

Kin and country at Wakooka Outstation: an exercise in rich interpretation¹

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Much of one's understanding of social structure and social processes derives from observing (usually, in fact, participation in) a continuing stream of minute interactions. A word, a glance, or a gesture may alert us to the quality of a relationship; a glimpse of two people's behavior, a snatch of overheard conversation, may link up with knowledge we already have about them, draw meaning from this knowledge, and, in turn, color our future perceptions. We routinely interpret interactions we observe, and our interpretations are neither parsimonious nor deductively well enclosed, but more often as rich and speculative as circumstances will allow. Behind this essay is a methodological issue: what expertise and what knowledge is required to reconstruct processes of interpretation and understanding that clearly accompany even the most prosaic and routine interactions? How can one penetrate the preformulated, though perhaps inexplicit, background of opinion against which interaction occurs?

I will look here at a much smaller problem, arising from some particular bits of recorded natural conversation. A good reason for looking at the minute details of people's conversation with one another is to find out, by reading between the lines (or listening between the words), about their relationships. It is a sociolinguistic commonplace that the choice between alternate ways of speaking (whether between alternate pronunciations, words, or even entire languages) can signal features of the relative status, rank, or genealogical connection between speakers, can respond to (and in turn set future parameters of) the context of speech. The classic instance — diglossia — maps a complex variety of asymmetrical social relations onto the single opposition between two linguistic varieties, themselves conceptualized (though not always realized) as discrete and distinct. In the more general case, the very availability of discrete linguistic varieties constitutes, inevitably it seems, a sociological and interactional resource. The varieties acquire specific values or characters (which lend themselves to special purposes: in irony, in mimicking or aping the speech of others, by metaphor or metonymy to remind participants of the features of relationships, and so on). Moreover, the possibility of switching between

varieties emerges as an exploitable device for specially marking a discrete stretch of speech.

The existence of such resources poses a problem of interpretation for speaker and analyst alike. The analyst may want to formulate what Silverstein (1976) called 'rules of use' to draw a formal link between, say, alternate sets of lexical items and specific sorts of social or genealogical relationships. Moreover, native experts are notoriously willing to associate linguistic varieties with social situations, often in categorical and rulelike terms. The facts of usage, alas, may not be so accommodating. A given context, or a particular social relationship between interlocutors, typically underdetermines the choice between alternate linguistic forms. On the other hand, where ways of speaking are multivalent, or when they respond to varying pragmatic features, they enable (or, at least, leave open) varying interpretations. The difficulty increases in communities where patterns of speech are undergoing rapid changes, where a linguistic habit can become, in a generation, a linguistic anachronism, or, perhaps, an idiosyncratic speech 'twitch'. Unravelling what someone is 'trying to say' in conversation — what he or she 'means' by the choice of a particular word, or a specially marked variant form — becomes an interpretive exercise that draws as heavily on biography and social history as on synchronic sociolinguistic or syntactic facts.

In this paper I propose to examine several fragments of conversation recorded on a trip in the Australian bush. Aborigines from widely separated parts of Australia have been described as possessing well-codified, highly elaborate systems of linguistic indexes for social, genealogical, and personal relationships. The correct use, for example, of kin terms routinely requires elaborate calculations about the relative statuses, group membership, and genealogical links between not only speaker and referent, but between speaker and hearer, speaker and referent, and sometimes overhearer as well. During my own work among Guugu Yimidhirr-speaking people from the area around Cooktown, in north Queensland, I have been instructed in a deferential style, said to have been employed with certain in-laws, canonically by a man to his wife's brother. The style, known as *dhabul* (and here abbreviated as BIL for 'brother-in-law' style), involved replacing everyday Guugu Yimidhirr words with special respectful words when speaking to, or within earshot of, relatives whom one treated with respect (Haviland, 1979a,b). In most parts of Australia, communities encompass several distinct Aboriginal languages (and their own internal varieties), as well, often, as varieties of English. How people choose to talk to one another, the words they use and more generally the linguistic varieties they select, are matters conditioned by kinship, status, settings, and the nature of the activities of the moment. The conditioning mechanisms may be subtle and complex (for a well-described example see Sutton, 1978; forthcoming).

