1

Power

Power has been the name of the game, from beginning to end — from 1788 until the present. Power was exerted through two different language families, later subdividing into different facets of power itself: power gained by physical force, then power by policy.

The Power of Koorie Languages

Language (its use, omission or prohibition) was the key element in historical and contemporary functions to direct, re-channel, record and fashion the destinies of my people throughout the nation.

The power of Koorie languages* was religious and social and therefore dominant in each Koorie's everyday life, as well as dictating the social patterns which communities were to follow. Prior to the British invasion, linguists estimated that there were approximately 230 languages, with between 500 and 600 dialects** being spoke throughout the continent. These were classified into twenty-six groups by Wurm (who arrived at the estimate via a hundred-word test — the languages which had a commonality of 70% were classified as dialects and those with fewer were regarded as separate languages). Those comprising the Pama-Nyungan (the words for man at Cape York, "pama"; and Perth, "nyunga") are spoken over approximately ninety per cent of Australia; and

* These are known as the Australian family of languages.
** A dialect is a variation within a language; for example, Australian English and American English are dialects of English.

twenty-five others (known as "non-Pama-Nyungan") are spoken in, or within the vicinity of, Arnhem Land (Northern Territory) and the Kimberleys (north-west of Western Australia).

Further research has indicated that Australian languages (including those of Tasmania), belong to one genetic family. All the languages are descended from a parent or ancestor language spoken thousands of years earlier. Dixon (1980, 19) has attempted a reconstruction of the proto-Australian language which he estimates was spoken before Indo-European; that is, prior to 3,000 B.C. However, over time, just as most of the languages of Europe (which are descended from Indo-European) have altered, the Australian languages have undergone considerable change. There are a number of commonalities within Australian languages but there are also significant variations which can make some languages mutually unintelligible to members of different speech communities.*

A number of attempts have been made to link these languages with languages outside the continent; for example, Papua New Guinean, Mon-Khmer, Inuit, Dravidian, African, American Indian, the languages of Oceania, and Indo-European (Dixon 1980). All such attempts so far have proved fruitless — the Australian family remains intact in itself.

Wurm (1972, 9) says that this freedom from outside influence over thousands of years constituted a linguistic situation that is unique in the world. He adds that the only evidence of non-Australian influence, probably from the Papua New Guinea area, is in some languages spoken in the north-eastern part of Australia.

Figure 4 shows the approximate distribution of the languages of Australia; a heavy line divides the two major sub-groups.

In most groups there are secret, taboo and special languages which are known to and may only be spoken by those

* For a detailed discussion of linguistic differences see Dixon (1980) and Dixon and Blake (1979).

Figure 4 Australian languages (from Wurm, 1972)

STATES

Western Australia · Northern Territory · South Aust. · Queensland · New South Wales · Vic. · Tas.

K KUNGARAKANYAN
W WARRAIAN
KA KAKADJUAN
M MANGERIAN
GU GUNWINGGUAN
NU NUNGGUYUAN
DJ DJAMINDJUNGAN
MA MANGARAIAN
NG NGEWINAN?
YAN YANYULAN
MI MINKINAN

WO WORORIC
WUN WUNAMBALIC
UNG UNGARINYIC
GI GIDJIC
MI MIRIWUNIC
BR BRINKEN-WAGATYIC
MU MULLUKIC
L LARAKIC
W WUNIC
IW IWAIDJIC
M MARGIC
G GARIKIC
AM AMARAGIC
NG NGANDIC

MAN MANGERIC
U URNINGANKIC
BU BURERIC
GO GOROGONIC
MO MOILIC
GU GUNWINGGIC

RA RAINBARNGIC
DJ DJAUANIC
NGA NGALAGANTIC
MAR MARIC
AL ALAWIC
YAN YANGMANIC
DJI DJINGILIC
WA WANYIC
K KALIBAMIC
KU KUKATYIC?
KAR KARANTYIC?
WAK WAKAYA-
 WARLUWARIC
KA KALKATUNGIC
YAL YALARNNGIC
YA YANDIC
MB MBABARAMIC

Mu Mullukmulluk
Wg Wagaty
Br Brinken
Da Daly
Wam Wageman
Wr Wardaman
Yan Yangman
Dj Djinang
Wa Wandaran
Ma Mara
Wu Wurangung
Gu Gulf Pama
Iw Iwaidji
War Warluwara
Mau Maung

MA MARAWARIC
A ANIWANIC
GUM GUMBAINGGARIC
YAI YAITHMATHANGIC
YOT YOTAYOTIC-
 BANYGARANYIC

AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGES

Phylic Family (under 15% cognates) — Group or
Group (16%-25% cognates) — Group or
Subgroup (26%-50% cognates) — Doubtful

DALY
MOILIC
Daly

0 200 400 600 Kilometres

...speech community. On the other hand, secret styles are restricted to special categories of persons.

