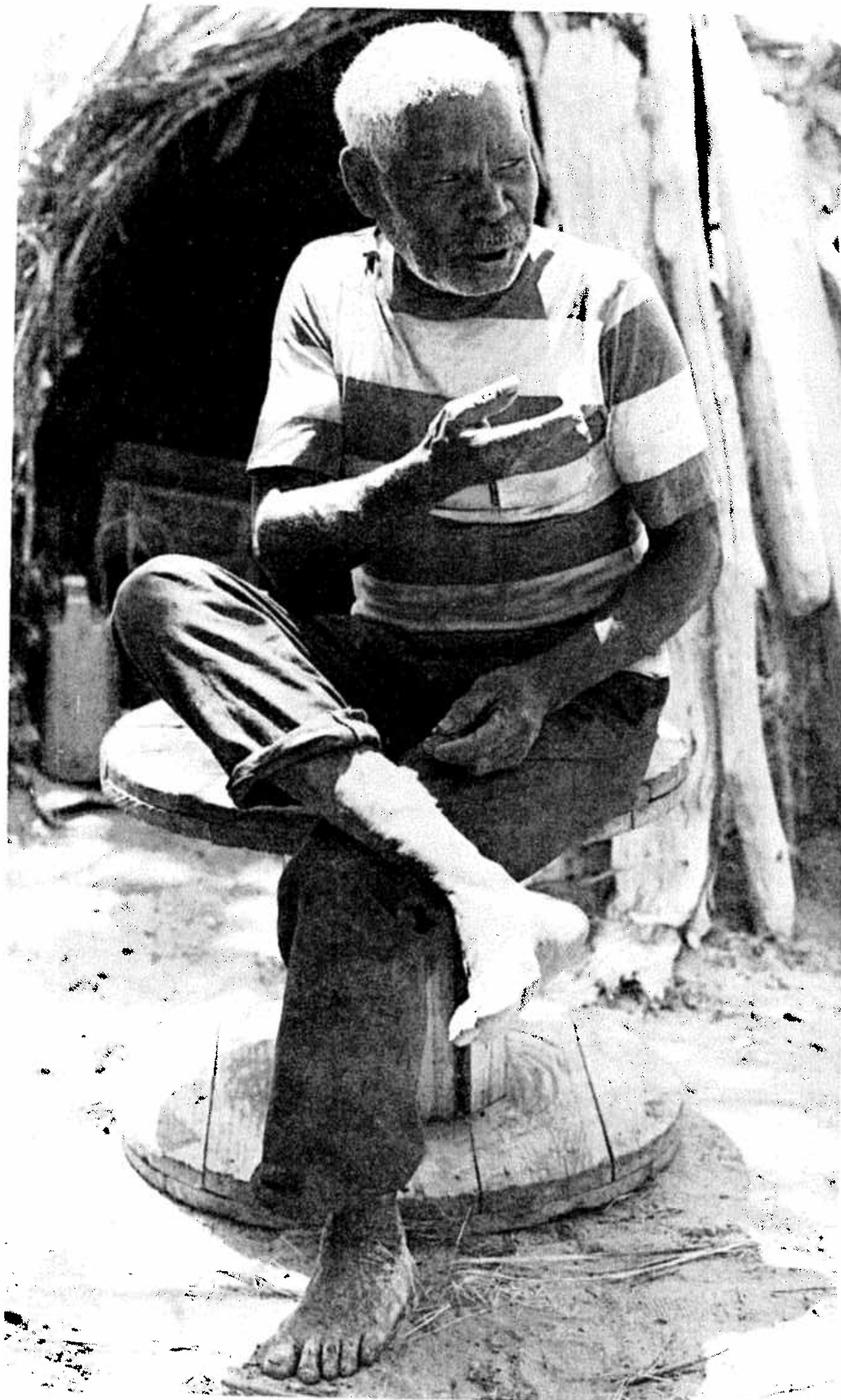

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IV

How to Talk to Your Brother-in-Law in Guugu Yimidhirr

John B. Haviland

1 EMBEDDED SPEECH

When people exchange words, there is usually much more to be said than that they are simply "speaking to one another."

"Howdy. My name's Maureen."

"Pleased to meet you. I'm Max."

"How are you, Max?"

"Fine, thanks."

In this dialogue the protagonists are not merely talking; they are introducing themselves. (They are saying hello—even though the word "hello" does not occur.) It is the fact that we can recognize this dialogue as a conventionalized greeting—and not, say, as an interrogation or an interview—that allows us to interpret the question "How are you?" quite differently from the same question addressed, for instance, to

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someone who has just fallen down a flight of stairs. The force of saying "My name's Maureen" as part of introducing oneself (which is partly to invite one's interlocutor to introduce him or herself in turn) is rather different from uttering the same words to *identify* oneself. ("Somebody named Maureen is wanted on the telephone." "My name's Maureen.")

Now compare the following conversation:

"How do you do? I am Dr. Maureen Smith."

> "I'm delighted to make your acquaintance, Dr. Smith. Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Gonzales, Max Gonzales."

"How are you, Mr. Gonzales?"

Although each sentence in the second dialogue has its counterpart in the first, we immediately see a difference in tone between the two conversations. The second dialogue portrays a more formal introduction than the first. For the moment we needn't try to say more exactly what the difference is. Partly it is a matter of different words—"meet you" and "make your acquaintance" are rather different turns of phrase. It is enough to see that even these sketchy hypothetical conversations are pregnant with information about their settings. (We might imagine the first dialogue occurring at an informal dancing party and the second at, say, a diplomatic cocktail party. We can even imagine how the protagonists might be dressed, how they are standing, and perhaps even how close together they are standing.) It is the settings that are more or less formal; the conversations are tailored to match them. People learn to speak as part of learning to live in the world. It is characteristic of speech that one fits one's words to the circumstances.

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Often, in fact, a speaker's choice of words helps to create or change those very circumstances. Imagine two different responses Max might offer to Dr. Smith's polite query "How are you, Mr. Gonzales?"

(1) "I'm quite well, thank you."

and:

(2) "Call me Max."

The first is a polite reply to the conventionalized greeting that maintains the formal style. The second invites Dr. Smith to drop the formal tone—and notice that the invitation is itself a suggestion about how to talk, rather than an explicit remark about greater informality.

These brief conversations display some notable properties of speech. First, we see that speaking is *embedded* in human activity. J. L. Austin pointed out that much action is accomplished through speech or

simply consists of speech. (One swears allegiance, or promises, by saying "I swear . . ." or "I promise . . ."; one gets married by saying "I do . . ."; and so on.) Examining the syntactic structure of sentences or the properties of words will be only a preliminary to an adequate study of the place of language in human life. Communicating information, or stating propositions, is only one sort of task that language accomplishes. Language also engenders and prompts, or prevents and hinders action. And a good deal of talk (including that in our hypothetical dialogue) establishes, reinforces, and changes social relationships between speakers.

Second, our examples demonstrate that speech mirrors features of the social context in which it occurs. When an occasion is formal, formal and stiff language is appropriate. Among specialists, specialized jargon emerges. Whether, in a given context, one says "damn!" or "darn!" "shit!" or "shucks!" is an *index*—a mark—of features of the situation. (Am I talking to maiden aunt, or roommate? Is this the church or the locker room? Did I bark my shin, or just bump my funny bone? Am I a seaman or a clergyman? And so on.) Politeness, formality, and propriety are features of human intercourse with reflexes in language. Correspondingly, impoliteness and impropriety also find linguistic expression. Speech can be antisocial and subversive, in form as well as in content. Speakers often turn conventions on their heads to surprise, to shock, and to snub. ("Hi, my name's Fred . . ." ". . . [silence] . . . .")

These are matters that involve not only the properties of language as a code but also the nature of speech in a social situation. It is a person's knowledge of such matters that allows him or her to understand "How are you?" as a greeting and not a request for information; or to interpret "Whose junk is this all over the floor?" more as a command than a question. And it is ignorance of such matters in a different language community, or deliberate violation of the conventions in one's own, that allows one to commit stylistic, lexical, and social blunders in speech, despite adequate grammar. (*Host*: "Will you have more to eat?" *Foreign guest*: "No, thank you, I'm fed up." *Court Clerk*: "Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?" *Wiseacre*: "You bet your ass!") Looking at the ways that speech merges with social life in other communities can put into illuminating counterpoint our own language practices.

Aboriginal Australians are celebrated for their highly complex social organization, in which people reckon their relationships to one another largely in terms of kinship. Amidst a complicated calculus of social identities that divided everyone into kin or spouse's kin, into friends, neighbors, and strangers, or into elders and juniors, many groups of these original Australians observed elaborate etiquette, treating some classes of people with extreme respect and caution and enjoying unrestrained and often ribald relations with others. Not surprisingly, this

social complexity is mirrored in correspondingly complex speech practices. In Australia, as elsewhere, respectful, restrained, formal speech differs markedly from ordinary talk, and again from joking, relaxed, or intentionally impolite and abusive language. For example, in the Guugu Yimidhirr language of Cooktown, in far North Queensland, the ordinary way to say "There is no food" is:

> *Mayi guya.* (lit.: "food not.")

But to speak respectfully to one's father-in-law or brother-in-law, one must say instead:

> *Gudhubay ngangarra.*

using special respectful equivalents in place of the ordinary words. Instead of *mayi*, one says *gudhubay* for "food"; instead of *guya* for "not," one says *ngangarra*. This chapter is about the special language of respect in Guugu Yimidhirr.

Throughout the discussion the reader should keep in mind two facts that we have uncovered about speech in our own society: first, that speech is part of action, that it performs work for its participants; and second, that speech adjusts itself to its surroundings—to the participants and to the social setting. Mechanisms of grammar—including the system of noun cases that we shall consider in the next section—along with the words or stems upon which such mechanisms act provide the tools for speech. However, it will be clear that no matter how much one knows about the formal properties of the language (for example, how to conjugate verbs or decline nouns) to speak Guugu Yimidhirr properly is to be embedded deeply in a particular social environment.

2 THE LANGUAGE OF COOKTOWN

On the eleventh of June, 1770, H.M. Bark *Endeavour*, with Lt. James Cook in command, struck a coral reef while exploring northwards along the east coast of Australia. The ship began to take water. After Cook directed his men to throw overboard extra weight in the form of guns, ballast, and rotting provisions, the ship again floated and slowly made its way to the mainland for repairs. Cook discovered a good harbor at the mouth of a river, and ultimately, by Friday the twenty-second, he brought the ship to shore where his men could examine and repair the damage. The river was named the Endeavour, and the spot where the *Endeavour* was beached became the site of the gold boom town Cooktown in North Queensland.

Cook first spied a strange animal "of a light mouse Colour and the full size of a Grey Hound, and shaped in every respect like one, with a

long tail, which it carried like a Grey Hound; in short I should have taken it for a wild dog but for its walking or running, in which it jumped like a Hare or Deer."[1] On July 3 some of the Endeavour's crew scouting for a passage through the reef to the North and searching at the same time for food, came upon a party of natives, who scattered at their approach. On July 11, one month after the accident that had brought the *Endeavour* to shore, a small party of Aborigines appeared on the shore of the river and ultimately approached the ship. According to Cook's Journal:

> . . . they were wholly naked, their Skins the Colour of Wood soot, and this seemed to be their Natural Colour. Their Hair was black, lank, and cropt short . . . . Some part of their Bodys had been painted with red, and one of them had his upper lip and breast painted with Streakes of white, which he called *Carbanda*. Their features were far from being disagreeable; their Voices were soft and Tunable, and they could easily repeat any word after us, but neither us nor Tupia could understand one word they said.[2]

Cook and his men were not long in learning from the natives that the strange animal that they had, by then, taken to shooting and eating, was called "Kangooroo or Kanguru." Cook, the botanist Joseph Banks, and members of the crew in fact collected more than sixty words from the "New Holland language" of the Endeavour River. These word lists from the Guugu Yimidhirr language still spoken around Cooktown were the first written records of an Australian language—just as Cook's men were the first Europeans ever to see a kangaroo. (In Guugu Yimidhirr *gangurru* is the name for a species of large, black kangaroo now rarely seen near the coast.)

Despite the fact that the *Endeavour* put to sea again in early August 1770 and that the Aboriginal inhabitants of that area were not again to be visited by white men in great numbers for nearly a century, they as well managed to learn a good deal from Cook about Europeans. On July 19 Cook reports that a party of Endeavour River natives visited the ship, evidently with a thought to sharing in the crew's meal of freshly caught sea turtle:

> Those that came on board were very desirous of having some of our Turtles, and took the liberty to haul 2 of them to the Gangway to put over the side; being disappointed in this they grew a little Troublesome, and were for throwing every thing overboard they could lay their hands upon. As we had no Victuals dress'd at this time, I offer'd them some bread to Eat, which they rejected with Scorn, as I believe they would have done anything else excepting Turtle . . . .

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[1]James Cook, *Captain Cook's Journal During His First Voyage Around the World Made in H.M. Bark* Endeavour, *1768–71.* Facsimile edition, State Library of South Australia, 1968, p. 281. (Also of relevance is John B. Haviland, "A Last Look at Cook's Guugu Yimidhirr Word List," *Oceania* XLIV 3 (1974): 216–32.)
[2]Cook, op. cit., p. 286.

After returning to shore the Aborigines remained "troublesome":

> ...[T]hey all went to a place where some of our people were washing, and where all our nets and a good deal of linen were laid out to dry; here with the greatest obstinacy they again set fire to the grass, which I and some others who were present could not prevent, until I was obliged to fire a Musquet load with small Shott at one of the Ring leaders, which sent them off"[3]

Friendly relations were soon again established, although the Natives showed the good sense, "whether through Jealousy or disregard," never to bring "any of their women along with them to the Ship," leaving them always "on the Opposite side of the River, where we had frequent Opportunities viewing them thro' our Glasses."[4]

After the *Endeavour* departed, the Guugu Yimidhirr–speaking natives of the area were spared more visits by white men in any numbers for the next hundred years. Some explorers came near in the 1840s, and in the previous two decades some ships had surveyed the area. But it was only the discovery of gold on the Palmer River in September 1873, inland from the spot where Cook had beached his ship, that brought Europeans (and later Chinese) in great hordes to the territory of the Guugu Yimidhirr and neighboring tribes. So numerous had the miners and prospectors become that in October 1873 the need was felt to open a port to supply them. A cutter was sent to land at Cook's original landing spot at the mouth of the Endeavour and to establish a camp. By early November there had been several major battles between the diggers bound for the gold fields and the Aboriginal natives of the area, almost certainly including Guugu Yimidhirr speakers or their close relatives. By February 1874, the height of the wet season, Cooktown was "a roaring, cosmopolitan, gold boom town, with hundreds of wood and iron buildings crowding both sides of two-mile-long Charlotte street, which ran from the wharves out to the beginning of the Palmer road, and dotting the bush on either side of it."[5] By 1876 Cooktown was a major seaport, surpassed only by Brisbane in the volume of its trade. The town had a population of over four thousand, of whom some two thousand were Chinese; and these figures do not include the estimated six thousand European and seventeen thousand Chinese miners in the gold fields.