In some modern Aboriginal communities, what were, presumably, once carefully maintained links between language and the social order have given way to seemingly more haphazard patterns of speech. Linguistic repertoires have become impoverished or drastically changed in composition. Correspondingly, the system of social relationships has changed, and the mechanisms of social reproduction have been destroyed or violently transformed (see, for example, Haviland and Haviland, 1980). Choosing between available linguistic varieties remains a device for conveying social meaning, but the meanings conventionally associated with particular choices (or the conditions presupposed by the use of particular forms) have shifted.

Conversation among members of the Hopevale Mission community, located near Cooktown at the southeastern corner of the Cape York Peninsula, is ordinarily carried on in a mixture of English and Guugu Yimidhirr (hereafter GY), the Paman language originally spoken between Cooktown and the Jeannie River (see Haviland 1979a for a sketch description of GY). Hopevale talk is riddled with small-scale switches between GY and English. Although one language or the other may predominate in certain defined settings (e.g. English in church, GY under the mango tree in front of the curio shop), very few are the individuals who can avoid slipping a GY pronoun into an English sentence, or a particular English *not juste* or fragment of English back-channel into an otherwise GY environment. My point is that although the two extreme varieties (full English and nonanglicized GY) may well represent distinguishable registers, toward which speakers may strive in certain contexts (and over which individual Hopevale people have variable mastery), nonetheless, most talk at Hopevale Mission involves a mixture of both languages. This mixture constitutes the *unmarked* register in conversation. Though conversationalists may intend to communicate through their selection of English or GY elements in speech, and though their coparticipants undoubtedly read significance into such choices, the moment-by-moment implication of these miniature switches is subtle and evanescent.

In this paper I want to concentrate instead on how one might understand the much less frequent and at the same time much more notable switch in conversation between the ordinary coin of Hopevale talk and certain other highly marked varieties. People at Hopevale know Aboriginal languages other than GY, sometimes only in bits and pieces, and a few older people also know at least some words in the special GY respectful style. These specially marked varieties occasionally surface in the midst of ordinary talk, and I recorded several instances during a stay at Hopevale in August 1980.

My main concern is a conversation, transcribed in part in the Appendix at the end of this paper, that occurred when a group of elderly Hopevale men, accompanied by a younger Aboriginal pastor and his wife (and by me), visited a now-abandoned territory, once part of a large pastoral operation in remote

country north of Cooktown. The biographies of the members of the group, the overall nature of our expedition, and the specific activities of the moment are all factors important in interpreting the conversational facts.

Three of the five elderly men on the trip are central participants in the sequences I want to consider. The first, BF, was brought by police to the old mission at Cape Bedford (the predecessor of modern Hopevale) in 1919, when he was about six years old. Like his sisters and cousins, who were also part-European children from the coast around Cape Melville, Bathurst Head, and Flinders Island, BF attracted the attention of police and native troopers who were, at the time, charged with bringing part-white children away from the camps, and under the 'civilizing influence' of European society. He was taken from his Aboriginal family and, after spending some time with white police at Laura, came to the mission where he went to school, was baptized a Lutheran, married, raised a family, was widowed, and lives still. A man with an inquiring mind (and a sharp tongue), BF has an encyclopedic memory for kin and names. He still remembered places and events in the territory we visited after an absence of more than 60 years.

BF arrived at the Cape Bedford mission speaking the Flinders Island language (see Sutton, 1980) and some English. Although he could not maintain his tribal language, having no one with whom to speak it at the mission, he did actively cultivate a knowledge of vocabulary from his own and neighboring languages, learning words from aged kinsmen who spend periods at the mission, or whom BF met during and after World War II in other parts of Queensland. BF is one of the few surviving authorities on the complex genealogical links between Hopevale people and Aborigines in other parts of Queensland who trace their ancestry to the area north of Cooktown. He is, moreover, one of a handful of people who know more than one or two words from the respectful style. At the mission, BF is known as a somewhat prickly character: competent, knowledgeable, and expert — but also supremely confident of his own opinions.

