 26 (72), 21-28.
- Keogh, Ray. 1996. The native interpretation of Aboriginal song texts: The case of Nurlu. In William McGregor (ed.) *Studies in Kimberley languages in honour of Howard Coate*, 255-264. München: Lincom Europa.
- Littleton, Judith. 2007. The production of local biologies: Childhood Department at Yuendumu to 1970. *Current Anthropology* 48 (1), 135-145.
- Marett, Allan. 2005. *Songs, dreamings and ghosts: The enactment of ancestral precedent in the Wangga of North Australia*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Marett, Allan, Linda Barwick & Lysbeth Ford. 2013. *For the sake of a song: Wangga songmen and their repertoires*. Sydney: Sydney University Press.

- Merlan, Francesca. 2005. Explorations towards intercultural accounts of socio-cultural reproduction and change. *Oceania* 75 (3), 167-182.
- McFadyen, Roy. 2005. *At a cost*. 1st edn. Golden Beach, Qld: Roy McFadyen.
- McGrath, Ann. 1987. *Born in the cattle: Aborigines in Cattle Country*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Northern Territory Administration. 1946. Report on the administration of the Northern Territory for the year ending 30th June. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Ottosson, Åse. 2012. The intercultural crafting of real Aboriginal country and manhood in Central Australia. *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 23 (2), 179-196.
- Ross, Alexander Donald Pwerle & Terry Whitebeach. 2007. *The versatile man: The life and times of Don Ross Kaytetye Stockman*. Alice Springs: IAD Press.
- Roth, Walter Edmund. 1897. *Ethnological studies among the North-West-Central Queensland Aborigines*. Brisbane: E. Gregory, Government Printer. <http://archive.org/details/ethnologicalstu00rothgoog>.
- Scherer, Philipp A. 1993. *Sunset of an era: The Heffernans of Ti Tree*. Tanunda, S.A.: P.A. Scherer.
- Smith, Ben & Melinda Hinkson 2005. Introduction: Conceptual moves towards an intercultural analysis. *Oceania, Special Issue* 75 (3), 157-166.
- Standfield, Rachel. 2015. 'Thus have been preserved numerous interesting facts that would otherwise have been lost': Colonisation, protection and William Thomas's contribution to the Aborigines of Victoria. In Leigh Boucher & Lynette Russell (eds.) *Settler colonial governance in Victoria, 1851-1900*. Canberra: Aboriginal History and ANU E-press.
- Strehlow, T.G.H. 1971. *Songs of Central Australia*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson.
- Sullivan, Patrick. 2006. Introduction: Culture without cultures—The culture effect. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 17 (3), 253-264.
- Tonkinson, Robert. 1978. *The Mardudjara Aborigines: Living the dream in Australia's Western Desert*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Trigger, David S. 2008. Indigeneity, ferality, and what 'belongs' in the Australian Bush: Aboriginal responses to 'introduced' animals and plants in a settler-descendant society. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14 (3), 628-646.
- Turpin, Myfany. 2007. Artfully hidden: Text and rhythm in a Central Australian Aboriginal song series. *Musicology Australia* 29 (1), 93-108.
- Turpin, Myfany. 2011. Song-poetry of Central Australia: Sustaining traditions. *Language Documentation and Description* 10, 15-36.
- Turpin, Myfany. 2015. Alyawarr women's song-poetry of Central Australia. *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2015(1):66-96.
- Turpin, Myfany & Alison Ross. 2012. *Kaytetye to English Dictionary*. Alice Springs: IAD Press.
- Turpin, Myfany & Alison Ross. 2013. *Antarrengeny Awely: Alyawarr women's traditional ceremony of Antarrengeny country*. Darwin: Batchelor Press.
- Turpin, Myfany & Tonya Stebbins. 2010. The language of song: Some recent approaches in description and analysis. *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 30 (1), 1-17.