Amidst this incredible invasion, the original inhabitants had little hope, indeed. According to the earliest reports, the policy of European gold hunters towards Aborigines was one of "dispersion"—a euphemism for massacre by rifle. No doubt some Aborigines found their way into

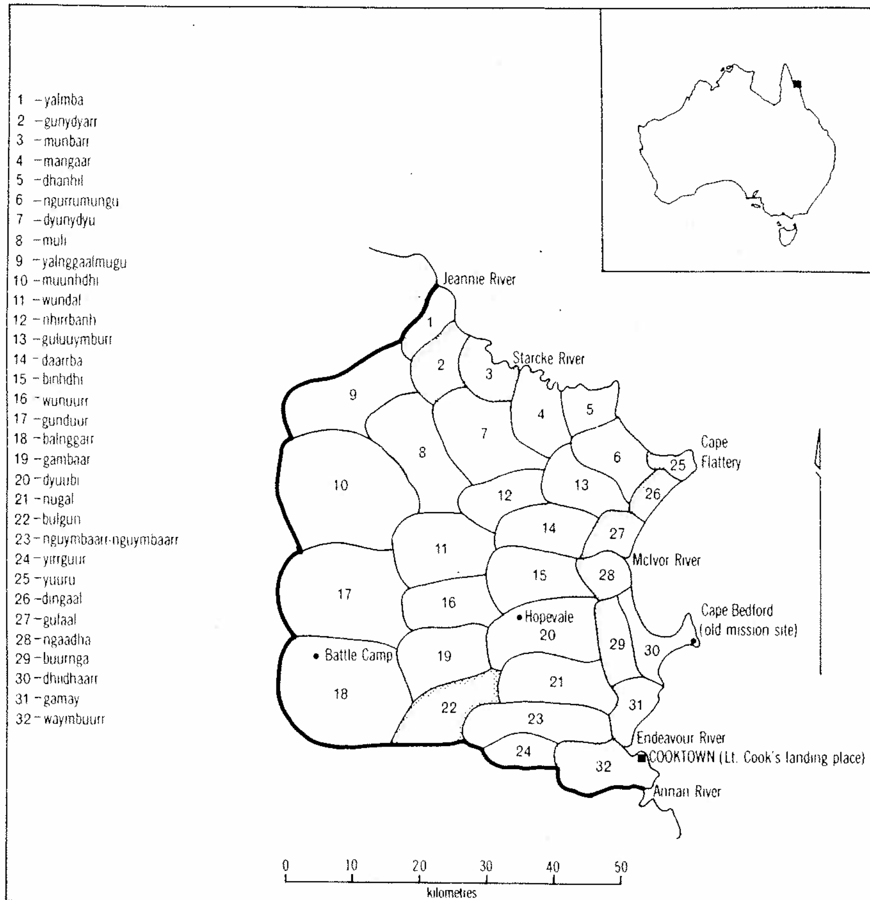
[3]Ibid., p. 289.
[4]Ibid., p. 319.
[5]Hector Holthouse, *River of Gold: The Story of the Palmer River Goldrush* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1967), p. 53.

the new town, for G. C. Bolton reports that by 1885 Cooktown imposed on Aborigines a formal curfew after dark.[6] Travelers on Cape York toward the end of the 1880s who bothered to pay any attention to Aborigines reported wholesale slaughter, as well as kidnappings of women and children, and addiction to alcohol and opium.

There were also, inevitably, missionaries, following close on the heels of the gold diggers, who probably offered timely sanctuary to the local Cooktown Aborigines. In January 1886 a Lutheran missionary en route to New Guinea established a mission among Guugu Yimidhirr–speaking Aborigines at Cape Bedford, some thirty miles north of Cooktown. The next year the Reverend G. H. Schwarz arrived from Germany to take over the mission, which was christened Hope Valley, or Hopevale. And although the Palmer gold was exhausted after ten years and Cooktown itself largely abandoned after being destroyed by a cyclone in 1907 and never rebuilt, Schwarz remained at Hopevale, with his community of newly Lutheran Aborigines, until 1942 when the entire mission population was relocated because of World War II.

Before the European invasion, Guugu Yimidhirr was spoken in an area that extended inland from the mouth of the Endeavour to a place called Battle Camp (named after that first bloody encounter between a party of diggers heading for the Palmer and a large group of armed Aborigines). Dialects of the language were spoken to the north past Cape Bedford and the McIvor River to the present Starcke station and from there inland to the source of the Jack River. Most of the natives of these and surrounding regions were at the mercy of encroaching Europeans: first the gold seekers and fishermen who scoured the coast for beche-de-mer (a giant sea slug, much esteemed in dried form in Chinese cookery), and later the settlers. Hopevale and its sister mission to the south at Bloomfield River became receptacles for the Aborigines driven from elsewhere. (Neither mission site was of much use to settlers: Hopevale was described as "mainly on rock and sand"; and the site of the Bloomfield mission seemed, according to an early report, to have been selected by some "evil genius."[7]) Here was somewhere to take children who survived "dispersion," especially children of mixed white and Aboriginal ancestry who could not be suffered to grow up uncivilized. Children brought to the mission, usually without their families, were interned at the mission school at Cape Bedford. A few adults lived in camps on mission territory and seem to have been reliable aides to native police and local landowners in monitoring the movements of other Aborigines—especially those who worked on nearby properties—

[6]G. C. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away: A History of North Queensland to 1920* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1970) p. 96.
[7]C. D. Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, Pelican Books, 1970) p. 177.



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through the area. Hopevale, like other missions, was used to institutionalize, educate, and isolate Aborigines, who had by then become dwellers on the fringes of towns and properties. Many people found themselves transported to the far north from distant areas of Queensland—one of the oldest inhabitants of the mission, now in his eighties, was brought to Hopevale as a lad of six from Bowen, in the south. In fact, of the native Guugu Yimidhirr speakers who were able to lay ancestral claim to the area around Cooktown, rather few survived to live under mission protection.

Nonetheless, Guugu Yimidhirr came to be the language of the community. The Hopevale Lutheran "Order of Services," translated into Guugu Yimidhirr by Reverend Schwarz and published in 1946, puts the matter this way:

> It is an interesting experience that the Aboriginals on the Cape Bedford Reserve, though not all of them were members of the Cooktown tribe, and though in the mission school they received all their instructions in the English language, among themselves always used the vernacular of the district, the Koko Yimidir dialect. They possess and read their English Bibles, and sing from the English Hymn Book, but their own tongue, the Koko Yimidir, speaks direct to their hearts, and their souls yearn to hear the Word of life in their native tongue, the Koko Yimidir.[8]

FIGURE 4.1 The Traditional Territory of Guugu Yimidhirr–Speaking People

The traditional territory of Guugu Yimidhirr–speaking people covered a wide area northwest of Cooktown in Northern Queensland. It was divided into thirty-two named locales (listed on the map), each with a dominant family group, and each with sacred places and favorite hunting spots. The shaded lines show major dialect areas. The dhalun-dhirr *("with the sea") dialect was spoken in locales 25–32. The* waguurr-ga *("of the outside") dialect was spoken in the remainder of the territory, except in locales 1, 2, 3, and 22, where individual dialect names have survived: Guugu Nyiiguudyi in 1, Guugu Nyalaadyi in 2, Guugu Yinaa in 3, and Guugu Diirrurru in 22.*

The map shows Lt. Cook's landing place at Cooktown on the Endeavour River and Battle Camp, scene of the first great battle between miners bound for the Palmer River gold fields and the aboriginal owners of the land. It shows the old mission site at Cape Bedford and its present location at Hopevale, where most of the surviving speakers of Guugu Yimidhirr and surrounding languages now live.

Traditionally marriages were contracted between individuals from widely separated locales. For example, one man from Dyunydyu *(7) married two sisters from* Balnggarr *(18) some fifty kilometers away. Guugu Yimidhirr people had extensive contacts with, and often married, speakers of neighboring languages—Gugu Yalandji to the South, the Barrow Point and Flinders Island languages to the North, and the so-called Guugu Warra and "Lama-Lama" languages to the West. The whole area formed a single large society, with the same basic kinship system, in which an individual spoke and understood several different languages in addition to his or her own native tongue.*

People have continued to come to Hopevale from other areas, but their own native or ancestral languages, if they still knew them when they arrived, have been largely submerged under the dominant local language.

Much remains to be learned about the recent history of the Hopevale Mission. Its residents clearly worked in large numbers cutting cane on sugar plantations farther down the coast. They have been, among other things, stockmen, sand miners, evangelists, seamen, professional boxers, and beche-de-mer fishermen. During World War II Reverend Schwarz was interned as a German alien, and the entire mission population was moved south to a large reserve inland from Rockhampton. There the colder climate decimated the Hopevale population. When,

[8]Board of the Lutheran Mission, Hope Valley, *Order of Service and Hymns* (Brisbane, Australia: Watson, Ferguson and Co., 1946) p. 2.

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FIGURE 4.2 Avoidance

Fred Jacko (also shown in the photograph at the beginning of this chapter), the son of an important Guugu Yimidhirr leader from the Starcke River, and now in his fifties, is one of the few remaining people at Hopevale who still remembers and uses the respectful "brother-in-law" style of speaking. He uses the avoidance language here, for example, in conversation with another man who married a woman Fred classed as his granddaughter. In such a relationship, both men not only use the respectful vocabulary; they sit far apart, orient their bodies so as not to face one another, and avoid direct eye contact.

after the war, Hopevale was resettled (without Reverend Schwarz) inland from the original site at Cape Bedford, most of the old people who had once known life in the bush had not survived.

Hopevale is now a small community of six hundred permanent residents (and a dozen missionary staff). It is a community in most ways more substantial than nearby Cooktown, which Holthouse describes as "a shabby shell in which about five hundred contented people potter about, fish, and sip an occasional beer. . . ."[9] The population is transitory. Many of the men work elsewhere; some nearby mine silica at Cape Flattery; others work in distant cities or towns. Some young

[9]Holthouse, op. cit., p. 209.

people, after finishing boarding school in the south, simply stay away, returning only to spend Christmas with family, at the beach near the old mission site, and singing some of those English hymns, now supplemented by a few Guugu Yimidhirr hymns written by an energetic Aboriginal minister.

Children still are taught in the white man's language, learning to read and write only in English. Although everyone speaks Guugu Yimidhirr, very few people are comfortable speaking *only* Guugu Yimidhirr. Instead, their language is full of English words and phrases, and detectable changes in Guugu Yimidhirr syntax and pronunciation are taking place. Much of the special linguistic knowledge about how to speak to a brother-in-law, or how to be especially polite (or impolite) is now lost, or confined to a handful of older people at Hopevale. The linguistic knowledge has faded, even though the social principles that motivated special speech remain matters of concern to Guugu Yimidhirr people. (The author apologizes in advance for saying so little about Guugu Yimidhirr women's speech, an omission that reflects serious gaps in his own knowledge and experience.) Perhaps the bits of information recorded here will contribute to some fate for Guugu Yimidhirr —whatever changes it may undergo—other than extermination.

3 THE GUUGU YIMIDHIRR LANGUAGE

Guugu Yimidhirr is in most respects a typical Australian language, sharing many features with the roughly two hundred other languages that faced the European takeover of Australia. For one thing, spoken Guugu Yimidhirr *sounds* like other Australian languages. It has only three vowels, *a*, *i*, and *u*, although long vowels (here written doubled) differ from short ones. For example, the word *bala* means "skinny" or "weak"; but the word *baalaa* denotes a kind of tree with a black, edible fruit. Guugu Yimidhirr also uses a number of sounds, called "laminals," produced with the blade of the tongue; the sounds represented as *dh* and *nh* are produced by pushing the tongue against the back of the front teeth so that it almost protrudes. (*Dh* sounds a bit like the *th* in *there*; *nh* sounds like an *n* pronounced with the tongue in the same position.) The sounds *dy* and *ny* result from putting the tongue against the roof of the mouth and sound something like the *j* of *judge* or the *ny* of *canyon*. There is also a difference between the "flap" or "trilled" *rr* and the single *r* which resembles the *r* of *rat*, with the tongue curled back. (The laminal sounds and the retroflex *r* are particularly common in Australian languages.) For the most part, the other sounds of Guugu Yimidhirr are pronounced much as their spellings suggest. The *ng* sound of Guugu Yimidhirr is like the *ng*'s of *singing* (and not like the *ng* of *finger*, which would be written in Guugu Yimidhirr

Yimidhirr a word can begin with *ng*: *ngaabaay* "head." Notice that there are no "fricative" sounds like English *s*, *z*, *f*, or *v*, and, finally, that there is no contrast in Guugu Yimidhirr between voiced and unvoiced consonants: *b* sometimes sounds like *p*, or *d* like *t*.

Guugu Yimidhirr also resembles other Australian languages in having a highly developed system of noun morphology. The specific form a noun takes in a sentence delimits the role of the corresponding person or thing in the event described. The system is extremely elaborate, allowing a Guugu Yimidhirr speaker to pack a good deal of meaning into a simple ending on a noun. The overall system and its detailed elaborations are worth our attention in this chapter, for such productive devices are among the verbal resources Guugu Yimidhirr provides to its speakers for accomplishing verbal tasks, or for endowing speech with a character appropriate to specific social situations.

3.1 Guugu Yimidhirr Pronouns

Let us transpose our original dialogue into a Guugu Yimidhirr setting. How does one introduce oneself in Guugu Yimidhirr? Or, to imagine a more likely situation—since most speakers of Guugu Yimidhirr know one another in the first place—how does one perform a greeting, or "say hello," at the Hopevale Mission?

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Wanhdharra, dhawuunh? Nyundu ganaa?

Howdy, friend. Are you well?

Ngayu ganaa. Nyundu ganaa?

I'm fine. Are you well?

The word *wanhdharra* (which means "how") is a normal greeting for friends, corresponding to "howdy" or "what's up?" or "how are you?" *Dhawuunh* means "friend." Another informal greeting is:

Wanhdharraga?

How are ya?

in which the suffix *-ga* conveys still more informality. The word *ganaa* means "all right, well, fine, okay."

The pronouns of a language are called "pro-nouns" because they are said to *stand for* nouns. When we say:

George likes fried grasshoppers, but Mary abhors them.

we have used the pronoun *them* to stand for the full noun phrase *fried*

grasshoppers; this device allows us to avoid repetition without sacrificing clarity. (We know that it is fried grasshoppers that Mary abhors.) And pronominalization allows us to replace extremely long and complex noun phrases with single monosyllables. For example:

The head dogcatcher's one-eyed son went out to look for the spotted black-and-white cocker spaniel that George lost at the creek. Did he find it?

But there is another sort of pronoun that does not, in any straightforward sense, stand for a full noun phrase and that illustrates a basic sense in which all languages are embedded in the speech contexts of their use. When a Guugu Yimidhirr speaker says to his friend:

Nyundu ganaa?

Are you well?

he uses the pronoun *nyundu* "you" not as a replacement for some full noun phrase, but rather as a pointer that denotes the friend, that is, the person to whom he addresses his words. In a similar way, there is no longer noun phrase which the pronoun *ngayu* stands for. (*Ngayu* denotes the speaker, but "I am sick" does not mean the same thing as "The speaker is sick.") All languages must have this kind of word (called *a deictic* pronoun or *shifter*) in order to situate utterances in their typical contexts, such as when two people speak to one another about their own affairs or about the circumstances in which they find themselves. (Words like *this*, *here*, and *now* depend in the same way on the contexts of their occurrence and have shifting reference.)

The pronouns of Guugu Yimidhirr are somewhat different from English pronouns. We have seen *ngayu* "I" and *nyundu* "you." Here are a few more:

Nyulu Billy ganaa?

Is Billy OK?

Nyulu ganaa.

He's OK.

Nyulu Mary ganaa galmba?

Is Mary OK too?

Nyulu galmba ganaa.

She too is fine.

galmba also, too

Nyulu can mean both "he" and "she"; it can also mean "it" when it replaces, for example, a noun like *gudaa* "dog."

Nhanu gudaa ganaa?

Is your dog OK?

Nyulu gaari ganaa. Nyulu biini.

It's not OK. It died.

nhanu your (Second person singular possessive)
gaari not
biinii die

(Each new word will be glossed as it appears in the examples that follow. For words you have seen before but whose meanings you can't remember, you should consult the full glossary at the end of the chapter.) However, unlike English, Guugu Yimidhirr has no pronoun that can stand for an inanimate noun, a thing.

Nhanu galga wanhdhaa?

Where is your spear?

Gadabadhi.