The next man, RH, lived the first eight years of his life in a large Aboriginal camp at Barrow Point, near Cape Melville, an area still well to the north of traditional GY territory. This camp was one of the last refuges for people from these northern tribes who had gradually been driven from their own land, and who had come to the coast where they could live a semiautonomous existence, supplemented by employment on the boats that worked the reefs. Like BF, RH came originally to the mission as a result of police attention directed toward part-European children in Aboriginal camps. In RH's case the process was indirect. His presence in the camp became enough of a liability that his parents finally brought him to Cape Bedford in 1922 and left him in the care of the missionaries. He tried at first to run away, and after being brought back for a second time, he was tied up in the mission hospital so that he

couldn't follow his relatives back to Barrow Point, more than 100 miles up the coast.

When he arrived at Cape Bedford, RH was a monolingual speaker of the Barrow Point language (hereafter BP), a close relative of BF's Flinders Island language. BP is also related to GY and has many cognate words, but is phonologically rather different. When he came to the mission, RH had no one at all with whom he could speak, and he recalls spending his first weeks there in lonely conversation with the hospital pussycat. He ultimately learned GY and the English taught in school, and he claims that he almost 'forgot about' his own language. However, a number of Barrow Point people, in particular one of his uncles, came to Cape Bedford when RH was a teenager. (By this time police had destroyed the Barrow Point camp and moved all its people away by boat, mostly to the Lockhart River.) This uncle was an accomplished seaman who took charge of the mission boats for a period; all the young men who worked on the boats learned bits of the BP language, and RH made a conscious effort to reacquire it from his kinsman. In recent years RH spent considerable time with one of his late relatives who was still fluent in BP; the two of them had lively discussions, RH tells me, about proper BP form and vocabulary. RH is acutely conscious of being probably the last speaker of his own language, and he constantly laments the amount he has forgotten. (When we made the trip in question, RH was trying to teach me BP, and he had asked me to assemble a list of words for him.)

RH is an independent and capable man who was never comfortable with the confined and controlled life of the mission. (He has only recently returned to Hopevale after spending many years working 'on the outside'.) Although fluent in GY and English, and the progenitor of a large and widely ramified Hopevale family, he seems to keep a certain emotional distance from his adopted community — a stance which is reinforced by his claim to a distant territory, its language, and its stories. An explicit purpose of our trip to Cape Melville was to visit RH's homeland around Barrow Point. The conversation at Wakooka Outstation which I present below took place on RH's tribal land.

By contrast, the third man, JJ, is the senior member of a family from the true heartland of GY territory. He is the eldest surviving son of the last 'king of the Cape Bedford reserve' — an Aboriginal elder appointed formerly to represent his area in dealings with government and police bureaucracies. JJ was also sent to the mission school at an early age (he is roughly BF's contemporary), but unlike both BF and RH he claims GY as both his rightful tribal language and his mother tongue. And though JJ was educated at the mission and has lived as part of the Hopevale community all his life, he enjoyed intermittent contact with his parents and other relatives living on the mission reserve but excluded from the small Lutheran community which the missionaries controlled. He thus retained a nonmission network of relatives and social

relationships which BF and RH, both effectively orphans in the mission dormitories, could not. Still, JJ married the daughter of one of the 'old mission families' — a couple who themselves had grown up and married under the supervision of the missionaries. JJ was, therefore, very much a part of mission life, and he was heavily influenced by missionary attitudes toward the traditional practices and beliefs of his 'heathen' kinsmen. JJ is a true GY expert, one of the last people to have an active knowledge of the customs of the old people, and of the BIL respect vocabulary as well.

JJ is an extraordinary accommodating and good-natured man: considerate, helpful, self-effacing and polite. Although about the same age as BF, JJ treats him with a certain deference, due perhaps to their respective personalities, and perhaps to JJ's less favored status in the mission society of earlier years.² JJ and BF also stand in what would, traditionally, have been an avoidance relationship (see below): the woman BF married was JJ's *gaminhdharr* or 'classificatory grandchild'.