A taboo form common to most Koorie groups is that which is known as "the mother-in-law language". Within Koorie culture the mother-son-in-law relationship can be one of total avoidance or restricted interaction. In most cases, persons who are *potentially*, as well as those who are *actually* in this relationship, must also conform to avoidance and/or special linguistic rules.

In a number of communities there may be languages used by people in specific situations; for example, Anitji, the language used by Pitjantjatjara mothers of adolescent sons. I will not reveal this language, because of its special in-family nature, although I have been criticised by one Anglo-Australian for not breaking a promise of confidentiality to a Pitjantjatjara sister. He wrote that I had a duty to reveal all I know to the linguistic world. Apparently promises made to Koories don't count as far as he is concerned.

Most Koorie groups have a taboo on speaking a person's name after his or her death. The taboo usually lasts several years, and even then the name may only be used by someone closely associated with the deceased. In a few communities the name may never be used again. In both cases this results in changes in the language. To overcome the problem of the word loss, most speech communities borrow a word from a neighbouring language; others fill the gap in the vocabulary by replacing it with a word with a similar meaning which was less frequently used prior to the death. An example of how such a loss was overcome comes from a Western Desert language (Dixon 1980, 29) concerning the first person singular pronoun, "I". In this language the word was "Ngayu", meaning "I", but in the Warburton Ranges a man named Ngayuna died about 1950 so that in this dialect "Ngayu" was proscribed and replaced by "Nganku", a form borrowed from the special mother-in-law speech style. However, ten years later, "Nganku" was itself proscribed on the death of someone with a name similar to it, and was replaced either by "Ngayu"

involved in special ceremonies, for example religious ceremonies (which are often gender, age or knowledge specific).

Unlike in European society, both males and females are religious leaders and conduct ceremonies for members of their own gender as well as individually or together for the community as a whole. Within the gender specific ceremonies, however, special sacred secret languages are used both as part of the ceremonies and as part of initiation ceremonies for those old and knowledgeable enough to undergo them. Within the religious sphere, therefore, restricted access to language highlights the fact that both men and women have religious autonomy.

As with other communities throughout the world, speech and song styles differ for topic and narrative; for example, a sad story or song about the death of a friend will have a different tone, speed of narrative and style to one about an exciting race.

Within some Koorie communities there are special styles for secret and taboo topics which include in a number, but not all groups, a form of language or style of communication which is the only one which may be used with a relative in a taboo relationship. Although in non-Koorie Australian society people may have a less familiar style of communication with some relatives than with others, in Koorie society there are strictly enforced rules which indicate those kin with whom relatives may joke and those who must be addressed in a formal manner. The degree of taboo differs among groups, to each other through a third person. Topics centering around from a total ban on verbal communication at one extreme, to a ban only on words or topics at the other. One clan on my maternal side permits an adult brother and sister to be present in the same conversation group, but they must speak to each other through a third person. Topics centering around body functions and sexual matters are taboo in such company and if referred to will create hurt and embarrassment. Linguistic restrictions may entail only a taboo on certain words or topics, or a total prohibition on verbal communication, or a limitation to a special restricted form of language.

Avoidance styles of speech, which must be used with kin in avoidance relationships, may differ according to the type

Near speaker		Near hearer		Far from both	
singular	plural	singular	plural	singular	plural
gala	ga:ŋ	mala	ma:ŋ	gila	ga:m

Invisible series

Near speaker		Near hearer		Far from both	
singular	plural	singular	plural	singular	plural
gayu	gaŋi:	mayu	ma:ŋi	maya	ga:ŋ

Invisible, formerly present series

Near speaker		Near hearer		Far from both	
singular	plural	singular	plural	singular	plural
guna:	gunaimir	muna:	muna:mir	gaiba	gabamir

Table 1 Noun markers in Bandjalang

(borrowed back from dialects where it had not been replaced) or by "Mi", a borrowing from English.