(It) broke.

galga spear
wanhdhaa where?
gadabal break, be broken

One cannot say here:

**Nyulu gadabadhi.*

because *nyulu* can only be used to replace a noun that denotes some animate entity, not a spear. Here, then, the Guugu Yimidhirr system of pronouns has only one word, *nyulu*, where English has three: "he," "she," and "it." But Guugu Yimidhirr also distinguishes between certain sorts of nouns that can be replaced by a pronoun and others that cannot.

Notice that a sentence like:

Nyulu Billy ganaa.

would be translated, word for word, "He Billy is OK." That is, the word *nyulu* is not simply standing for the noun *Billy* but actually occurs together with it. We might think of this doubling up of pronoun and noun as a device both to highlight the topic of the remark and to tell us,

among other things, that Billy is a person (or at least an animate being) because an inanimate thing could not generate the word *nyulu*.

Where English has different pronouns for singular and plural, Guugu Yimidhirr distinguishes a further set of forms; it has pronouns that denote exactly two people, called "dual" forms.

Nyundu dhadaa?

Are you going to go?

Yuu, ngayu dhadaa.

Yes, I'm going to go.

Ngayu galmba dhadaa.

I too am going to go.

Ma, ngali dhadaa gulbuuygu.

Come, we'll go together (the two of us).

dhadaa go
gulbuuygu together

Ngali means "you and I"—that is, it includes just the speaker and the hearer. Another pronoun, *ngaliinh*, is called an 'exclusive' form because it indicates the speaker and one other person who is *not* the hearer. It thus means "he/she and I (but not you)." *Yubaal* means "you two," and *bula* "the two of them." Notice how one says "X and Y" for animate things:

Dharramali bula Wurrbal

Thunder and Fog

Thunder and Fog are mythical beings, here conceived as animate. Inanimate things are conjoined by simply putting them together with no overt equivalent for "and."

yugu nambal

stick(s) and stone(s)

Table 4.1 shows all the different 'personal pronouns' in Guugu Yimidhirr.

A pronoun like *ngayu*, as we have seen, is a kind of pointer that each speaker can use to talk about himself or herself. However the precise *form* of the pronoun tells us something about its syntactic function in a sentence. One way of putting this is to say that the form of the pronoun

TABLE 4.1 Guugu Yimidhirr Personal Pronouns

1st person (inclusive)	1st person (exclusive)	2nd person	3rd person	
ngayu		nyundu	nyulu	**singular**
ngali	ngaliinh	yubaal	bula	**dual**
nganhdhaan		yurra	dhana	**plural**

ngayu depends on the role of the speaker in the action or event he or she is describing.

Ngayu ganaa.
I'm well.

Ngayu dhadaa.
I'm going to go.

In both these sentences, *ngayu* is the subject: it represents the person who is well, or the person who is going.

Ngayu Billy nhaadhi.
I saw Billy.

nhaadhi saw

In this sentence, the same form, *ngayu*, represents the fact that *I* am the one who saw Billy. We see that *ngayu* corresponds exactly to the English word "I"; it refers to the speaker, and it is the form appropriate to the subject of a sentence. This subject form of a pronoun is often called the "nominative" form. Similarly, the word *nyundu* is the nominative form of the second-person singular pronoun (the one that refers to the hearer).

Nyundu ganaa.
You are OK.

Nyundu dhadaa.
You are going to go.

Nyundu Billy nhaadhi.
You saw Billy.

Now, how do I say that the person with whom I am speaking saw *me*? First let's recall how we say this in English.

You saw Billy.

I saw Billy.

You saw me.

Notice first the order of the parts in these sentences. The subject (the person who did the seeing) comes first, followed by the verb, and then by the object (the person who was seen). Second, notice that when the subject is in the first person (i.e., is the speaker) the form of the pronoun is nominative—"I." But when there is a first-person object, the form of the pronoun is "me"; in English this is the "objective" or "accusative" form of the pronoun. (Similarly there are accusative forms of "he" and "she"; and what are the accusative forms of "you" and "it"? These are, of course, extremely elementary facts about English.) The situation in Guugu Yimidhirr is similar.

Nyundu Billy nhaadhi.
You saw Billy.

Ngayu Billy nhaadhi.
I saw Billy.

Nyundu nganhi nhaadhi.
You saw me.

Notice that the typical order here is different from English: instead of the order Subject–Verb–Object, Guugu Yimidhirr has the order Subject–Object–Verb. Moreover, we can see that the Guugu Yimidhirr first-person singular pronoun also has an accusative form; *nganhi* corresponds to *me*. You can see some of the other accusative forms in the following sentences.

Ngayu nhina nhaadhi.
I saw you.

Nyulu nganhi nhaadhi.
He saw me.

Ngayu nhangu daamay.
I speared him.

daamal spear

First we can see that Guugu Yimidhirr is more systematic than English about distinguishing nominative from accusative forms. In the sentences:

You saw it.

It saw you.

only the order of the words determines what (or who) saw what (or whom). But in Guugu Yimidhirr each pronoun has an accusative form distinct from its nominative form.

Nyundu nhangu nhaadhi.

You saw him.

Nyulu nhina nhaadhi.

He saw you.

One corollary of this specificity of forms is that the precise order of words in a Guugu Yimidhirr sentence is rather variable. Although

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TABLE 4.2 Nominative and Accusative Forms of Guugu Yimidhirr Personal Pronouns

1st person (inclusive)	**1st person** (exclusive)	**2nd person**	**3rd person**	
ngayu		nyundu	nyulu	**singular** **nom.**
nganhi		nhina	nhangu	**acc.**
ngali	ngaliinh	yubaal	bula	**dual** **nom.**
ngalingan/ ngaliin	ngalinhun	yubalin	bulangan/ bulaan	**acc.**
nganhdhaan		yurra	dhana	**plural** **nom.**
nganhdhanun		yurrangan/ yurraan	dhanangan/ dhanaan	**acc.**

Note: The alternate accusative forms are dialectal variants.

ordinarily a sentence follows Subject–Object–Verb order, this is by no means always the case.

Billy ngayu nhaadhi.

I saw Billy.

Nhina nhaadhi ngayu.

I saw you.

Nhaadhi nhangu nyundu.

You saw him.

There can be no confusion about who did what to whom since each pronoun is unambiguously marked as either subject (nominative form) or object (accusative form). Table 4.2 shows the accusative forms of Guugu Yimidhirr personal pronouns.

(The reader might try to formulate a concise statement of the shape of alternate accusative forms for dual and plural pronouns. Which pronouns have alternate forms, and how are they formed? Notice that some non-singular pronouns end with consonants and others with vowels.)

3.2 The Dative Case and Possession

So far we have distinguished several different relationships that a person (denoted by a pronoun) can have to the action or event depicted in a sentence. In sentences with intransitive verbs there is a subject; in those with transitive verbs there is a subject (who is typically the actor) and an object. A third sort of sentence, typically one that describes some sort of giving, has an actor (the person who gives), an object (the thing given), and a beneficiary (or indirect object: the person to whom the object is given). In English, the indirect object form of a pronoun is like the object form, and it often occurs with the preposition *to*.

He gave me water.

He gave water to me.

I brought you food.

I brought food to you.

In Guugu Yimidhirr there are distinct indirect object (or 'dative') forms of the first- and second-person singular pronouns.

Nyulu ngadhu buurraay wudhi.

He gave me water.

Ngayu nhanu mayi maandi.

I brought you food.

buurraay water
wudhi gave
mayi food, vegetable food
maandii bring
maandi brought (past tense of *maandii*)

For the other persons and numbers, the dative and accusative forms are the same.

Nyundu nhangu mayi wudhi.

You gave him food.

Dhana ngaliin mayi maandi.

They brought us two food.

When a noun is the indirect object of a transitive verb, then it combines with a special ending or suffix to give its dative form. The suffix is *-bi* if the noun ends in a consonant and *-wi* if it ends in a vowel.

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Ngayu Billy-wi mayi wudhi.

I gave food to Billy.

Nyulu dyin-guurr-bi minha maandi.

He brought meat to his sister.

dyin-gurr younger sister
minha meat

(Notice that the word *dyin-gurr* "sister" changes to *dyin-guurr-* when the suffix *-bi* is added. Most noun endings in Guugu Yimidhirr cause such lengthening on words of two syllables if the word ends with a consonant other than *n*. Be on the lookout for lengthening in the later examples.)

The dative form is used in another, clearly related meaning, which we have already seen in the phrase *nhanu gudaa* "your dog": it expresses what might be called ordinary possession.

buurraay ngadhu

my water

mayi nhanu

your food

nhangu ganggal

his/her child

ngaliin bayan

our house (of the two of us)

ganggal child
bayan house

Similarly, noun possessors require the dative suffix.

yarrga-wi galga

the boy's spear

ganggaal-bi mayi

the child's food

yarrga boy
galga spear

Dative forms of nouns and pronouns are used to express sentences that in English would use the verb "have."

Bayan nhangu wunaa.

He has a house. (lit.: his house exists.)

Mayi gabiirr-bi guya.

The girl has no food.

wunaa exist
gabiirr girl
guya lacking, nonexistent, not

Table 4.3 summarizes the different dative forms for nouns and pronouns.

All languages have shifters, including personal pronouns, that connect speech to the world by pointing at objects (or places or moments); demonstratives like *this* and *that* (and *here* and *now*) have this character. One particular act we perform frequently in speech is to give something its name, or to identify it.

Yiyi ngadhu bayan.

This is my house.

Nhayun bama ngadhu biiba.

That man is my father.

TABLE 4.3 Dative Case Marking

1. Personal Pronouns

(a) First and second singular have distinct forms:

1st person sing.		**2nd person sing.**		
ngayu	"I"	nyundu	"you"	**nominative**
nganhi		nhina		**accusative**
ngadhu		nhanu		**dative**

(b) For all other personal pronouns, the dative form is the same as the accusative form (see Table 4.2).

2. Nouns

(a) If the noun ends in a consonant, add *-bi*. (The second syllable of a two-syllable word ending in a consonant other than *-n* is lengthened.)

dyin-gurr	younger sister	*dyin-guurr-bi*	to the sister, the sister's
yarraman	horse	*yarraman-bi*	to the horse, the horse's

(b) If the noun ends in a vowel, add *-wi*.

yarrga	boy	*yarrga-wi*	to the boy, the boy's

Yiyi yugu.

This is (called) "yugu" (wood).

yiyi this, here
bama person (especially Aboriginal person)
nhayun that, there
biiba father
yugu wood

Notice that in Guugu Yimidhirr there is no separate word corresponding to the English word *is*. In equational sentences (of the form "X is Y") Guugu Yimidhirr simply puts X and Y together.

3.3 Subjects and Objects

Let's look again at the nominative pronouns. These forms are used in two different sorts of context: as subjects of intransitive verbs:

Ngayu ganaa.

I'm well.

Ngayu dhadaa.

I'm going to go.

and as subjects of transitive verbs:

Ngayu Billy nhaadhi.

I saw Billy.

Ngayu nhanu mayi maandii.

I'll bring you food.

Since these two 'functions' both employ the nominative forms, and since in both cases the pronoun serves as the 'subject' of the verb, on what grounds may one distinguish the two cases at all? For one thing, not all Guugu Yimidhirr pronouns have a single form that can occupy both sorts of position. Consider the interrogative pronoun *wanhu*.

Wanhu gaga-dhirr?

Who is sick?

Wanhu dhadaara?

Who is going?

gaga-dhirr sick

These intransitive sentences are correct, but it is impossible to say:

**Wanhu nhanu mayi wudhi?*

(Who gave you food?)

Instead, Guugu Yimidhirr has an entirely different word, *wanhdhu*, that serves precisely as the subject of transitive verbs.

Wanhdhu nhanu mayi wudhi?

Who gave you food?

Wanhdhu Billy nhaadhi?

Who saw Billy?

And although a transitive verb cannot have *wanhu* as its subject, it *can* have *wanhu* as its object.

Nyundu wanhu nhaadhi?

Whom did you see?

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If we diagram the pronoun forms that can serve in various capacities—as subjects and objects in intransitive and transitive sentences—we see two patterns. (Refer to Table 4.4.) In one case, the same form (*ngayu*) is used for subjects of both intransitive and transitive verbs, and a special accusative form is used for the objects of transitive verbs. In the other case, the same form serves as the subject of intransitive verbs and object of transitive verbs, and a special form (*wanhdhu*) is required as the subject of transitive verbs. The first pattern, with a nominative case for subjects and an accusative case for objects, is common throughout the world and predominates in the well-known languages of Europe. (Russian is a typical nominative/accusative language—see Chapter III in the companion volume. English once had this pattern for all nominal expressions and, as we have seen, retains it for pronouns.) The second pattern, in which the form used for intransitive subjects and transitive objects is often called the "absolutive" form and the special form for transitive subjects the "ergative," is considerably less frequent; although languages that display this pattern in some parts of their grammatical systems are widely distributed, occurring in every continent. In Guugu Yimidhirr both patterns coexist in the marking on nouns and pronouns; for in Guugu Yimidhirr nouns and a few pronouns follow the absolutive/ergative pattern, while personal pronouns follow the nominative/accusative pattern. (Some American Indian languages show the same split between an ergative/absolutive pattern for nouns and a nominative/accusative pattern for pronouns. Georgian, a language of the Caucasus, has an ergative pattern with perfective sentences but not with those in other tenses or aspects. A similar split holds in Yucatec, which like other Mayan languages—including Jacaltec [see Chapter I]—exhibits an ergative/absolutive pattern not by noun suffixes but in the system of pronominal cross-reference on verbs.)

Let's examine the ergative/absolutive pattern more closely. The greetings now complete, our hypothetical conversation continues.

Ngayu gaga-dhirr.

I'm not feeling well.

TABLE 4.4 Two Patterns of Subject/Object Marking

Transitive subject	*ngayu*	*wanhdhu*
Intransitive subject	*ngayu*	*wanhu*
Transitive object	*nganhi*	*wanhu*
	"I"	**"who"**

Ngaanii? Nyundu buli?

Why? Did you fall down?

Ngayu gaari buli. Nganhi dhuurrngay.

I didn't fall down. I was pushed.

ngaanii why?
bulii fall down

In this last sentence *dhuurrngay* is the past tense of the transitive verb *dhuurrngal* "push." And as we know *nganhi* is the accusative (or object) form of the first-person singular pronoun. Thus this sentence means, word for word, "me pushed"—roughly comparable to the English passive sentence "I was pushed." Another translation with an indefinite subject is possible: "Somebody pushed me." In Guugu Yimidhirr such a sentence with no overt subject is quite ordinary; the subject simply does not appear, and there is nothing special about the form of either object or verb.

The natural response now is to ask "*Who* did the pushing? *Who* pushed you?" (a question the reader should be able to construct from the words he or she already knows.) The special ergative form *wanhdhu* has precisely the properties needed to query the actor, the subject of the verb *dhuurrngay*, the pusher.

Wanhdhu nhina dhuurrngay?

Who pushed you?

Just as Guugu Yimidhirr allows transitive sentences with no overt subject, so too does it allow transitive sentences with no explicit object. Thus one can ask simply:

Wanhdhu dhuurrngay?

Who pushed?

Here, of course, the object is understood to be *nhina* "you"; prior conversation has already established who was pushed. (How do you think one might ask "Who got pushed?" Hint: use the "absolutive" form of the pronoun for "who.")

The first speaker, prodded by his interlocutor's questions, now reveals who the culprit was:

Billy-ngun nganhi dhuurrngay.

Billy pushed me.

Here all the parts of the sentence are familiar except the special ending *-ngun* on *Billy*. This is an ergative suffix that marks the proper noun *Billy* as the subject of *dhuurrngay*.

A noun with the *-ngun* suffix is functionally parallel to the form *wanhdhu*, and the unsuffixed noun is like the absolutive form *wanhu*. This is clear from the following sentences:

Billy dhadaa.
Billy is going to go.