After several exhausting days crashing through seemingly trackless bush, leveling river crossings, and hacking paths for our vehicles, our party had arrived at the abandoned Wakooka outstation, part of a large pastoral property. The station is squarely on territory associated with the *gambiil-mugu-ngu*, 'Barrow Point people', and was RH's *bubu* or tribal country. Our guide, GR, is a man of 50 who had worked extensively through this area in the 1950s. (He had, in fact, bulldozed most of the old tracks which we were trying to follow.) Except for him, none of the people on the trip were familiar with this country, although RH had been on a similar expedition a few years earlier, and had also walked over the same land 60 years before as a small boy. The men spent much of the trip trying to reconstruct traditional boundaries on the basis of features of the landscape they had heard described. They also returned again and again to a single conversational theme, the joking comparison of the relative merits and deficiencies of different tribal territories: whose country had the most plentiful animals, the biggest fish, the best supply of fresh water, and so on. People continually invoked the anachronistic rule that owners of a territory (*bubu gudyin*, people who 'belong to a place') have exclusive, or at least preeminent, rights to its native foods and game.

Shortly before reaching Wakooka outstation, just at dusk, the leader of the expedition, GR, shot a wild pig — a prized food and a welcome addition to our group diet. GR butchered the pig, and prepared the meat overnight. The next morning we arose to find delicious hot roast pork for breakfast. Three particular episodes in the accompanying conversation are the focus of my interest here. (In the description that follows, the reader is referred to the transcript reproduced in the Appendix.)

While two members of the group talk about people from Hopevale who mustered cattle at Wakooka during the 1950s (see lines 1, 4, 5 and 7 of the

transcript), BF approaches the makeshift table where the meat is spread out. He has been invited to serve himself by RH who, just before the transcript begins indicated the meat by saying

1. pointing at meat:

inya
meat+ABS
(There is the) meat.³

The word *inya* is the BP equivalent of GY *minha* 'edible animal' — an obvious cognate that virtually any Hopevale person would recognize — and in effect RH's invitation initiates the BP sequence that follows. BF, helping himself to pork, replies (at line 2 of the transcript):

2. taking meat:

inya *umi:n*
meat+ABS bandicoot species
(This is, or we call this) pig/bandicoot meat.

BF tries, evidently, to carry on this side sequence initiated by RH by displaying his own knowledge of the appropriate BP word for wild pig.⁴ He elaborates on RH's original prompt, and also implicitly checks that he has, in fact, used the right word.

There are several notable features to this bit of speech, representing a switch into the marked BP language in the midst of otherwise ordinary mixed GY and English. On the one hand, as the only two legitimate claimants to the area being visited, BF and RH were conscious of having a special relationship to the land — and the game — of the area. This special relationship surfaced from time to time in their own verbal interaction, which occasionally included switches into BP, their common language from the area.⁵ Moreover, under the circumstances, it was clear to all present, whether or not they spoke BP and despite the fact that BF's remark was ostensibly directed as an aside to RH alone, that BF's utterance demanded a somewhat more elaborate reading, along the following lines: 'this meat (that I am helping myself to) is appropriately called (that is, is called in the language appropriate to these circumstances) by the name *umi:n*, and what's more I happen to know this singularly relevant lexical fact (which some of you may not)'. His utterance, that is, implicitly acted (1) to provide a kind of verbal punctuation to accompany the immediate action (taking meat); (2) to inform others present of an otherwise obscure lexical fact; (3) to prove by demonstration that the speaker, at least, possessed the relevant linguistic knowledge; (4) to remind all present that the place, and the food, *belonged* to a particular group of people — the speakers of the lan-

guage in which wild pig was known as *umi:n*, thereby establishing the relevance of the linguistic move to the situation at hand; and finally (5) to demarcate his proprietary relationship, shared with RH, to the territory and the game by exercising his specialized, and locally relevant, expertise.