Semantic distinctions in Australian languages can be significantly different from those in European languages. This is undoubtedly due to differences in lifestyle and the emphases on what is important to the culture. Among others, Dixon (1980, 104) cites the following example:

Tribes living among the well-watered mountains of the dividing range can have grammatical specification for whether some object referred to is uphill, upriver, downhill or downriver, and how far up or down it is. There is often a series of verbs for different kinds of "spearing", depending on whether the spear is held on to or let go, whether the object can be seen or not, and whether the activity takes place by day or at night, using artificial light. It is common to encounter specialised verbs of "giving", referring to the satisfaction of social obligation that depends on specific kinship ties.

Bandjalang, spoken on the north coast of New South Wales, has special noun markers (small words placed in front of the names of people or things) for invisibility. One form indicates that a person is invisible because he or she *has not yet arrived*, and another indicates that the person is invisible because he/she *has been and gone*. These in turn are related to distance and number. (See table 1 for examples.)

Gugu Ngantyara, which is spoken in north Queensland, has special marking on words for "giving", to indicate whether the item being given has left the hand of the giver, is in the process of being passed from the hand of the giver to the hand of the receiver, or has just reached the hand of the receiver.

Kinship names carry socially significant meanings in all Koorie groups. These include clan, section, kin, personal and place names. Some clan names carry a word of the language in their title; for example Gubbi Gubbi (my maternal language, spoken in southern Queensland) means "the people who say 'gubbi' for 'no'"; similarly Yota Yota (spoken in northern Victoria) means "the people who say 'yota' for 'no'". Dialects of Gugu Ngantyara include the verb "go" in their clan names; for example, Gugu Uwanh means "the language which says 'uwanh' for 'go'". (Gugu means "language".)

Section names are related to lineage. In Koorie society both the patriline (descent through males) and the matriline (descent through females) designate special roles and rights of inheritance. For instance, I may inherit custodianship of land through my mother and the right to paint certain pictures through my father. Children belong to different sections from their parents and must marry out of their own section. Groups may differ in the number of sections within their clan — most have four sections but others can have six or eight. The section, sub-section or moiety system operating within

Because the children in each family get their identity from their fathers, this is called a patrimoiety system.

A matrimoiety system is superimposed on the patrimoiety system. To do this, some new rules are needed:

1 Children get their identity from their mother.
2 Two new symbols will be needed for matrimoieties.
These will be:

Here is what happens when the new rules are applied:

If you examine the diagrams carefully, you will discover that there are only four combinations of symbols. Each symbol represents a set of rules, inheritances, rights and obligations.

Figure 5 Eight sub-section system

rules of that community. This knowledge is important, not only when addressing people, but also in discussions about speech community members, or participation in the social life of the community. In fact, a person's section name (sometimes called "skin" name), tells the rest of the community:

—how that person must behave towards others, both within and outside the section and how they may respond;
—what land is under the person's custodianship;
—what food is taboo and what is not;
—the group into which the person may marry, and the group into which a person may not marry;
—the clan inherited rights (for example, to paint certain pictures, sing and dance specific repertoires);
—which group the person must support in conflicts.

Figure 5 is an example of an eight sub-section system. Out of each permitted marriage combination differently named sets (or sections) of children are produced (the language is Gupapuyngu spoken in north-east Arnhem Land) (Williams 1981).

The importance of sections and their significance to language is also illustrated in an example from Alyawarra (Central Australia) of pronouns (words such as I, you, we, and so on), discussed by Dixon (1980, 2-3):

...there are three ways of saying "you two" — *mpula* has to be used for two people in the same section (in addressing two sisters, for instance); *mpulaka* refers to two people in different sections who are in a father-child relationship (it is used in talking to father and daughter); and *mpulantha* is employed where the two addressees belong to different sections for which this relationship does not hold (for example mother and daughter).
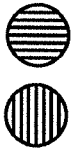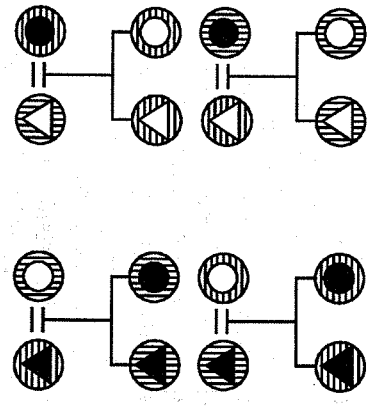
As kinship is the pivot of Koorie society, it is not surprising that kin names also play an extremely important role in dictating lifestyles and language usage. It is essential to know the kin relationship and sections of *all* community members to speak the language accurately. If an outsider lives in a Koorie community, unless he or she is "adopted" by someone and is given a kinship name in relation to the