Ngayu Billy nhaadhi.
I saw Billy.

Billy-ngun nganhi nhadhi.
Billy saw me.

As we can see from Table 4.5, the noun *Billy* follows the ergative/absolutive pattern of *wanhdhu*/*wanhu* rather than the nominative/accusative pattern of personal pronouns. In fact, all nouns in Guugu Yimidhirr follow the ergative/absolutive pattern. The unsuffixed form occurs when a noun is the subject of an intransitive verb or the object of a transitive verb; when a noun is the subject of a transitive verb, an ergative suffix is attached to it.

Yarrga-ngun nganhi gunday.
The boy hit me.

Yugu-ngun bayan dumbi.
The tree broke the house. (i.e., it fell and crushed it.)

***TABLE 4.5** Two Patterns of Subject/Object Marking: Personal Pronouns vs. Interrogative Pronouns and Nouns*

	"I"		"who"		"Billy"
Transitive subject	*ngayu*	(nominative)	*wanhdhu*	(ergative)	*Billy-ngun*
Intransitive subject	*ngayu*		*wanhu*	(absolutive)	*Billy*
Transitive object	*nganhi*	(accusative)	*wanhu*		*Billy*

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Yarraman-ngun nhina dhuurrngay.
The horse pushed you.

Gudaa-ngun yarrga dyinday.
The dog bit the boy.

gundal hit, kill
dumbil break
yarraman horse
dyindal bite, peck

Guugu Yimidhirr grammar here poses a puzzle for us: Why is there one pattern for pronouns but a different pattern for nouns? To find part of the answer requires that we examine more closely the sentence roles that different case markings distinguish (as such systems of special pronominal forms or of special noun endings are usually called). The nominative/accusative pattern marks subjects differently from objects; the ergative/absolutive patterns lump together intransitive subjects and transitive objects and distinguish these from transitive subjects. We can abbreviate these different sentence functions as follows: *S* means intransitive subject, *O* means transitive object, and *A* (for actor or agent) means transitive subject. Nouns in these different functions can have quite different roles in the actions described, depending on the meanings of the words involved.

Consider, first, the subjects of intransitive verbs (nouns in function *S*). An intransitive sentence by definition makes some statement about a single principal noun phrase.

The little dog laughed.
(Tells us what the little dog did.)

The stone rolled away.
(Tells us what happened to the stone.)

The plot thickened.
(. . . or to the plot.)

The funny little man split into a thousand pieces.
(. . . or to the funny little man.)

In intransitive sentences, the subject is sometimes the actor (the one who laughs, say), sometimes the patient (the one that rolls or splits), and sometimes merely the neutral receptacle for some predicated property (color, existence, etc.) Sometimes the subject is part actor and part patient, both inititiating action and undergoing its effects. Contrast:

The bird flew out the window.

(Subject is both agent and patient.)

The Frisbee flew out the window.

(Subject is patient only.)

or:

The child skipped.

The record skipped.

Thus a noun in *S* function can have one or more of a variety of roles in the event or action depicted in a sentence.

In a transitive sentence, on the other hand, there are typically two major noun phrases. The subject (function *A*) is usually an actor who does something; the object (function *O*) is the thing to which something is done, the patient.

The cat put the rat on the mat.

(Tells us what the cat did to the rat.)

The funny little man split the queen into a thousand pieces.

(Tells us how Rumplestiltskin repaid his tormentor.)

In most cases the actor will be animate, capable of independent initiative. The sentence will emphasize the actor's operation on the patient, whose own potential activity (if any) is thus deemphasized. (The rat isn't just *on* the mat; the cat put it there. She didn't just split; he split her.) Of course, not all transitive sentences, at least in English, fit this pattern, but this is the *typical* form of a transitive sentence.

The entities of the world thus fall into two natural categories. Some things—inanimate objects, stones, trees, food, etc.—are natural patients or objects, often acted upon but infrequently themselves actors. Other things—typically human beings, but also animals (occasionally machines, etc.)—are likely potential actors, capable of initiating and carrying out operations on other things.

For nouns that denote things in the first category, the absolutive/ergative patterning has a certain naturalness. Consider the following sentences:

The tree fell.

I felled the tree.

In both sentences more or less the same thing happens to the tree: it falls. In the first "tree" is the subject of the intransitive verb "fall"; in

the second it is the object of the transitive verb "fell." The word *yugu* "tree" has the same absolutive form in both the corresponding Guugu Yimidhirr sentences:

Yugu buli.

Ngayu yugu bandi.

bandil chop, fell

Many languages have verb pairs, like "fall" and "fell," that hold constant the relationship of the intransitive subject and the transitive object. Think of such English verbs as "roll" (intransitive) and "roll" (transitive—i.e., "cause to roll, set rolling"), "open" ("come to be open") and "open" ("cause to be open"), or even "die" and "kill." (Can you think of other such verb pairs? Can you think of any intransitive/transitive pairs that do *not* hold constant the relationship between *S* and *O* functions? See Chapter II for a discussion of this aspect of the grammar of Maninka verbs.) Guugu Yimidhirr also has a productive system of deriving from intransitive verbs corresponding "causative" transitive verbs, meaning "cause to X" where X is the intransitive verb.

Yugu buli.

The tree fell.

Ngayu yugu bulii-mani.

I made the tree fall.

Nambal duday.

The rock rolled away.

Yarrga-ngun nambal dudaay-mani.

The boy rolled the rock away.

nambal rock (also means "money")
dudaa run, roll

Nouns that denote inanimate, concrete things are natural subjects for the intransitive members of such verb pairs (which mean "something happened to ____") and similarly are natural objects for the corresponding transitive verbs (which mean "____ caused something to happen to ____").

Nouns that denote these "natural patients" *can* be subjects of transitive verbs as well. (That is, inanimate things can cause other things to happen, although they cannot properly be said to "act"). But it is precisely to such nouns that the special ergative ending attaches, in the *A* function.

Yugu-ngun bayan dumbi.

The tree crushed the house (i.e., by falling on it).

Galga-ngun nganhi daamay.

The spear speared me (i.e., it was thrown at me).

The unsuffixed absolutive form of such nouns thus coincides with their normal patient or object status (in functions *S* and *O*); the ergative form marks the atypical situations in which such nouns are in the *A* function.

On the other hand, the nominative/accusative pattern of case marking seems especially appropriate for first- and second-person pronouns. These words denote entities that clearly belong to the class of potential or likely actors: the people actually present, taking part in a conversation. Speaker and hearer are certainly *qualified* actors (being human, conscious, and active), whose own doings are salient topics for speech.

Ngayu buli.

I fell down.

Nyundu duday.

You ran away.

Ngali mayi budal.

We two will eat food.

budal eat

Personal pronouns in Guugu Yimidhirr exhibit normal nominative form when they act as subjects, in both *S* and *A* functions. It is on those occasions when they are robbed of activity—when they are the patients of the actions of others—that special accusative forms appear.

Nganhi daamay.

Somebody speared me.

Dyaarba-ngun nhina dudaay-mani.

The snake chased you (i.e., made you run).

dyaarba snake

It is thus the expected, normal situation when a pronoun is in the *A* function and an inanimate thing is in the *O* function.

Ngayu galga dumbi.

I broke the spear.

In such a case the pronoun is nominative and the noun is in absolutive form. A reversal of the expected roles (when the inanimate thing acts on me) engenders special forms of both pronoun and noun.

Galga-ngun nganhi daamay.

The spear speared me.

What becomes of nouns that denote likely or potential actors: nouns for humans, or for animals? As nouns, such words in Guugu Yimidhirr receive ergative/absolutive case marking. But it is these nouns that typically occur *together with* third-person pronouns, inflected on the nominative/accusative pattern. Let's look more closely at this situation.

We have already seen sentences in which a noun and a pronoun occur together.

Nyulu Billy ganaa.

Billy is OK. (lit., He Billy is OK.)

The subject of this intransitive sentence is *Billy*, a proper noun. The pronoun *nyulu* adjoined to it is seemingly redundant, although we have seen that it shows that Billy is an animate being (since the pronoun *nyulu* cannot stand for an inanimate noun.)

In fact, Guugu Yimidhirr as a rule adjoins a third-person pronoun to an animate (especially a human) noun in *S*, *O*, or *A* function. This is especially likely to happen in a sentence that introduces the noun as a new topic of conversation—when it initiates a discourse in which the noun figures prominently.

Nyulu Billy-ngun nganhi dhuurngay.

Billy pushed me.

Nyulu Billy gaday.

Billy came.

Ngayu nhangu Billy gunday.

I hit Billy.

(Each of these sentences gives special prominence to the noun phrase represented by *Billy* plus the adjoined pronoun.) In other words, in the case of a human noun, *both* the ergative/absolutive noun pattern and the nominative/accusative pronoun pattern co-occur, and they unambiguously distinguish between the three possible sentence functions. Table 4.6 presents these three functions diagrammatically.

Here we see the motivation behind the fact that only animate, and usually only human, nouns can be replaced by third-person pronouns.

TABLE 4.6 Animate Noun with Adjoined Third-Person Pronoun

"Billy" as:			pronoun	noun "Billy"	
A—Transitive subject	"Billy pushed me."		*Nyulu*	*Billy-ngun* (ergative)	*nganhi dhuurrngay.*
S—Intransitive subject	"Billy came."		*Nyulu* (nominative)	*Billy*	*gaday.*
O—Transitive object	"I hit Billy."	*Ngayu*	*nhangu* (accusative)	*Billy* (absolutive)	*gunday.*

These are exactly the nouns that denote members of the category of potential actors. It is, therefore, not surprising that these are also the nouns that can occur together with (or be replaced by) personal pronouns, which as we have seen are inflected on a pattern appropriate to potential actors. As we might predict, inanimate nouns do not allow the adjoined third-person pronoun in either subject or object position.

Yugu-ngun nganhi gunday.

The stick hit me.
(Not: *Nyulu yugu-ngun . . . , if *nyulu* is to refer to the stick.)

Ngayu galga dumbi.

I broke the spear.
(Not: *Ngayu nhangu galga . . . , if *nhangu* is to refer to *galga.*)

When a pronoun does appear in a sentence, we know that it must refer to something animate, probably a person, and not to an inanimate object.

Ngayu Billy nhaadhi, nhangu gunday.

I saw Billy and I hit **him**.

(Notice how the two parts of this sentence are chained together so that the noun object of the first clause appears in the second clause as an accusative pronoun. And notice further that the subject is not repeated in the second clause.) But:

Ngayu yugu nhaadhi, nhangu gunday.

cannot mean "I saw a stick, and I hit *it* (the stick)." (Why not?) Instead it must mean "I saw a stick, and I hit *him* (i.e., someone already mentioned)."

In much the same way, a sentence like:

Nyulu galga-ngun nganhi daamay.

cannot mean "The spear (lit: it the spear) speared me" because *nyulu* cannot refer to the spear. Instead, *nyulu* must refer to some person (whose identity is understood from what has gone before in the conversation). In this case, the ergative ending on *galga* signifies not the transitive subject, actor, or first cause, but rather the *instrument* by

which the action was carried out. Thus, the sentence means:

He speared me *with a spear.*

In such a sentence the ergative suffix is doing a different (though clearly related) sort of job in the sentence, still marking something instrumental in bringing the action about, but not marking the active agent.

As a result, a single sentence can have two noun phrases with ergative marking, one for the agent and the other for the instrument.

[*Nyulu Billy-ngun*]	[*yugu-ngun*]	*nganhi*	*gunday.*
Agent	Instrument	Object	Verb

Billy hit me with a stick.

3.4 Animate and Inanimate Nouns, Alienable and Inalienable Possession

The contrast between animate and inanimate nouns thus affects both the interpretation of an ergative suffix (animate nouns are generally interpreted as actors and inanimate nouns as instruments, if they have ergative endings), and the possibilities of pronominalization (animate nouns can be replaced by or adjoined to third-person pronouns, but inanimate nouns cannot). In fact, the distinction between animate and inanimate nouns figures in other areas of the language as well, and it intersects with a difference between two kinds of possession. We have seen that dative forms of nouns and pronouns express ordinary possession.

Yiyi ngadhu yarraman.
This is my horse.

Yiyi yarrga-wi galga.
This is the boy's spear.

Ordinary possession is a transitory, often socially constituted, relationship between a thing and a person or being that has control over it (rights to its use, its disposal, etc.). Several features characterize ordinary possession: first, generally only human beings (and very occasionally animals) are able to exercise this sort of control over their possessions. (In our society it is also possible to talk, in an extended sense, of institutions possessing things: "the Chase Manhattan Bank's oilfields," "the Army's stock of antipersonnel weapons," etc. In English there are also certain abstract nouns that both inanimate and animate things can "possess"; for example, we can say both "the villain's demise" and "the forest's destruction.") But a rock cannot have a house

in the same sense that, say, a man can (although, of course, there can be a house *for* a rock). In a similar way, I cannot give food to a tree in the same sense that I can give food to a child (to have, to eat, etc.) Only potential recipients can be ordinary possessors; that is, precisely those nouns that allow adjoined pronouns in Guugu Yimidhirr (nouns denoting humans or other animate beings) are potential indirect objects or possessors. Only these nouns can take the dative ending *-bi/-wi* in this possessive sense.

There is, of course, another sort of possession in regard to which things as well as people can be possessors. This is the relationship between a thing and its parts. We can talk about "the man's foot" and "the foot of the mountain"; or "the back of the man" and "the back of the house." Such a part-whole relationship is often called "inalienable possession," since a part cannot be separated from its whole in the same way that an ordinary possession can be separated from its owner.

In English, possession can be represented by at least two different constructions:

X's Y

and:

Y of X

Thus, we have:

the parson's bulletproof vest

and:

the bulletproof vest of the parson

In many cases, the choice between one construction or the other seems more or less indifferent:

the house's hilltop location
the location of the house on a hilltop

a woman's position in her family
the position of a woman in her family

the car's acceleration
the acceleration of the car

When we talk about parts, however, there seems to be a difference between animate and inanimate possessors. Thus we can say "the man's

head" but not "*the line's head" (rather: "the head of the line"), or "the horse's mouth" but not "*the cave's mouth." In fact, inanimate nouns often allow an entirely different construction to express the part/whole relationship.

*the refrigerator's door (questionable)

the door of the refrigerator (correct, but somewhat awkward)

the refrigerator door

In the last example, whole and part are simply put together with no overt mark of the possessive. This structure is frequently, but by no means always, successful;

the top of the tree
the tree top

the foot of the tree
*the tree foot.

Here, then, English distinguishes, within the category of inalienable possession, between animate and inanimate nouns, with animate nouns using the X's Y or Y of X constructions, and with inanimate nouns using only the Y of X or the more restricted X Y constructions.

Another interesting, if less conspicuous, reflex of the interrelated distinctions of animate/inanimate and alienable/inalienable possession in English appears in sentences like:

I patted George on the head.

which seems a somewhat more natural way of saying:

I patted George's head.

(This latter sentence seems, somewhat oddly, to suggest that I could pat George's head without patting him in the bargain.) But the sentence:

I patted George's watch.

is not equivalent to the very dubious sentence:

?I patted George on the watch.

Seemingly only parts (of the body, of some larger whole) allow a construction like:

Verb X *in/on the* Y

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where X is the whole and Y is the part. Such an expression will be equivalent to one of the form:

Verb X'*s* Y

when what happens to the part also happens, in some sense, to the whole. Thus, the verb in question affects the possibility of the *in the/on the* formulation. For example, we can say:

I ran over George's big toe.

but:

?I ran over George on/in the big toe.

seems doubtful, because, though I may have run over his *toe*, I didn't actually run *him* over. But the fact that the whole as well as the part must be affected by the action seems to disallow this sort of construction with inanimate entities and their parts. So, for example, though one can say:

I dented the door of the car.

and, although when I dent the door I at the same time dent the car, it does not seem possible to say:

?I dented the car in/on the door.