At line 3 of the transcript, RH agrees with BF ('yes [that's the right name]'), and then after a short hesitation he steps up to BF, puts his hand on his shoulder, and says to him:

4. offering a friendly correction:

inya . . . umi:n.ga
 meat+ABS bandicoot-ABL?
 (It really should be called) wild pig.

He offers an improved version of the correct BP name for this food,⁶ and BF defers to his greater expertise.

The second notable sequence in the conversation occurs after we have all eaten our fill of the pork. Talk has revolved around how much each person is eating, whether some are getting more than others, whether all are doing their share to finish the abundant supply, and so on. Suddenly, with no obvious prompt which would explain the switch to BP, BF injects another BP remark (at transcript line 46):

5. criticizing the pig hunter?:

inya awudha male:ym-bi imba-y
 meat+ABS NEG · native-Gen kill-PAST
 It wasn't a native (of this country) who killed the game.
 (Or: It was game not belonging to a native of the territory that was killed.)⁷

In this case only one person – RH – can be the intended audience, since no other member of the group could be expected to understand the BP words used. Indeed, the utterance *depends* on the exclusivity of the intended audience. Because it could be interpreted as a criticism (as well, probably, as a private joke), the utterance has the character of an aside, made 'under the breath': that is, publicly, but 'off-record', meant to be heard and perhaps understood, but not something for which the speaker can be held accountable.⁸ Again, the remark seems a particularly apt use of the language native to the area; BF makes the pointed (if, under the circumstances, somewhat rude) observation that the meat in question was dispatched by someone other than a native of the territory who, under the traditional scheme of things, was supposed to have exclusive rights to such game.

The last exchange I want to examine involves not the BP language but the

respectful style in GY. Toward the end of breakfast everyone has tried, without success, to finish the pork. The men are talking about what we may have to eat in the next few days, naming in particular some shellfish (*baabaa*) which we expect to find on the beach (lines 75–79). Everyone is full of pork, although someone (probably GR) is still urging people to eat (line 80). At this point JJ switches from ordinary GY into the respectful BIL style, to ask BF:

6. politely inviting BF to eat more:

yalmburr gayi-nhu yurra
meat+ABS take-PURP 2pNOM
Do you want to take meat?

BF declines, saying he has eaten enough (line 82).

JJ's utterance here is genuine GY; but he has substituted special respectful equivalents for the ordinary GY words *minha* (< *yalmburr*) and *maani-nhu* (< *gayi-nhu*). Moreover, in place of the second-person singular pronoun *nyundu*, JJ uses the second person plural form *yurra* as a suitably polite term of address.⁹

The respectful style involved a number of such substitutions. BIL speech was formerly obligatory when a man addressed or spoke within earshot of his wife's relatives, especially her parents, brothers, and grandparents. BF and JJ do stand in such a relationship (BF married JJ's classificatory *gaminhdharr* 'grandchild'); and although the use of the BIL style has, along with most other behavioral concomitants of avoidance relationships, all but disappeared at modern Hopevale, these two men are still able to use the special forms on occasion.

That JJ chooses to offer BF more meat using BIL words suggests an interpretation for his utterance that goes somewhat beyond an invitation. His highly polite formulation both recognizes that the offer (of more meat) can be interpreted as an imposition of sorts (in part because everyone is obviously full, and in part because it requires a response – see Brown and Levinson, 1978), and at the same time mitigates the imposition by making an implicit reference to the restrained and deferential nature of their (traditional) relationship. JJ affirms that he is treating BF with care and respect by choosing a linguistic register which conjures precisely those aspects of now-lapsed social arrangements that had to do with restrained and formal interaction. Moreover, JJ both underscores a kind of solidarity with BF (both men are competent in traditional propriety) and pays him the implicit compliment of recognizing his competence in the BIL style by assuming it.