Figure 6 Kinship terms in Gupapuyngu and English
(after Williams 1981, 41-42)

Top diagram (English kinship terms):
uncle · aunt · uncle · aunt · uncle · mother · father · brother · uncle · aunt · uncle · aunt · uncle · aunt
cousin · cousin · cousin · sister · brother · cousin · cousin · cousin · cousin · cousin

Lower diagram (Kinship terms in Gupapuyngu):

Kinship terms in Gupapuyngu
Close Relationship (Female Father)
Very Close Relationship Politically Aligned
Taboo Relationship

(waku) bäpa mukul · bäpa (ngändi) · bäpa (ngändi) (bäpa) (ngändi) ngapipi (mukul rumaru')
dhuway · dhuway · wäwa yapa yapa · wäwa · wäwa · yapa · galay galay

MAY NOT MARRY dhuway or yapa
MAY MARRY Galay

Legend:
△ A male
○ A female
= Marriage
⌐ Marriage

...person remains a nonentity in the community. English kinship terminology, in lay terms, is unable to cater for the needs of Koories living in communities where the lifestyle is dictated by Koorie mores. The examples in figure 6 show how (among other things), if a male Ego were to be given English kinship terms only, he would not know who the women in the category of potential spouse were, and just as crucial to his future, who the women in the taboo relationship were (these women are his potential mothers-in-law).

Multi-naming according to each social situation exists in most communities, and it is also usual practice for Koories to have several personal names by which they are addressed as well as names others use to refer to them. These may include:

— the kinship name;
— the section name;
— a name describing a personal characteristic or habit; and
— a sacred name given at birth which is known only to a few close relatives.

In contrast to European places which are frequently named after people, place names in Australian languages usually embody a description of the surroundings or events which have occurred or occur there. For example Brewarrina, a town in mid-west New South Wales, has retained the Koorie name, which means "the place where acacias grow", Giribiri (now Kerribree Creek, also in New South Wales) means "dancing place" (where many Koorie ceremonies were held). Both of these names are from the Muruwari language. The naming of people and places for Creation Beings in Koorie religious stories has not only sacred but also secular significance. Names bind people to their land which bestows upon them their identity and relationship to other clan groups.*

Important cultural characteristics of Koorie people are reflected in their languages; Dixon (1980) has researched the "wide spectrum" of adjectives which refer to degrees and types

of reactions — pity, human psychological feelings, sorrow, being offended (through being socially neglected), justifiable anger, shyness and melancholy due to a longing for friends, family or homeland, as well as many for feelings of well-being.

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* For a detailed discussion on the intricacies of land and naming see Williams (1986, chapter 2).

is most often interpreted as "shame".

It is in fact used to describe someone's feelings if he is seen to do something that is poor etiquette, ill-mannered or wrong — the timidity felt by young men at a public occasion that is likely to prevent them speaking out in front of older men; the shyness felt by children which makes them shelter behind a parent in the presence of strangers; the awkwardness felt in the presence of strangers or people who are only distant kin which inhibits one from asking them for food or favours; the obligatory respect towards tabooed kin which necessitates avoidance of direct contact with them; the embarrassment felt at the use of crude language in inappropriate contexts, or at being observed making love, or at overt discussion of the role of copulation in procreation; and so on.

The word "shame" is used in Koorie English to mean all of these things.

Because of the constraints placed upon language use within a Koorie community, no one person knows *all* the language of the group. If a language is to be totally known, that is, alive and functioning, the linguistic group must consist of persons whose life stages have placed them in the categories of speakers of all the special linguistic styles. In such a case, an older man and an older woman could, between them, hold all the knowledge. So that any language can remain viable, however, a speech community needs a number of younger people of both genders in various life stages to whom the knowledge can be passed.

Where marriage rules dictate that a person must marry outside his or her clan, Koorie children grow up speaking two languages — their mother's and their father's. Due to the Koories' own interest in language and their interaction with differing linguistic groups, multilingualism is, therefore, quite common. (My circle of friends and relations include Koories who speak Dutch, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Japanese and Malay as well as Koorie languages.)

Koprie attitudes to other languages indicate that a type of imperialism existed in the past when "naming" other Australian languages. According to Matthews (1907), the Ganai of

mouth), and that of the Bidawal, "Kwaidhang" (rough mouth) (Matthews' spelling).