Although the details are complex, in English, the division between animate and inanimate possessors crosscuts the division between alienable and inalienable possession, with varying constructional possibilities for each case.

The same distinctions operate in Guugu Yimidhirr, although the syntactic realization of the facts is somewhat different. First, as we have seen, inanimate nouns cannot be recipients (indirect objects) and therefore are not possessors in the ordinary sense, with the *-bi/-wi* suffix. In Guugu Yimidhirr inalienable possession requires no special case marking, nothing that corresponds to the dative marking of ordinary possession. The part and the 'possessor' merely appear together as a compound noun phrase, both nouns in the case appropriate to the function of the entire phrase in the sentence. (Recall the English example "the refrigerator door.") This construction is possible with inanimate nouns:

Yugu ngarraa munhi.
The tree('s) bark is black. (lit.: tree skin black)

ngarraa skin
munhi black

And it works equally well with animate nouns:

> *(Nyulu) yarrga mangal munhi.*
> The boy's hand is black. (lit.: he boy hand black)
> *mangal* hand

In this sentence both *yarrga* and *mangal* appear in unmarked absolutive form. Contrast this sentence with another that displays ordinary possession, with a dative case ending:

> *(Nhangu) yarrga-wi bayan munhi.*
> The boy's house is black.

(What accounts for the difference between *nyulu* in the first sentence and *nhangu* in the second?) Similarly, if a body part is the object of a transitive verb, both part and possessor appear in the case appropriate to an object.

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> *Nyundu yarrga dhamal wagi.*
> You cut the boy's foot.
>
> *Nyundu nganhi dhamal wagi.*
> You cut my foot.
> *dhamal* foot
> *wagil* cut

(What is the case of *nganhi* and why?) Contrast these sentences with the following:

> *Nyundu yarrga-wi ngamu nhaadhi.*
> You saw the boy's mother.
>
> *Nyundu ngadhu ngamu nhaadhi.*
> You saw my mother.
> *ngamu* mother

We see that Guugu Yimidhirr uses the *-bi/-wi* suffix, with animate possessors, for ordinary possession. For both animate and inanimate nouns Guugu Yimidhirr represents the part/whole relationship by simply putting whole and part together, in the form [X Y] (plus case). The situation is diagrammed in Table 4.7.

Can you now translate the following sentences? (Check in the glossary at the end of the chapter for words you do not recognize or whose meanings you don't remember.)

TABLE 4.7 Possession in Guugu Yimidhirr

	Animate nouns	Inanimate nouns
Ordinary possession	*X -bi/-wi Y* *yarrga-wi ngamu* the boy's mother	X
Inalienable possession	*XY* *yarrga mangal* the boy's hand	*XY* *yugu ngarraa* the tree('s) bark

> Nyulu gabiirr-ngun yarrga-wi ngamu mangal wagi.
>
> Ngayu nhanu biiba dhamal daamay.
>
> Nyulu nhina dhamal galga-ngun daamay.

When a body part is called upon to act as the subject of a transitive verb, both part and possessor receive the case appropriate to sentence function *A* (ergative for nouns, nominative for pronouns), hence;

> *Nyulu yarrga-ngun mangaal-ngun nganhi gunday.*
> The boy's hand hit me. (i.e., the boy hit me with his hand.)

(Notice the two different interpretations of the *-ngun* suffix.)

> *Ngayu nhina dhuurrngay dhamaal-ngun.*
> I pushed you with my foot.

The same sort of thing happens when a body part is the object of a transitive verb.

> *Nyundu nganhi dhamal wagi.*
> You cut my foot.

Here *dhamal* is in absolutive form, appropriate to a noun in *O* function; and *nganhi* is the appropriate accusative object form of the first-person pronoun.

3.5 **Further Elaborations of the Case System**

Guugu Yimidhirr performs rather complex work with case endings, not simply distinguishing the syntactic functions of *S*, *A*, and *O*. We have already seen that the ergative suffix *-ngun* can signify either actor or instrument, depending on the noun in question. There are also different ergative endings that suggest action remote in time. Instead of simply:

Nyulu gabiirr-ngun nganhi wagi nambaal-ngun.

The girl cut me with a rock.

one can say:

Nyulu gabiirr-nda nganhi wagi nambaal-nda.

The girl cut me with a rock some time ago.

using the "remote" ergative suffix *-nda*. Guugu Yimidhirr thus accomplishes with case endings what English expresses with an adverbial expression or a special verb tense.

Let's consider the nuances of meaning connected with the Guugu Yimidhirr dative case. We have seen that an inanimate thing cannot be, in any ordinary sense, a possessor. Nor can it be a beneficiary, an indirect object. Instead, the *-bi/-wi* ending attached to inanimate nouns has a locational sense, encompassing both motion towards an object and rest when it reaches it.

Ngayu dhaday nambaal-bi.

I went to the rock.

Ngayu mayi maandi nambaal-bi.

I took food to (i.e., up to) the rock.

Ngayu dagaadhi nambaal-bi.

I sat on the rock.

dagaadhi sat

The inanimate counterpart to an animate indirect object is thus seen to be a location instead of a beneficiary. Whether motion or rest is involved depends largely on the verb in question.

Ngamu ngadhu bayan-bi nhin-gaalnggal.

My mother is sitting in/at the house.

Ngamu ngadhu bayan-bi dhadaara.

My mother is going to the house.

nhin-gal sit, be located

We can provisionally represent the noun cases we have met. (See Table 4.8.)

A separate ending *-nganh* indicates motion away from a place. (This is called the "ablative" case.)

Ngayu ngulgu gaday yuwaal-nganh.

Yesterday I came from the beach.

Ngadhu ngamu dhaday bayan-nganh.

My mother went from the house.

Nyulu yarrga-ngun galga nangguurr-nganh maandi.

The boy took the spear from the camp.

ngulgu yesterday
gadaa come
yuwaal beach
nanggurr camp

The ablative case also has a related temporal and causal sense (shared, incidentally, by the English preposition "from").

Ngayu mayi-nganh nangguurr-bi dhadaa.

I will go to camp after eating. (lit.: from food. Compare: This office will be closed from Friday.)

TABLE 4.8 Guugu Yimidhirr Cases—1

Case	**Ending**	**Meaning with animate nouns**	**Meaning with inanimate nouns**
Absolutive	zero ending	S, or O	S, or O
Ergative	*-ngun*; *-nda* (remote)	A	A or Instrument
Dative	*-bi/-wi*	Indirect object, possessor	Location, motion towards

Nyulu biini muganh-nganh.
He died from the cold.
muganh cold

It is clear that the two meanings of the *-bi/-wi* suffix divide along the same lines that distinguish the agent and instrument interpretations of the ergative suffix. Just as an inanimate noun cannot in any ordinary sense be a possessor, a human being is not normally a location. We can see this most clearly with personal pronouns. It is at least odd to say:

?George is at me.

and there seems to be a difference between the sort of motion/location expressed in:

George came to the house.

and

George came to me.

—at least if by "me" one means my person and not just, say, my body.
English seems to make a related distinction between animate and inanimate destinations (or "end points for motion"). All of the following sentences are possible:

I sent the package to John.
I sent the package to England.
I brought the food to Mary.
I brought the food to the picnic.

Both animate and inanimate destinations here seem to be treated in the same way. The verbs *bring* and *send* allow another word order, but only when the "destination" is animate:

I sent John the package.
*I sent England the package.
I brought Mary the food.
*I brought the picnic the food.

When we talk of sending a package to John or bringing food to Mary, neither John nor Mary is simply a place; instead we understand them to

be *recipients*. Inanimate places or events cannot usually be recipients in the same sense, and they cannot then immediately follow verbs like *bring* and *send* as destinations. In a sentence like:

James Bond sent London a cable.

the word *London* stands for a good deal more than an inanimate location. And consider what makes a sentence like:

The President sent China thirty tons of surplus wheat.

more acceptable than one like:

*The university sent the top of Mt. Everest an expedition.

In Guugu Yimidhirr dative inflection can only be used with animate nouns to represent situations in which they are not merely destinations, but are directly affected by the actions involved, usually as recipients.
Guugu Yimidhirr uses an entirely different case, called 'adessive', to signify being in or coming into the conscious presence of an animate being. The case ending is *-gal.*

George ngadhun-gal nhin-gaalnggal.
George is staying (lit.: sitting) with me. (i.e., in my company, under my care.)

George ngaliin-gal gaday.
George came to (stay with, see) us two.

With verbs of speaking, the *-gal* suffix marks the person with whom one talks.

Nyulu ngadhun-gal yirrgaalga.
He is talking to me.
yirrgaa talk, speak

Similarly, leaving someone's presence is rendered by the 'abessive' suffix *-ga.*

George nhangun-ga gaday.
George came from (e.g., visiting) him.

(These pronominal forms are based on the dative pronoun, plus *-n-* for all singular pronouns, plus the appropriate case ending.)

Motion away from a place is marked with the ablative case, and motion away from a person is marked with the abessive case in a combined sentence like the following:

Nyulu duday dhanaan-ga nangguurr-nganh.

He ran away from them, from the camp.

The *-ga* suffix also represents the reverse of the dative. Where the dative marks the beneficiary, recipient, or possessor, the abessive marks the origin, source, or former possessor of an object.

Ngayu yarraman biibaa-ga maani.

I took the horse from (my) father.

This sense extends even to inanimate nouns. Compare:

Nyulu yugu yalmba-nganh maani.

He took the tree from the sand hill. (i.e., he chopped it there and brought it away.)

Nyulu yugu yalmbaa-ga maani.

He took a tree of the sand hill. (i.e., a tree of the type that comes from the sand hill.)

yalmba sand hill

(You will see that the suffix *-nganh* does not cause words that end in a vowel to lengthen, although the suffix *-ga* does. Several other case suffixes cause both vowel- and consonant-final words to lengthen.)

Table 4.9 summarizes these interrelated case usages. With these four cases an animate noun represents a possessor or a conscious presence; an inanimate noun represents a location.

Three final examples will demonstrate the range and power of the Guugu Yimidhirr case system. There is a suffix *-ngu* that can express the goal or purpose of an action or the intended function for an object.

Ngayu gaday mayii-ngu.

I came for food.

Nyulu bayan balgay gudaa-ngu.

He made a house for the dog.

Yiyi galga guudyuu-ngu.

This is a spear for fish.

balgal make, do, wash
guudyu fish

TABLE 4.9 Locational Cases in Guugu Yimidhirr

Case	Suffix	Meaning with animate nouns	Meaning with inanimate nouns
Dative	*-bi/-wi*	possessor, beneficiary	location, motion towards
Ablative	*-nganh*	from possession of	motion away from
Adessive	*-gal*	in or into presence of	—
Abessive	*-ga*	from presence or possession of	from place of origin

This 'purposive' case also allows a Guugu Yimidhirr speaker to incorporate into a sentence a noun that is not, syntactically, subject or object, but that is involved in some way in the action or event depicted.

Nyulu wanggaar nhin-gaalnggal ngaliin-ngu.

He is waiting for us outside. (lit.: he above is sitting for us.)

wanggaar above

This device occurs particularly frequently when an idea that we might express in English with a transitive verb is rendered in Guugu Yimidhirr by an adjective or other intransitive construction that does not admit a direct object. For example, instead of using a transitive verb like "fear," Guugu Yimidhirr uses the adjective *yinil* "fearful, afraid," with the object that inspires fear marked by *-ngu.*

Nyulu Billy yinil dyaarbaa-ngu.

Billy is afraid of snakes.

In much the same way Guugu Yimidhirr expresses desire by means of the word *wawu* "soul, breath, insides" plus the derivational formative *-dhirr* (which means "with"). The object of one's desire carries the purposive ending.

Ngayu wawu-dhirr mayii-ngu.

I want food. (lit.: I am with-soul for-food.)

TABLE 4.10 Composite View of Guugu Yimidhirr Cases

	Case	Personal pronoun form	Noun suffix	Meaning: animate referents	Meaning: inanimate referents
I—syntactic cases	Nominative	*ngayu*, *nyundu*, *nyulu*, etc.	—	S, A (personal pronouns only)	—
	Accusative	*nganhi*, *nhina*, *nhangu*, etc.	—	O (personal pronouns only)	—
	Absolutive	—	zero	S, O (nouns but not pronouns)	S, O
	Ergative	—	*-ngun/* *-nda* (remote)	A (nouns, but not pronouns)	A, Instrument
II—locational cases	Dative	*ngadhu*, *nhanu*, *nhangu*, etc.	*-bi/-wi*	possessor, beneficiary	location, motion towards
	Ablative	Dative form + *-nganh*	*-nganh*	from possession of	motion away from
	Adessive	Dative form + *-gal*	*-gal*	in or into presence of	—
	Abessive	Dative form + *-ga*	*-ga*	from possession or presence of	from place of origin
III—additional cases	Purposive	Dative form + *-ngu*	*-ngu*	goal, purpose, intended effect	
	Comitative	—	*-dhirr*	accompaniment	
	Privative	—	*-mul*	lack	

The ending *-dhirr* transforms a noun into an adjectivelike word that means "with ______" or "having ______". Thus one can say:

Ngayu gambuul-dhirr.

I'm full, satisfied. (lit.: I am with stomach. This can also mean "pregnant.")

gambul stomach

Here are some further examples:

Ngadhu dhawuunh gaday yarraman-dhirr.

My friend came by horse.

Ngayu dingga-dhirr.

I'm hungry.

(In modern Guugu Yimidhirr there is no word **dingga* for "hunger" and only the compound exists.) This 'comitative' suffix is, in fact, part of the name Guugu Yimidhirr. *Guugu* means "word" or "language." *Yimidhirr* comes from the demonstrative root *yi* (which occurs in some forms as *yim-* or *yimi-*) and means literally "this-with": that is, "this way, in this way." Hence, Guugu Yimidhirr means "speaking this way" or "this kind of talk"—a literally descriptive label for the language.

Complementing the comitative suffix *-dhirr* is a 'privative' suffix *-mul* that means "without."

Nyundu wawu-dhirr buurraay-ngu?

Do you want water?

Ngayu wawu-mul.

I don't want (any).

Or consider the following short conversation. (Can you understand it?)

Ngayu dingga-dhirr. Ngayu wawu-dhirr mayii-ngu.

Ngadhu mayi guya. Ngayu mayi-mul.

Ma, ngali dhadaa bayan-bi mayii-ngu.

Personal pronouns occur with locational and purposive cases as well. Pronouns use the same suffixes as nouns, attached to the dative form of the pronoun (with an added *-n* on singular pronouns). For example, the dative form of *ngayu* "I" is *ngadhu*. One says:

Nyulu ngadhu-n-gal dhadaa.

He's going to (be with) me.

Billy ngadhu-n-ga gaday.

Billy came from (being with) me.

(What are the cases involved here?)

We can summarize the Guugu Yimidhirr cases we have met in a single composite chart. The first four cases in Table 4.10 interact to delimit the syntactic functions of nouns and pronouns as subjects and objects. Cases of the second group elaborate on further entities involved in the action or event depicted in a sentence—providing locational and dative complements or introducing auxiliary personnel. These cases also maintain a systematic distinction between animate and inanimate things, with distinct meanings when applied to nouns from different categories. The last cases further expand the expressive potential of simple noun endings—introducing goals, purposes, and accompaniments to action by simple morphological mechanisms. Hopefully even this much abbreviated treatment conveys a picture of the richness of the system.