Most of the cases I have recorded of spontaneous use of BIL in ordinary talk resemble this one. For one thing, JJ quite frequently initiates BIL exchanges with BF, in a variety of situations. Once, for example, these two were

making spears in BF's backyard. BF was host, and in many ways was also acting as *boss*: directing the spear-making operation, taking charge of the fire (in which spears were straightened and worked), passing out tools and materials, and generally telling people what to do. Asking to borrow a pocket knife, JJ spontaneously switched into BIL, apparently to temper his request (something like adding 'please'):

8. making a polite request:

wirriirr mayba-la yurra
 knife+ABS give-IMP 2pNOM
 Please give me the knife.

Unlike the offer of pork in 6, JJ's imposition is here more direct, especially in view of BF's position in the event at hand.

In this conversation in the bush I have isolated instances of two special registers that contrast strikingly with the medium of ordinary talk. To say that these are *marked* varieties does not imply that instances of their use are necessarily striking or remarkable in their interactional effect. Speaking in BIL language does not seem to elicit puzzlement and BF and RH's occasional chatting in BP is not rewarded with astonishment or jokes. Instead the utterances in question are routinely absorbed into the stream of talk, even though the marked codes are duly noted and recognized.

Why do people use these highly marked forms of speech? How do speakers exploit them, and what do hearers make of them? In the examples I have given it should be clear that using BIL or BP, at modern Hopevale, is predominantly a matter of marking, establishing, or drawing upon social relationships. (Peter Sutton suggests, in a related context, that such features of speech index 'states of intention'.) These brief switches to marked registers draw participants' attention (and, indeed, draw our analytical attention) precisely to the content of personal relations in the conversational context. What aspects of these relationships will be relevant to our ongoing interpretation is a function not only of formal indexical properties of the codes involved, but concerns personal biography, the activity of the moment, and the specific sociolinguistic history of the speech community.

I can give content to these remarks by cataloging some of what seem to me relevant variables – sociological, personal, and interactional – which may affect the interpretations available when speakers use marked registers like BIL words or fragments of the BP language. As always, one's choice of words may go well beyond the obvious referential content of what one says.

1. Genealogical relationship, widely construed, is clearly preeminent in the examples at hand. Not only do certain links of kinship (as, for example, between BF and JJ) enable the use of BIL words, but the use of the register itself

focuses attention on the genealogical relationship of the protagonists. Here I mean by genealogy not simply links between people and their relatives, but relationships to land as well. (One may say of a kinsman: 'he belongs to me'; and of a tract of land: 'I belong to there'.) The conventional formulas with which people at Hopevale address each other encapsulate these geosocial relationships. GR calls BF, his classificatory 'son', though 20 years his senior, 'Sonny'; JJ calls RH *dhuway* 'Nephew' and me — his 'son' — 'Boy'. But BF calls RH, his nephew or grandson depending on how one reckons the relationship, by a BP word, *ayinhthin*, which means, literally, 'big lot of boys'. The customary vocative records at once a genealogical fact, and a common link to a shared tribal land.

2. These conversational devices may rest on facts of personal biography and community history. BF and RH, both orphans, part European, wrenched from their Aboriginal families, raised by missionaries in two foreign tongues, on foreign land, share a common tie to a lost identity through the half-remembered scraps of an almost extinct language. Isolated words from obscure linguistic varieties most frequently emerge when conversationalists engage in the verbal equivalent of comparing scars: one person after another announces his *own* word for some familiar object so that others may admire it. Our own roast pig prompted such a display, when BF commented that, because of its especially good flavor, it must recently have had a steady diet of a certain water lily called, in GY, *mabil*. One man present, a native of Maytown who spoke Gugu Yalandji as a child before being taken to Cape Bedford, intoned his word for the lily, *bulburrul*; and RH completed the chain by saying

9. giving one's own word:

<i>ngayu</i>	<i>ayi</i>	<i>unhdhi:n</i>
IsNOM(=GY)	vegetable food (=BP)	water lily
I (call that water lily) <i>ayi unhdhi:n</i> .		

