

analysis of a literary work imposed by a critic? How do we know that there is anything psychologically real about Dixon's analysis?

In the first place, Dixon's analysis was not his own. The explanations he gives are just those that native speakers told him about. They are the accounts given by the Dyirbal themselves to explain those parts of their classification system for which they had a conscious explanation.

In addition, there is some indirect evidence that Dixon's analysis was basically correct. It comes from an unfortunate source. Dixon did his initial field research in 1963. At that time, English-speaking Australian culture had not yet impinged much on the Dyirbal community. But in the years since 1963, the impact of white Australian society has been greater because of compulsory schooling in English and exposure to radio and television. As of 1983, only twenty years later, Dyirbal culture and the Dyirbal language are dying. Young people in the Dyirbal community grow up speaking English primarily, and learn only an extremely oversimplified version of traditional Dyirbal. Their experiences are very different from those of their parents and they either don't learn the myths or find that the myths don't mean much in their lives.

As one might expect, this has resulted in a drastic change of the categorization system. This has been documented by Annette Schmidt in a remarkable study, *Young People's Dyirbal: An Example of Language Death from Australia* (Schmidt 1985). Dyirbals who are roughly 45 or older speak traditional Dyirbal. Speakers who are under 35 speak some more simplified form of the language. Schmidt's study of the overall demise of Dyirbal included two degenerate stages of the categorization system: an intermediate stage (from five fluent speakers from an intermediate generation) and a very simple system (from much younger speakers). These two degenerate stages provide evidence that the analysis given above, or something close to it, is correct for traditional Dyirbal.

The intermediate stage shows the radial structure in the process of breaking down. The five speakers surveyed each showed a somewhat different loss of an aspect of radial structure. But the systems of these speakers only make sense in terms of the breaking-off of some radial links in the traditional Dyirbal system. In other words, each intermediate system lacks some of the hypothesized links that allow things that are not males and females to be categorized in classes I and II.

All of the intermediate speakers surveyed shared the following characteristics:

- The mythic links are kept: the moon, storms, and rainbows are still in class I with men and animals. The sun, stars, and birds are still in class II with women.