4 THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF SPEECH IN TRADITIONAL GUUGU YIMIDHIRR SOCIETY

The common Western theory of language, in a tradition that derives from Aristotle, holds preeminent a language's logical structure: its capacity for conveying information or expressing propositions. However, when Aboriginal Australians theorize and talk about language, they concentrate on its social aspects. Language does not exist and utterances do not occur in a social vacuum. Speech between two people both expresses and helps to maintain the relationship between them. In Guugu Yimidhirr words are not simply linguistic units. They belong to people (their rightful users), and they have striking social properties, rendering them appropriate or inappropriate to different circumstances. Moreover, the way one Guugu Yimidhirr speaker chooses to speak to another creates in large part the relationship they establish. The relationship, once set up, itself has consequences for future linguistic interaction.

Both aspects of language—its systematic and logical properties on the one hand and its social applications on the other—feed one another. For to use language for social ends, speakers must master its grammar: Guugu Yimidhirr speakers, whether speaking in ordinary language or in the respectful language, which we shall examine in this section, must employ the system of case marking, along with all the other syntactic devices of the language. (Although the respectful style uses special

words, it combines these words with the same case suffixes that we have learned.) At the same time, the conditions under which a language is spoken and the uses to which it is put in turn motivate the form it takes—a tool reflects its tasks. The Guugu Yimidhirr respectful style makes do with a very small number of distinct roots; it therefore pushes a formal mechanism like the case system to its expressive limits—to construct specific messages from restricted lexical raw material.

Here are two examples that anticipate later discussion. In everyday Guugu Yimidhirr, the noun *ganggal* means "child," and the adjective *muli* means "barren, infertile." But in respectful speech neither word may be used; *ganggal* has the respectful equivalent *duula* "child." But there is no single respectful word equivalent for *muli*. Instead, to convey the same idea in respectful speech, a Guugu Yimidhirr speaker says *duula-mul*. (Recall that *-mul* is the privative case suffix. What is the literal meaning of this expression?) In a similar way, there is no respectful word for *nambi* "grave, casket." To express this idea to a tabooed relative, one must use two respectful words together with the *-bi*/*-wi* suffix:

wuurrii ground, earth (equivalent to the everyday word *bubu*)

dhuwun below (equivalent to the everyday word *bada*)

wuurrii-wi dhuwun grave (lit.: under the earth, equivalent to the everyday word *nambi*)

Throughout Aboriginal Australia words are endowed with a special potency. In most areas a name becomes taboo when its bearer dies; often the prohibition extends to other words that sound like the names of the deceased. Frequently, when an ordinary word must be dropped from speech, people borrow the equivalent word from a neighboring dialect or language—a practice that accounts in part for the relatively large amount of shared vocabulary between Australian languages. A person's everyday vocabulary thus becomes a repository of social history, carrying the imprint of recent deaths.

Special language also frequently marks ritual. Kenneth Hale describes an "upside down" version of the Aboriginal language Walbiri, used during male initiation, in which words are replaced by their opposites—one says "It's hot" to mean "It's cold." Special occasions engender special kinds of talk.[10]

So too do special people: among many Aboriginal groups special "mother-in-law" languages are used in conversation between kinsmen

[10]An article by Hale describing an Australian initiation language is found in Steinberg and Jakobovits, eds., 1971. See "Suggestions for Further Reading" at the end of the chapter for full reference.

who are taboo to each other and who must avoid and treat each other with special respect and care. Typically, throughout Aboriginal Australia a man was obliged to behave with extreme deference to his wife's mother or simply to avoid contact with her altogether. The mother-in-law was, then, the prototypical person to inspire the use of special avoidance language. The lexicon of respect in Guugu Yimidhirr might be called a "brother-in-law" language, because traditionally among the Guugu Yimidhirr–speaking people a man was not allowed to speak *at all* to his mother-in-law. He used the special language with brothers-in-law, with father-in-law, and with certain other kin. (It does not seem to have been necessary for a woman to use the special language with her in-laws, although she showed deference to her father-in-law. That a woman could be freer with her in-laws than could a man with his perhaps reflects the fact that a woman, on marriage, entered into close contact with her husband's family; whereas a man, after marriage, could to a greater extent avoid his wife's relatives. It may be, too, that women did not in general employ the special vocabulary, much as elsewhere in Australia women were denied access to special ritual language and knowledge.)

It may seem bizarre to have to use special words with specific kinsmen, but there are less exotic parallels in our own experience. Frequently we have to rephrase our thoughts, substituting one expression (or even a gesture) for another to avoid offending people within earshot.

Where have you been?

I went outside to take a . . . uh, to relieve myself.

I saw Dick and Jane in the bushes.

What were they doing?

(Gesture) . . .

And although we may find it hard to imagine spearing a man for speaking impolitely around his mother-in-law, it would be perfectly imaginable, if somewhat foolish, even in our own society, for a gentleman to offer to defend his lady's sensibilities from the unrepeatable remarks of some ill-mannered oaf. Even a hardened seaman may well blush with sincere shame or embarrassment when his ordinary turn of phrase accidentally reaches his mother's loving ears. Proverbs notwithstanding, words *can* harm. They certainly arouse powerful emotions and can move people to action. ("Them's fighting words, pardner!")

Guugu Yimidhirr speakers tailor talk to circumstances. Thus an important feature of a Guugu Yimidhirr word, whatever its meaning or grammatical properties, is its compatibility with particular social situations and its appropriateness for conversation with particular people.

FIGURE 4.3 Relaxed Amicability

A gami *(grandfather) and his* gaminhdharr *(classificatory grandchild) together scrape the roots of an ironbark tree, the first step in preparing tar for making spears. The two men enjoy a close, relaxed relationship, with no restrictions on physical proximity, face-to-face interaction, joking, or obscene language.*

But speech does not merely fit the social situation in which it occurs. The character of talk between two individuals symbolizes their whole relationship. With his mother-in-law a Guugu Yimidhirr man is *guugu-mul* "without words, speechless"—a diagnostic symptom of the restraint and avoidance that characterizes all his dealings with her. On the other hand, between two men who stand in the relationship of grandfather to grandson there are unrestrained, often ribald relations; accordingly, their talk together is typically a kind of obscene verbal joking called *guya-gurral* (literally, "saying nothing," i.e., "speaking nonsense.")

In this section we shall be concerned first with the partitioning of the traditional Guugu Yimidhirr social universe; second, with the elaborations of Guugu Yimidhirr vocabulary that create a special vocabulary of respect; and finally, with the correspondences between social relationships and kinds of speech.

4.1 Kinship and Geography

The Guugu Yimidhirr social universe is composed entirely of kin. Like many people throughout the world who live in limited, relatively small groups, Guugu Yimidhirr speakers apply classificatory principles to extend kinship to everyone with whom they come into contact. One's family, of course, can be reckoned so as to extend a long way—from remote cousins and great-uncles, to half-kin and step-kin. In the Cape York Peninsula people employ a further classificatory device: every individual belongs to one of two great groups, or *moieties*, each of which has a representative animal as its symbol (its 'totem'). One moiety has *waandaar* "white cockatoo," the other *ngurraar* "black cockatoo." One moiety is my own and my father's; the other belongs to my mother and her brothers and sisters. In my moiety are also my siblings. In the other moiety I find my wife or husband. And so on. Moiety membership is a feature that goes well beyond tribal or lingistic boundaries, so that a person from a distant area, whose language one cannot understand, nonetheless has a moiety affiliation. Through such affiliation it is possible to assign a stranger to a likely and appropriate kin category. If I am from white-cockatoo moiety and you are someone about my age from the same moiety, even if we are strangers, we may agree to call one another "brother" or "sister."

The system of moieties generalizes on local genealogical relationships to categorize every member of the social world. It divides the world into two sorts of people: members of "my moiety" and members of "their moiety." If we distinguish further between generations (starting with one's grandparents' generation and going to one's grandchildren's generation—a total of five generations including one's own), and between men and women, we will have a system that divides the whole society into twenty discrete categories, as shown in Table 4.11. For example, in the box marked X go men of my moiety of my parents' generation. (This category includes my own father.) A person in the category marked Y is a woman of the other moiety of my parents' generation. (My closest relative in this category would be my own mother.)

The Guugu Yimidhirr system of labelling relatives makes many more discriminations than does this simple chart, and it also omits distinctions that appear here. For example, in Guugu Yimidhirr there is only a single term for both males and females of the +2 generation at the upper left of the chart: *gami*. This term corresponds to the category of "same moiety person of grandparents' generation." It is the term one would apply to, among others, one's father's father. (Can you imagine a woman to whom the term might also apply?) And, within the category of zero-generation males of my own moiety, Guugu Yimidhirr distinguishes *yaba* "older brother" from *garga* "younger brother." Table 4.12 schematizes, in

TABLE 4.11 Moiety Categorization

	My moiety		Their moiety	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
+2 gen.				
+1 gen.	X			Y
0 gen.				
−1 gen.				
−2 gen.				

highly simplified form, part of the Guugu Yimidhirr kinship terminology as seen from a man's perspective. (An important difference in the kin terms used by men and women is this: a man calls his own children *yumurr*, but a woman calls her son *dyuway* and her daughter *nguudhurr*. This is because a man's children belong to his own moiety, but a woman's children belong to the opposite moiety, that of her husband.)

Where a single box in Table 4.12 has two entries there is a

TABLE 4.12 Simplified Partial Guugu Yimidhirr Kinship Terminology

	My moiety		Their moiety	
	M	F	M	F
+2	gami		ngadhi	babi
+1	mugagay biiba	biimuur	mugur	ngamu
0	yaba garga	gaanhaal dyin-gurr	gaanyil, dunhu, etc.	dyiiral
−1	yumurr		dyuway	nguudhurr
−2	gaminhdharr		ngadhinil	

Note: Shaded kin categories are potential in-laws, people who might become a man's *dhabul* relatives.

distinction of relative age (e.g., older/younger brother; older/younger sister.) I call my father and his younger brothers *biiba*, but there is a different term, *mugagay*, reserved for my father's oldest brother. Each term has a genealogical meaning; for example, *biimuur* means "father's younger sister" (a Guugu Yimidhirr speaker might give "auntie" as an English equivalent). But by a classificatory extension, the term is also appropriate for an unrelated woman of my own moiety of the appropriate age, just as *biiba* may be applied to other men of the same moiety and generation as my own father.

A Guugu Yimidhirr man traditionally was supposed to marry a woman from the opposite moiety. One's *biiba* "father" married one's *ngamu* "mother" from the other side. Similarly, a *mugur* marries a *biimuur*; their daughter will be a woman in the category of *dyiiral*—a word that means "wife." It is clear that such a woman is precisely an appropriate bride for a man: she is of the right age, and she belongs to the right moiety. This sort of reasoning underlies the typical Guugu Yimidhirr formulation of what makes a good marriage. One should marrv *muguur-nganh* (what is the case ending?): "from a *mugur*"—but "not too close": that is, a) not from a closely related *mugur* (not from a real mother's brother, for example), and b) hopefully from a distant area of the territory, which was subdivided into named locales.

Certain of a man's relatives were *dhabul* "sacred, forbidden, taboo" to him. Chief among these was his wife's mother, his *biwul*, whose presence he strictly avoided. He also avoided, but nevertheless could still have some dealings with, his wife's father, his *ngadhiina*, and his wife's brothers, called among other terms *gaanyil*. (A man was not obliged to avoid his wife's younger sisters, whom he also called by the term *dyiiral* "wife"; in a sense they were like wives to him, and he could joke with them freely, in ordinary Guugu Yimidhirr, just as he could with his actual wife.) The reader is invited to verify, by examining Table 4.12, that kin in the shaded categories are precisely those who might become a man's *dhabul* relatives through marriage: they are the parents and brothers of a woman a man might marry, his *potential* in-laws (or "affines"). The structural point is important, for although a man was obliged to use the special "brother-in-law" language with his actual wife's kin, he *could* use it as a special sign of respect with any of these *potential* in-laws: for example, with *biimuur* who is a kind of potential mother-in-law. (It is worth repeating that women were less likely to use special respectful vocabulary with their fathers- and mothers-in-law than were men, possibly because as members of their husband's group after marriage, they were in somewhat closer contact with their in-laws than were men with theirs.)

At the opposite extreme, certain kinsmen enjoyed extraordinary freedom and familiarity in their dealings with one another. A classificatory *gami* (same moiety grandparent) of the same sex was the

prototypical joking partner whom one could tease, insult, and goad, in both word and gesture. A *gami* and his *gaminhdharr* (same moiety grandchild) were permitted a license completely beyond the bounds of behavior appropriate between ordinary acquaintances, let alone between *dhabul* relatives.

In the Guugu Yimidhirr area it might be more appropriate to speak of a "father tongue" than a "mother tongue." For just as moiety membership came from the father, so too did one adopt as one's own the language spoken by one's father. Traditionally in the Guugu Yimidhirr area there were more than forty named tribal areas, each with distinctive ways of talking and idiosyncratic words for common objects and actions. (Although the dialects are all mutually intelligible, even the pronouns vary: inland Guugu Yimidhirr speakers say *nganhdhaan* for the first-person plural nominative pronoun "we"; speakers from coastal areas use *ngana* instead.) As one's mother might well come from a distant area and thus speak a different version of Guugu Yimidhirr (perhaps a different language altogether if she came from another tribe) it frequently happened that a child grew up laying claim to his or her father's language but also speaking, or at least knowing, a good many words from his or her mother's language as well. Occasional contacts with more distant groups multiplied the words from other languages a person was likely to know, so that many Guugu Yimidhirr speakers were accomplished polyglots. It is important here to realize that it is the norm in Guugu Yimidhirr society for things to have alternate names. Everyone is likely to know two or three different ways of identifying common objects: their *own* word and some other people's words as well. The device of substituting a respectful word for an everyday word when speaking with tabooed relatives is, therefore, similar to using someone else's word in place of one's own.

Here, then, are two outstanding features of traditional Guugu Yimidhirr society. On the one hand it was entirely subdivided into kin. Each person had a particular kin relationship with every other person in the community. Even a stranger from outside one's own area could be assigned a categorical status as some sort of a relative, once certain (perhaps hypothetical) kin connections had been worked out. Accordingly, one's personal relationships with everyone else were influenced by kin categories: every *biimuur* was to be treated with restraint; every *gami* was a potential joking partner. And this was true even of a stranger: if he turned out to be a classificatory *gami* (someone in the same category as my father's father), I could joke with him; if she were a distant *biimuur*, I would watch my tongue. On the other hand, despite the interpersonal regularity created by this wide-ranging kinship system, the Guugu Yimidhirr area was linguistically heterogeneous, with many alternate ways of talking circulating throughout the area. It was in this context that the special "brother-in-law" language existed.

4.2 The Structure of the Guugu Yimidhirr Vocabulary of Respect

Guugu Yimidhirr speakers use the English word "deep" to describe the words of the respectful style, which is called *guugu dhabul*. Ordinary Guugu Yimidhirr words are to be used *mundaal-gal*—literally, "with the rest of them," i.e., with people who are not *dhabul*. In fact, as we have seen, the very name *guugu yimidhirr* means "this kind of word/this kind of language"—it is a label that describes itself. *Guugu yimidhirr* or *guugu nganhdhanun* "our language" are terms one uses to contrast the local language with other Australian languages spoken farther away—*guugu dhanangan* "their language" or *guugu ngarrbal* "strange language."

The *dhabul* style is also described as *dani-manaarnaya* "being soft or slow." To speak respectfully is to avoid the strident tones and rapid speech that characterize ordinary conversation; one speaks to a brother-in-law or a father-in-law in a deliberately subdued voice, drawing out words and dropping into a near whisper. At the same time it is impolite to attempt physical proximity with one's in-laws; instead one *diili yirrgaalga* or *wurriin yirrgaalga*—that is, speaks "sideways" or "crosswise," neither facing one's interlocutor nor, if it can be avoided, addressing him or her directly. (In areas to the north of Cooktown it was said that a man would avoid speaking to his father-in-law by addressing his dog instead!) This indirection contrasts with ordinary Guugu Yimidhirr, which is said to be *dhumbuurrgu* "straight out."