Dixon found that in some areas of his research, language speakers considered their way of speaking to be the ideal and the others inferior. He quotes two languages in the Cape York Peninsula, "Gugu-Mini" ("good language" to its speakers), and "Gugu-Warra" ("bad language" to the speakers of Gugu-Mini) (Dixon 1980, 41).

This type of reaction seems to have been the extent of the imperialism, however. Yallop (1982, 29), in surveying Australian languages, concluded that Koories are not generally linguistically "chauvinistic", that they "borrow" freely from neighbouring groups and are often not concerned about "naming". This observation appears accurate.

Contact with the Macassans may have created, initially, a form of Australian-Macassan pidgin. In the Northern Territory Koories learned Macassarese prior to the British settlement. That they attempted to use it as a lingua franca with the British after their arrival, is noted by Urry and Walsh (1981, 92), who cite the difficulty encountered by the resident linguist at Port Essington in collecting vocabularies of Australian languages. "After having collected many words, I found that I was making a vocabulary of a horrid *patois* of Macassar dialect: in fact, nearly all the words the natives use when speaking with us are Macassarese."

Many Macassan words were adopted into those linguistic groups who had considerable contact with them. Walker and Zorc (1981, 117-33) list two hundred words from what they term "Austronesian", which indicates that contact between the groups was long and intimate. This is also substantiated in a paper by Urry and Walsh (1981, 95-96) who stress that the degree of contact between Macassans and Koories varied from seasonal visits by the Macassans to north Australia to extended visits by Koories to Indonesia, where they stayed with the families of the captains of the praus, sometimes for up to two years.

That Koories were quick to learn English words also, is evidenced in records reported by Reynolds (1981, 14), who

here:

"On Dirijan [Bunya Mountain] I beat the bunya nuts and gave some to the visitors."[*]

Other differing linguistic groups also often came together for the sharing of special foods and ceremonies. Such an occasion was the gathering of Bogong moths in the Victorian Alps when various peoples from the north and south moved onto the high plains to enjoy the special nutritional food value provided by the moths. The name of the moths is taken from "boogang" which means both dark and night. At times the moths are still so plentiful they darken the sky.

Message sticks (see figure 7), which consist of symbols marked on a piece of wood, carried special information from group to group and specifically along the trade routes which once almost encircled Australia. These messages related the commodities which were needed and their availability in areas which could be thousands of kilometres from the source of request.

Many Koorie paintings also consist of symbols which contain a history of a clan, a family or an individual; tell the stories of the Creation Beings and religious laws; and in other ways are used to educate the young or transmit information. A painting painted for me by a brother from Milingimbi; is a reminder of the clan territory (mangroves and estuaries) and that the time for special ceremonies is when the turtles' eggs have been laid.

Toas are small sculptures made from wood and gypsum; often symbolic natural objects or artefacts are attached to the heads; or the toas themselves may be carved from natural objects or consist of natural objects with painted designs.

Toas show, in symbols, the paths taken by the Creation Beings and indicate special places where they paused or

previous contact with Europeans, but used the term "white-fellow" when speaking of them. The first reports of this linguistic ability came from the explorer Mitchell, in 1831.

Koories in the Lockhart River area became fluent in Japanese as well as conversant with other contact languages. Chase (1981, 15) cites an island-style song known to Koories as "The Three Language Song". The song includes lines from an Australian language, a Torres Strait language and Japanese.

The willingness to learn and use other languages also extended to Papuan loan words which can be found in languages spoken on the north-east coast of Queensland. This tolerance of linguistic differences may have been aided by the need for differing linguistic groups to exchange cultural items as well as songs and stories over long distances. Such items of value were passed along trade routes which encircled Australia. Jones and Sutton (1986, 37-38) cite evidence of songs from Queensland being sung by Koories in Central Australia who said they had obtained the knowledge of them via the trade routes.

Although the number of words common to linguistic groups in Australia is small (less than one hundred), the spread of some may have been due, on the one hand, to the interaction which the trade exchange necessitated. On the other, the need to communicate in trade negotiations may have aided the survival of some proto-Australian forms.

