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Toward a revised classification of Australian languages

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ABSTRACT:

In preparation for revising the Australian part of the Linguistic Atlas of the Pacific, I want to reconsider the classification of some Australian languages, in addition to incorporating the recent advances made in Evans (ed) 2003 and Bower and Koch (eds) 2004. Using the criteria of common innovation (CI)—rather than typological similarity, lexicostatistical percentages, or areal distribution—can we in fact put more historical order into the Pama-Nyungan (PN) languages? Some questions I would like to address are:

- Is there evidence for an “eastern” or “southeastern” subgroup of the Pama-Nyungan family? If so, which languages belong to it?
- Can W. Schmidt’s Yuin, Kuri, or O’Grady-Hale-Wurm’s Yuin-Kuri group be justified by the criteria of common innovation?
- Can more order be put in the non-Maric languages of southeastern Queensland?
- Are there any languages of southeastern Australian whose Pama-Nyungan membership can be seriously doubted?
- Is O’Grady-Hale-Wurm’s Nyungic family still justified, and by what CI criteria?
- Can some of the “isolates” within PN be included larger groups?
- Is there any evidence of overlapping innovations which would render discrete (family-tree type) subgrouping unviable?

References:

- Bower, Claire and Harold Koch (eds). 2004. *Australian languages: classification and the comparative method*. (Current Issues in Linguistic Theory, 249) Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Evans, Nicholas (ed.) 2003. *The non-Pama-Nyungan languages of northern Australia: comparative studies of the continent's most linguistically complex region*. (Pacific Linguistics 552) Canberra: Australian National University.