The brother-in-law vocabulary is not in itself a full language separate from ordinary Guugu Yimidhirr. Instead it consists of a relatively small set of special words considered to be appropriate for highly polite and respectful speech. Since there were a number of alternate words for common items, the existence of a separate set of respectful words must have seemed perfectly reasonable. A Guugu Yimidhirr man once spoke of several different words he knew for "echidna" (a porcupinelike Australian animal):

> *Balin-ga* is porcupine. That's my word. I got another word, too: *nhalngarr*. You can use that word to brother-in-law and father-in-law. Some of these people call it *barradhal*. Well, I understand that *guugu* but that's not my word. That's their word—people who come from up Cape Flattery way.

Here the everyday word *balin-ga* has a single brother-in-law equivalent.

More frequently several different everyday words are replaced in formal brother-in-law speech by a single respectful word that spans the meaning of the whole set. For example, the verb *balil* is the respectful word for the everyday *dhadaa* "go." Thus, to say to one's brother-in-law that:

Balin-ga dhaday.
The porcupine went away.

one must say, instead:

Nhalngarr bali.

But *balil* is also the brother-in-law equivalent of a number of other everyday verbs: *gaynydyarr* "crawl," *biilil* "paddle (in a boat)," *dhaarmbil* "float, sail, drift," *yaalgal* "limp," *daabal* "wade," etc. None of these everyday words can be used with a brother-in-law. But rather than have a separate respectful equivalent for each of these words, *balil* is used in brother-in-law speech as the equivalent for any of them. A word like *dhaarmbil* could be rendered more precisely in brother-in-law language by adding further qualification; and here the case system comes into play, for the same case endings are used in brother-in-law language as in everyday Guugu Yimidhirr. The brother-in-law equivalent for *buurraay* "water" is *wabirr.* A more specific way to say *dhaarmbil* in the respectful style is, thus, *balil wabiirr-bi* (can you supply a literal gloss?) *Yaalgal* "limp" may be better rendered as *dyirrun balil.* (*Dyirrun* is the brother-in-law equivalent of *warra* "bad.") And so on. The principle resembles that described by R. M. W. Dixon for the mother-in-law language spoken by the Dyirbal people (south of Cairns), where the limited lexical resources of the respectful style are pushed to their limits to accommodate everything it would be possible to say in everyday language. The brother-in-law vocabulary itself is kept to a minimum, and syntactic and derivational devices are used heavily to express specific and detailed ideas.

TABLE 4.13 Brother-in-law Equivalents for Everyday Vocabulary

	Everyday word		Brother-in-law equivalent
one-to-one	balin-ga	→	nhalngarr "echidna"
many-to-one	dhadaa "go"	→	balil "go"
	dhaarmbil "float, sail, drift"	→	(*balil wabiirr-bi* "go in water")
	yaalgal "limp"	→	(*dyirrun balil* "go badly")
	gaynydyarr "crawl"	→	etc.
	biilil "paddle"	→	
	daabal "wade"	→	

Of course, the special brother-in-law vocabulary in Guugu Yimidhirr is used in somewhat restricted circumstances. Consider how one says "wife" in brother-in-law speech. One way is to use the word *munamuna.* In brother-in-law *muna* means "breast, milk"; reduplicated it simply means "woman." The narrowly defined context surely helps clarify the meaning, for in conversation with his wife's kin a man's use of the word "woman" as a replacement for "wife" is a fairly transparent euphemism. Another equivalent for "wife" in brother-in-law is the expression *yurrangan yambaal. Yurrangan* is the possessive (dative) form of *yurra* "you (all)." *Yambaal* is the respectful equivalent of the everyday word *bama* "person." Hence, *yurrangan yambaal* means, literally, "your person"—again, surely a reasonable way for a man to speak about his wife in conversation with the people who gave her to him.

Since the correspondences between everyday and brother-in-law words are generally many to one, they provide evidence for superordinate categories in the Guugu Yimidhirr scheme of things. For example, in everyday Guugu Yimidhirr there are at least ten names for different types of kangaroo and wallaby, but there is no overall generic term for "kangaroo." Purely on the basis of the ordinary terminology, there seems to be no Guugu Yimidhirr category of kangaroo but only a set of discrete kangaroo varieties. But the brother-in-law vocabulary groups all ten varieties under a single respectful word, *daarraalngan.* The category thus exists even though it is labelled only in the brother-in-law language. (See Table 4.14.)

The connections between single brother-in-law words and sets of everyday terms are sometimes less obvious. For instance, the single brother-in-law word *dyinu* encompasses a range of everyday words that form an apparent category comprising parts of the body with protruding bones and joints on the one hand (e.g., hip, chin, knee, elbow, wrist, anklebone, heelbone, armpit, crotch, and ribs), and certain small animals (including wild pheasant, water rat, worm, native cat, and some lizards) on the other. Whatever these items have in common, they are all referred to by the word *dyinu* in brother-in-law language. Other sets of everyday words collapse into single brother-in-law equivalents according to a clearer logic: the brother-in-law word *balnggirr* stands in for words denoting leg, lap, shin, hip, pelvis, and calf; whereas the lowest parts of the human body are rendered in brother-in-law by a different word, *buyiibuyii,* which replaces everyday words for foot, footprint, corn (on foot), shoes, ankle, heel, and toes.

Some everyday words, if they are pronounced in the proper slow and respectful manner, do not require replacement in conversation with a brother-in-law. The sentence:

Mayi guya.
There is no food.

becomes in brother-in-law style:

Gudhubay ngangarra.

The more specific sentence:

Mayi badhuurr guya.
There is no zamia-nut food.

becomes simply:

Gudhubay badhuurr ngangarra.

The everyday word *badhuurr* remains unchanged in brother-in-law speech, even though the other words in the sentence are replaced by polite equivalents. Many words, particularly names for species of plant and animal, are like *badhuurr* in this respect.

Other words do a kind of double service in brother-in-law language: they serve as their own equivalents, but they also replace other everyday words that cannot be used with brother-in-law. Words from distant dialects frequently behave this way, as if an everyday word from someplace else is sufficiently polite for use with a brother-in-law simply by virtue of its being alien. So, for example, the coastal word *babaar* "spear thrower, womera" is a polite brother-in-law equivalent for the inland everyday word *milbiirr* (which also means "womera"). When variant everyday words have found their ways into Guugu Yimidhirr from outlying dialects and languages, seemingly only the local everyday words stand in need of a special brother-in-law replacement.

A more interesting example of an everyday word that does double service in brother-in-law is the everyday second-person plural pronoun *yurra*. The singular pronouns *ngayu* "I" and *nyulu* "he, she"—and their respective case forms—survive in brother-in-law with no change from their everyday forms.

Ngayu bada dhaday.
I went down yonder. (Everyday)
bada down, yonder

Ngayu dhuwun bali.
(Brother-in-law equivalent.)
dhuwun down, yonder (Brother-in-law)

Ngayu nhangu nhaadhi.
I saw him. (Everyday)

Ngayu nhangu midungadhi.
(Brother-in-law equivalent)
midungal see (Brother-in-law)

However, the second-person singular pronoun is replaced in brother-in-law speech by the plural pronoun *yurra*. The question:

Nyundu buurraay waami?
Did you find water? (Everyday)
waamil find

becomes, in brother-in-law style:

Yurra wabirr yudurrin?
yudurr find (Brother-in-law)

A speaker uses a second-person pronoun to refer to his interlocutor. When the speaker must treat the interlocutor with deference and respect, he may do so in part by means of various linguistic devices. He may use circumlocution or stylized indirection. Recall formal English style: "Will your Lordship have another slice of raisin toast?" "Allow me to escort Madame to the door." Many languages use kin terms in order to refer to the hearer without making a direct reference. (Thus, our parody of tribal language: "I invite my white brother to enter the wikiup.") Another device is formally akin to the Guugu Yimidhirr brother-in-law use of *yurra*: French uses a plural pronoun *vous* as the polite form of a singular second-person pronoun *tu*, suggesting perhaps that a plural form that literally makes more of the hearer is more deferential than a singular form. That the same device for showing respect should have been developed in such widely separated regions (and a number of other Indo-European languages do the same sort of thing) attests both to the universality of the problem—expressing deference in speech—and to the naturalness of the solution.

Finally, there are in Guugu Yimidhirr some everyday words that have no equivalent whatsoever in the formal brother-in-law style. These are words that denote things about which one cannot speak with a father-in-law and brother-in-law. Of such words Guugu Yimidhirr speakers say: "You can't say those words against your mother-in-law." They include the everyday words for various sexual organs and sexual acts. To use such words within earshot of one's in-laws would be to curse them, to be deliberately insulting. Plainly, sexual relations—of which the forbidden words are all metonymic reminders—are sensitive issues between a man and his wife's parents and brothers; and the sensitivity is mirrored in the content of speech between them.

TABLE 4.14 Everyday and Brother-in-law Vocabulary: Types of Correspondence

Type of correspondence	Everyday word	Brother-in-law word
1. Everyday word survives in brother-in-law	badhuurr →	badhuurr "type of fruit"
2. Everyday word does multiple service in brother-in-law	nyundu "you sg." yubaal "you dual" yurra "you plural"	yurra
3. One-to-one replacement	balin-ga →	nhalngarr "echidna"
4. Many-to-one replacement	gangurru "large kangaroo" gadaar "wallaby that lives on the flat" bibal "small scrub kangaroo" wudul "whip-tail kangaroo" etc.	daarraalngan "kangaroo" (generic)
5. Everyday word has *no* Brother-in-law equivalent	gulun "penis"	*** (no equivalent)

Thus, two sorts of features of everyday words seem to motivate the special brother-in-law vocabulary. On the one hand, an everyday word (having to do, for example, with sexual matters) may because of its meaning require at least a special brother-in-law word, different from the everyday; or it may be excised completely from speech with tabooed

relatives. On the other hand, some everyday words seem to require alternate brother-in-law forms simply because they are *familiar* or *ordinary*; and in this case even an everyday word from a neighboring dialect or language may have the required properties as a respectful equivalent. These various possibilities are schematized in Table 4.14.

4.3 Respect (and Disrespect)

Let's look a bit more closely at the sort of respect due a man's in-laws. First, notice that there are at least two crosscutting dimensions of respect and avoidance. One has to do with kinship: a man is obliged to treat with respect certain people with whom he is related through his wife—in-laws (with the notable exception of a man's wife's sisters) become *dhabul*. Second, the fact that a man cannot speak *at all* to his mother-in-law suggests that special restraint operates across sexes: the relationship between a man and his wife's mother is more delicate than that between him and his wife's father or brothers. This cross-sex restraint will be discussed later.

Furthermore, as we can easily discern in our own behavior, there is more than one way to act deferentially. In Guugu Yimidhirr society more is involved in proper behavior with a brother-in-law or father-in-law than simply speaking with the special brother-in-law words, although the tenor of speech between tabooed kin is symptomatic of the tone of all their interactions.

First, as we have seen, brother-in-law utterances are soft and slow, contrasting strongly with ordinary Guugu Yimidhirr. When one's father-in-law comes around, this is how one should act:

> Keep away! Don't talk hard! Stay quiet! If your mother-in-law comes, she can't talk. But your father-in-law can speak up. *Nhanu dyiiraal-gal yirrgaalga nyulu.* (He'll speak to your wife.) But *nhanun-gal gaari* (not with you). Your wife will ask him what he wants. But you can't say, "*Ngaanaa?*" (What?).

Notice that the quality of a relationship between a man and his wife's father is described specifically in terms of speech (or, more accurately, in terms of the absence of or limits on speech between them). Simply asking what someone wants, with the abrupt but quite ordinary word *ngaanaa* here exemplifies in microcosm all that must not take place between a man and his wife's parents.

Speaking loudly and rapidly is associated not only with familiarity and informality but also with anger and scolding. One speaks softly to a brother-in-law and, accordingly, one doesn't "fight him."

> I can't fight him. If I do he just won't talk. He won't joke or tease or get angry. And I won't growl at him. If he gets angry with me I won't answer. I'll just walk away.

Again, the nature of the relationship (respectful, deferential, polite) is expressed in terms of permissible speech interaction (slow, soft, restrained).

Brother-in-law words have about them a character that suggests to Guugu Yimidhirr speakers situations that contrast markedly with those situations appropriate for everyday words.

> You could use [everyday words] if you talked to any person-*gal*. You can talk, laugh, anything.

(Notice here the case ending appended to an English word; "any person-*gal*" is the adessive case form of "any person"—meaning, then, "(talk) with any person.") So, for example:

> You can use *mayi banggamu* (potato) to any common person, to *gami* or to *dhawuunh* (friend). But not with *ngadhiina* (father-in-law). But "*dhirrguul-dhirr*"—you can use that *guugu* with father-in-law."

Here the ordinary word *banggamu* suggests joking, familiar contexts; it suggests speech with friends or with the prototype of the familiar kinsman, the *gami*.

Relatives who were obliged to avoid each other typically adopted physical postures and arranged themselves spatially so as to minimize mutual interaction. (See Figure 4.2.) Elsewhere in Australia it is reported that a man will walk well out of his way to avoid possible meetings with his mother-in-law. In Guugu Yimidhirr society a man and his mother-in-law did not sit in one another's presence, did not look at each other, approach one another, or stand face to face. They both *diili nhin-gaalnggal* and *diili yirrgaalga* (sat and talked sideways). In former times there were also severe restrictions on the sharing of food and possessions between a man and his parents-in-law.

Physical and spatial avoidance has an exact linguistic parallel. Transfer of information between a man and his taboo relatives was mediated and indirect. Speaking with brother-in-law words, a man directed messages to his in-laws via his wife. In return, the wife's father, speaking either in brother-in-law or everyday words, gave his daughter messages for his son-in-law. Indirect address in speech thus corresponds to sitting sideways, avoiding eye contact, and so on.

> I can't talk to my mother-in-law. But I got my children. And *ngadhu dyiiral* (my wife) can talk to her own mother. But I can't. She might be over there, but I'm facing away from her. My kids can talk—she is their *gami*. But I sit over here, behind the fence.

In the olden days a man who spoke in everyday language to his mother-in-law would have been speared to death for his offense. But

such drastic sanctions applied to breaches of etiquette seem only to supplement deep-seated inner feelings of restraint about those relationships that called into play brother-in-law language and associated avoidance behavior. As we have seen, when confronted with insult or inappropriately rough or joking speech, people would often withdraw in silence from the presence of their tabooed relatives. A child who spoke impolitely in the wrong company would be made to feel *muyan* "shame." It is from *muyan* that one cannot bring oneself to speak in everyday language to a *dhabul* relative, to look at, still less to *touch* him or her.

> *Nyundu mangal gaari garrbal. Muyan.* (You can't grab her hand. It would be shameful.) If I were to touch my mother-in-law, hiii, *muyan*! Then I might go and wash my hand in water.

The spectre of having to wash away the touch of a mother-in-law's hand suggested a further image:

> *Biwul gaga.* (Mother-in-law is poison.)

Why? Because:

> You married her daughter; and so real shame, real *muyan*!

A man avoided his actual wife's relatives. But he was also expected to be restrained and polite—and he might use brother-in-law words as a special sign of respect—with his actual and classificatory father's sisters, mother's brothers, and mother's brother's sons, people we have seen to be his *potential* in-laws. Whether or not one used brother-in-law language with these people, one had always to behave in a decorous manner, without joking or cursing and refraining from anger—restrictions that plainly parallel, in somewhat reduced form, the stricter prohibitions on interaction with real in-laws.