Ceremonial exchange required groups of Koories to travel considerable distances. This contributed to social interaction, and also encouraged linguistic tolerance. For instance, the speakers of Bandjalang, from the northern coastal area of New South Wales, walked to the Glass House Mountains in Queensland (a distance of over two hundred kilometres), to join the Gubbi Gubbi peoples for the bunya nut festivals when this fruit was ripe. These two groups did not share a linguistic boundary and, in fact, the languages differed considerably from each other. Song styles as well as religious beliefs were also dissimilar. Gubbi Gubbi songs, however, tell of the preparations which were made prior to the arrival of the visitors.
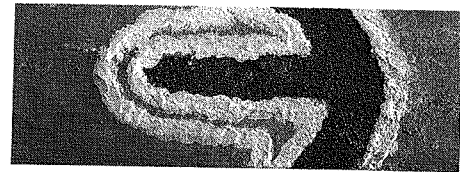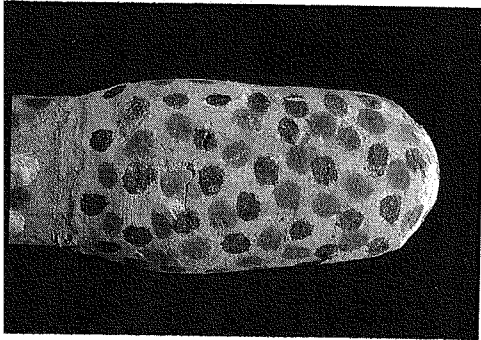
Figure 8 Toas (small sculptures) (South Australian Museum, Adelaide)

participated in a special event. Examples of these symbols are shown in figure 8.

For messages of importance, sacred boards were sent from one group to another. Another means of sending a message was to use smoke from fires to signal someone's approach, to warn of danger or to let others know someone had arrived at a particular point and was awaiting permission to enter another group's territory.

Thus education and the history of the Koorie people was and is still passed on in symbolic art and more frequently in oral form — in stories of the events as well as in songs to which the new cycles of the events have been added as they occurred. The longevity of history passed on in this form is demonstrated in stories which obviously stem from an inter-glacial period before the last Ice Age. Such stories tell of how the waters rose and cut off what is now an island, Tasmania, from the mainland and relate specifically to the melting of the ice.

In addition to verbal language, some Koorie groups have a complete repertoire of non-verbal communicative means —
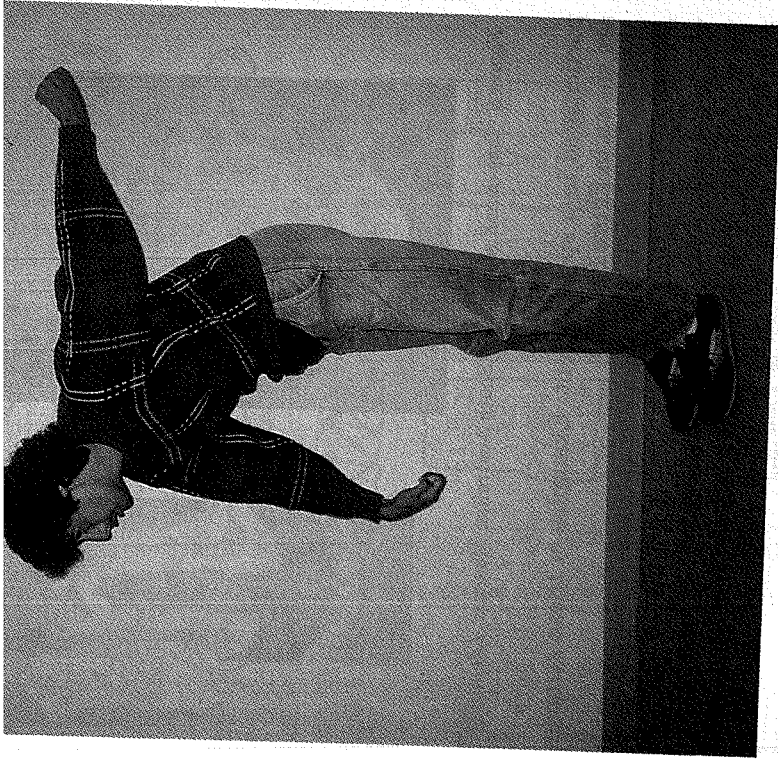

Figure 7 Message sticks (from Roth 1984, vol.1, plate *xviii*)

Figure 9 Shark message

via hand signs and gestures. (See figure 9.) This is very important when silence is required in times of danger, and when hunting shy animals, as in the bushland voices can be heard over long distances. Being able to send a message is also useful when a person is visible but a voice cannot be heard; for example, when a Koorie wants to send a message to a person on the other side of a noisy river (or street).