Furthermore, a man was expected to monitor his behavior with his elder sisters and, to some extent, with his mother. Here again is evidence for a restraint between the sexes independent of *dhabul* relationships. A man could share food with his sister, but he could not sit or stand facing her or even close to her. (A Guugu Yimidhirr friend once introduced the author to his elder sister and induced him to shake her hand, all without moving from the far end of the room and by only glancing sideways at her.) Although one used everyday vocabulary, it was important to prune from one's speech with such people all "bad words," that is, words with vulgar overtones.

That there are such "bad words" further elaborates the continuum from familiar to polite vocabulary. We have distinguished between 1)

everyday words that can themselves be used in speech with taboo relatives, 2) sensitive everyday words that, for one reason or another, require brother-in-law replacements, and 3) words whose referents simply cannot be labelled at all in polite brother-in-law speech. Words of the last sort are often called "swearing words"; they are used in extremely rude curses in the everyday language. Saying *mangal gulun* (literally, "hand penis")—usually with an accompanying gesture—is a very impolite way to call someone greedy.

Other so-called bad words, however, refer to seemingly innocuous items. They have impolite connotations that are activated merely by the presence of people who must be treated with care (whether or not one used the special brother-in-law vocabulary with them). For example, a man should not say *warrbi* "axe" to his sister because to her it might suggest "penis." He should not say *nambal* "stone" because she might interpret instead "testicles." He should not say *warrigan* "hole" because it suggests "vagina." And so on. These are not merely symbolic or metaphorical associations; the impolite connotations seem to inhere in the words themselves. It is not that one cannot talk about axes or holes with one's sister, but only that one cannot use these particular words. Instead of saying *warrbi*, a man might use the more polite word *guliirra*, which also means "axe." Or in modern times he could simply use the English word "axe";

> *Ngadhu* **axe** *wanhdhaa?*
>
> Where is my axe?

Neither word would offend his sister, although neither would be sufficiently polite for speaking to his father-in-law or brother-in-law. With them he would use the brother-in-law word *gadiil-baga*, said to be the "deepest" or most polite word for "axe." The range of politeness associated with individual Guugu Yimidhirr words is more elaborated than a simple distinction between everyday and brother-in-law language would suggest.

The range of conventional social relationships is correspondingly complex. There is ordinary, relaxed amicability between friends and family members, and there is strict avoidance between a man and his mother-in-law. Between a *gami* and a *gaminhdharr* there is an obscene joking relationship. Between these extremes are various forms of politeness and restraint, sometimes tempered by special circumstances or genealogical distance. One man spoke of visiting in the hospital a remote relative who fell into a *dhabul* category. He felt ashamed to speak openly to the sick person, who, in turn, sought sympathy and initiated direct conversation. Also, a man might joke in a suggestive manner with potential wives (for example, with his wife's sisters) but be obliged to speak circumspectly with his own sister, who could never be

TABLE 4.15 Social Relationships, Speech Categories, and Lexical Alternatives

Social Relationship: kin-category	*Dhabul*		Non-*Dhabul*		Unrestricted (e.g., with wife or potential wife; or joking relationship with *gami*)
sex	opposite sex	same sex	opposite sex	same sex	
Type of speech interaction:	no speech	respectful "brother-in-law" words	polite	everyday	joking or vulgar language
Lexical alternative: "axe"	***	*gadiil-baga*	*guliirra*	*warrbi*	*warrbi*
"food"	***	*gudhubay*	*mayi*	*mayi*	*mayi*
"penis"	***	***	***	***	*gulun*

his sexual partner and who might be offended by an incautious utterance.

Such a highly structured social universe, as we have seen, implies a set of speech styles, levels, or *registers* appropriate to different sorts of interaction: informal, deliberately obscene, restrained and polite, or deferential and respectful. Formally these registers comprise different sets of words that have the character appropriate to one tone or another. People may often manipulate registers to a particular purpose: choosing a brother-in-law word to convey an extra hint of deference where an everyday word would do; or deliberately violating normal rules of speech politeness to insult, startle, or to undermine a relationship. What is important is that in every case, in more or less highly codified ways, people's speech is partly determined by and partly itself a determinant of the relationship between speakers. The existence of discrete registers is a symptom of the different sorts of interaction that occasion speech in the community.

5 LANGUAGE IN THE MODERN GUUGU YIMIDHIRR COMMUNITY

In traditional times the Guugu Yimidhirr kinship system probably worked smoothly. Reckoning by moiety membership and genealogical relationships presumably produced few discontinuities, and people doubtless married correctly most of the time according to what older Hopevale residents call "the law." Nowadays kinship remains an important part of the conceptual apparatus for dividing up the world, but there are frequently crossed ties and "crooked" relationships. For many older people these confusions are distressing since often one doesn't know what kin term to apply to someone else.

> *Walu dhula-gadhaadhi, walu gumbiin.*
> It seems all twisted, like a vine.

Frequently, because of the high rate of intermarriage between people of part-Aboriginal and part-European descent, modern marriages violate old rules. And in the present day there are no elders to spear offending parties or to drive them from the community. Instead, Guugu Yimidhirr speakers continually adjust their usage so as to bring their relationships with others under appropriate kin categories.

The habits of language we have discussed in the previous section were largely dependent on social habits. As kin categories became confused, as old-style standards of proper behavior gave way to Lutheran precepts, as groups of people were forcibly relocated or "dispersed," as dialects were thrown together or died, many of the

traditional speech practices that drew meaning from lapsed social arrangements in turn disappeared from Guugu Yimidhirr society. Nowadays, few people remember, and still fewer can use, words of the respectful brother-in-law style. Older people brought up at Hopevale before the relocation during World War II still experienced practices of avoidance and the corresponding speech behavior. Though such practices have fallen into disuse, they have left deep impressions. As one old man says:

> These young people here at the Mission talk to their mothers-in-law. They fight and scold and curse. But we older people *just can't*. . . .

Older people carefully monitor their interactions with tabooed relatives, even though they may speak everyday Guugu Yimidhirr, and even though they do not fear physical punishment for breaches of etiquette. But elaborate avoidance is anachronistic in the society in which Guugu Yimidhirr speakers now live. The name of a deceased person cannot be tabooed in the face of a Lutheran funeral; nor can one speak brother-in-law words to a brother-in-law who comes from a distant Queensland town, and who doesn't even know everyday Guugu Yimidhirr.

It is not only speech habits that are changing. Guugu Yimidhirr is undergoing syntactic changes as well, partly as a result of external influences and partly from internal motivation.

The major outside force is English. Ordinary language around Hopevale is a confirmed mix of English and Guugu Yimidhirr. Young people have difficulty eliminating English words from their speech; quite often they revert to an English laced with Guugu Yimidhirr pronouns (which, as the reader will recall, are organized on slightly different principles from English pronouns).

> ***Ngali** got no **mayi**.*
> We (two) have no food.

Occasionally, Guugu Yimidhirr speakers attach Guugu Yimidhirr formatives to English words.

> *Nyundu **mother-in-law**-gal gaari yirrgii.*
> Don't speak to your mother-in-law.

Though this situation may change in the future, Hopevale people go to school only in English; they read and write only in English, and they attend church services conducted for the most part in English.

(The first German missionaries at Hopevale translated a good deal of evangelical material into a peculiar sort of Guugu Yimidhirr—one that, for example, almost entirely omits ergative inflection. Only older people

can read the idiosyncratic spellings that Reverend Schwarz used. This missionary version of the language is now enshrined as a kind of semiofficial church language—one appropriate to Bible stories but distinctly odd in terms of the actual spoken language.)

Even when they speak only in Guugu Yimidhirr, younger people use forms that older speakers regard as incorrect. Modern speech smooths over exceptions and syntactic irregularities of the past language. A good example involves verb forms.

Guugu Yimidhirr verbs display as much morphological elaboration as do Guugu Yimidhirr nouns. A single verb ending can convey a good deal of specialized meaning. There are familiar contrasts of tense.

Nyulu mayi buday.

He ate food.

Nyulu mayi budal.

He eats food; or, he'll eat food by and by.

There are also reduplicated forms that signify action in progress.

*Nyulu mayi buda**aral**.*

He's eating food.

*Nyulu mayi buda**aray**.*

He was eating food.

There are verb forms that command.

*Mayi buda**la**!*

Eat food!

*Gaari dhad**ii**!*

Don't go!

*Mayi buda**arala**!*

Keep eating food!

There are special endings that express desire or intention.

*Ngali dhada**nhu**.*

We want to go, ought to go, intend to go.

And there are even special precautionary endings that issue warnings or try to head off undesirable consequences.

*Ngayu buli**ya**.*

I might fall.

*Nhina gunda**ya**.*

You might get hit.

*Gaari dhadii, nyundu bulii-**gamu**.*

Don't go, otherwise you might fall.

*Nyulu duday biiba-ngun gunday**igu**.*

He ran before his father could hit him.

Guugu Yimidhirr verbs fall into several natural groups, or conjugations. Verbs of one large group have a final *-l* in the "present" tense (which can be translated into English in several ways).

Ngayu buligi gundal.

I'll hit the bullock. (Or "I hit the bullock.")

Nyulu mayi wagil.

He'll cut the food. (Or "He cuts the food.")

These *l*-final verbs form an imperative in *-la*.

*Gunda**la**!*

Hit it!

*Wagi**la**!*

Cut it!

The vast majority of these *l*-final verbs are transitive.

Verbs of another major conjugation end in long vowels.

*Ngali dhad**aa**.*

We (two) will go.

*Nyulu Billy gad**aa**.*

Billy will come.

The imperative form of these verbs has *-ii* instead of the final long vowel.

*Dhad**ii**!*

Go!

*Gaari bul**ii**!*

Don't fall!

Most of these vowel-final verbs are intransitive.

In the speech of older Guugu Yimidhirr speakers there are a few verbs in each conjugation that do not conform to the normal pattern with regard to transitivity. That is, there are some intransitive *l*-final verbs, such as *wurrgal* "suffer."

Nyulu wurrgaalgal.
He is suffering.

Gaari wurrgala!
Don't suffer!

And there are some vowel-final verbs, like *banydyii* "wait for," that are transitive.

Ngayu nhina banydyii.
I'll wait for you.

Nganhi banydyii!
Wait for me!

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Older speakers of Guugu Yimidhirr insist that these are the correct forms. In both cases, however, younger people seem to be in some doubt; they seem to have reanalysed these verbs so as to interpret the transitive *banydyii* as actually an *l*-final verb, and the intransitive *wurrgal* as actually vowel-final. One hears such forms as:

Gaari wurrgii!
Don't suffer!

Nyulu wurrgaalga.
He is suffering.

(These forms would only be possible for vowel-final verbs). Or:

Banydyila nhangu!
Wait for him!

Nyulu banydyiilndyil nganhi.
He is waiting for me.

Older speakers reject such forms as corrupt and incorrect, although they frequently occur in speech.

Here the language seems to be shifting in the direction of greater regularity, where the form of a verb corresponds exactly to its transitivity. Such changes undoubtedly take place constantly in all

languages; although in the past, when many variant dialects and languages coexisted in the same wide community, Guugu Yimidhirr might have resisted more vigorously against such shifts, accommodating more irregularity as a means of maintaining its integrity against other forms of speech.

Despite the reduced use of Guugu Yimidhirr and the gradual disappearance of both the brother-in-law vocabulary and associated social institutions, speech in the Hopevale/Cooktown community remains a primary sociological index. A person's choice of words from a larger repertoire is as much a function of social facts as it was in traditional times. Here is a crude example to illustrate the principle. In the Hopevale Mission store, which is staffed both by Aboriginal Guugu Yimidhirr speakers and white missionary personnel (who do not speak Guugu Yimidhirr), one decides whether to order an item in English or in Guugu Yimidhirr partly on practical grounds (one does not speak to the white store manager in a language he doesn't understand) and partly on social grounds. For often people order in English from a Guugu Yimidhirr–speaking shop assistant whenever the manager is present, even when he is not attending them. His presence creates, as it were, an English context, whether or not he himself is part of the dialogue. Speaking Guugu Yimidhirr in front of the store manager is, by contrast, a conscious means to exclude him from the conversation.

Guugu Yimidhirr is a language with limited range in the modern world. Young people at Hopevale say that although they can speak Guugu Yimidhirr, they cannot write it and have little interest in trying to do so. Others lament the passing of skills and knowledge (including knowledge of language) possessed by previous generations but now largely lost. Still others regard Guugu Yimidhirr as an exclusive possession, certainly not to be shared with white men, but not even to be squandered on Aborigines from other areas or on young people whose lives will carry them away from the mission. In the company of non-Aborigines, many Hopevale residents who are uncertain of their English lapse into silence; others deprecate their language and claim to know little of it. These phenomena, taken together, suggest that in the Cooktown/Hopevale area, Guugu Yimidhirr is still an index, still a mark, setting its speakers apart from other people. Choosing to speak Guugu Yimidhirr instead of English can be an unambiguous signal. (In front of the Cooktown policeman it can mean: "Let's keep him out of this conversation." With an Aboriginal evangelist or in a gathering of the men's society it can mean, "Let's get together on this, speak our true minds, bare our hearts.")

Although the linguistic registers are different—different languages instead of discrete special-purpose vocabularies—these phenomena formally parallel the use of brother-in-law language to signal a deferential kin relationship, or the deliberate use of insulting or vulgar language

as part of a special sort of friendship. In each case, some feature of an interaction is mirrored in the character of the speech that accompanies it; or, just as often, some feature of speech sets the tone of an interaction as it develops.

Speech is *inherently* indexical; to speak at all is to choose a register (even if only a word, or a tone of voice) that will index the moment. Such phenomena have been widely described. In Java people speak in a high, a low, or a middle variety of Javanese according to the relative status of the protagonists. (A high-status person speaks down to a low-status person by using the low language, and vice versa.) Throughout Asia languages have elaborate systems of honorifics to elevate the addressee. (See the following chapter on Japanese.) Respect for a Samoan chief is shown in part by respectful vocabulary used when common people speak to or about him. Such devices are widespread, although the details doubtless vary from one speech community to another. In every case, speech is connected with a set of situations and social relationships—sometimes binding people and constraining their interactions, sometimes marking and reinforcing social facts, but often facilitating communication, lubricating sore points, and serving as the medium by which people forge new relationships and ideas.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Those students who wish to pursue Australian languages in more detail should begin with R.M.W. Dixon's *The Dyirbal Language of North Queensland*, which surveys the major features of Australian languages (including sound systems and ergative inflection), and which provides a comprehensive look at this language of the Cairns rain-forest region. Readers with a knowledge of introductory linguistics will find especially useful Dixon's account of the relationship between noun and pronoun morphology and the syntax of clauses and complex sentences. Further descriptions of the semantics of a mother-in-law language and an initiation language are in articles by Dixon and Kenneth Hale in the Steinberg and Jakobovits reader in semantics. A good place to start further inquiry into speech as part of and equivalent to action is J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, or Searle's *Speech Acts*. Chapter IV in the companion volume gives a look at another sort of language spoken widely in Cape York, even by some Hopevale residents, called Cape York Creole.

A good deal has been written about Aboriginal Australians. Robert Tonkinson's *The Jigalong Mob* describes a traditional group who have recently come under Mission conditions. But before plunging more deeply into ethnography and learning about the "dream time," students are well advised to read C. D. Rowley's *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society* to locate contemporary Aborigines firmly in the Australian reality.

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GLOSSARY

The glossary lists all the Guugu Yimidhirr words that appear in this chapter together with their English equivalents. Nouns appear in absolutive form, and verbs appear in unreduplicated present-tense form, unless otherwise indicated.

baalaa fruit tree species
babaar womera (Coastal word)
babi mother's mother
bada down, yonder
badhuurr zamia-nut palm
bala skinny, weak
balgal to make, to wash
balil to go (Brother-in-law style)
balin-ga echidna
balnggirr leg (Brother-in-law style)
bama person
bandil to chop, to fell
banggamu potato
banydyii to wait for
bayan house
bibal small scrub kangaroo
biiba father
biilil to paddle