The politics of modern Hopevale make these verbal practices at once significant and poignantly anachronistic. Although located on land traditionally occupied by GY-speaking people, the mission community comprises predominantly people of non-GY ancestry. Belonging to one group rather than another, or having legitimate claim on the community, is a divisive and difficult issue. Some people express their disdain for other groups in terms of a detachment from GY; they disown their own first language (even when their own tribal tongue is unknown to them) in an effort to disguise from themselves their imprisonment in an Aboriginal institution. At modern Hopevale, to use BP words is, in part, to say 'I am *not* a Guugu Yimidhirr person, and this place is not really my home (i.e., I have another home).' By contrast, to

use 'deep' GY, to speak with BIL words, is in part to say 'I *am* a true GY person, and this place is *mine*.'

3. Using specially marked registers depends as well on features of the overall 'context of situation'. The conversational fragments I have presented all occurred in the midst of a conscious excursion into the past. We visited 'story places' (sites where the actions of mythological characters have left their mark upon the land), traveled old routes, feasted on local delicacies, slept in old camps. The traditional life of the places we visited was of continuous implicit relevance in everything we did or said. Against such a background using language connected with that traditional life was, far from being mysterious or puzzling, peculiarly appropriate.

Our desire to see again and enjoy this territory from the past also set the content of much of our interaction. A common conversational ploy involved a joking competition about who had the best country, or who, as native to a place, was at each moment responsible for our well-being: in charge of keeping us on the track, at fault if we caught no fish, entitled to praise if we found honey but ridicule if the nest was poor. This competitive, joking tone extended to other sorts of talk as well. RH had told us stories associated with places we saw. These stories in turn prompted TG, a GY man with a certain reputation as a storyteller, to ruminate aloud on similarities between Aboriginal tales from different areas. He began to list characters that appeared time after time in the stories. As he named each character, in GY, others joined in, either repeating the name or suggesting another. All the while, in the background, RH chimed in with the BP name:

10. naming mythic characters:

TG;	<i>bun^udyul</i> . . .	that's everywhere. . .
	frill-lizard(=GY)	
		[
JJ;		<i>bun^udyul</i>
RH;	<i>wun^{ha}:rr</i>	[laughs]
	frill-lizard(=BP)	

4. However much a full interpretation must draw on a detailed situational background, using marked registers clearly serves immediate interactional ends as well. In each example, it is possible to discern an interactional motive which the switch to a marked register serves. The social arrangements which provided for an institutionalized avoidance relationship have faded, and correspondingly what was once an automatic linguistic reflex of those arrangements – using BIL words – has shifted to become appropriate to different tasks. Speaking BIL is now a strategic device for 'being elaborately polite' or for 'tempering an intrusive request', among other things. Similarly, though the social resources

required for speaking BP as a full language no longer exist, fragments of the language are appropriate to two sorts of task: (1) proprietary labeling ('you tell me your word, and I'll tell you mine'), reminiscent of a public *display*, like wearing one's national costume to a ball; and (2) 'on stage' but nonetheless private remarks which, like private jokes, specifically include some hearers but exclude others.

5. Finally, the interpretive machinery set into motion by the use of a marked register in conversation may penetrate to the most specific and contingent details of individual personality. We may perceive, for example, BF's somewhat antisocial (because ostentatiously private) remark in BP at 5 as evidence for his negativeness, his feeling of detachment from or superiority over others present. And if BF is 'prickly' while JJ is 'helpful', then JJ's use of ultrapolite BIL words to BF seems natural and expressive. Our relations with and our impressions of one another develop from a multitude of miniature interactions. Moreover, we manage these relationships, and the impressions we give, through a collection of tiny strategies, among which our choice of words is by no means the least significant.

This is of course only a partial catalogue of variables that inform the process of interpreting talk in natural circumstances. I think it characteristic of conversation that such factors, together with those pragmatic and interactional rules we may care to formulate, *underdetermine* performance. The *potential* significance of a word or a gesture must be constructed, in tentative fragments, from these and other features of the situation. The *available* significance (about which we can gather specific evidence — as, for example, when TG, listening to a tape of this conversation, hearing BF carry on about the wild pig and its taste, shook his head with a laugh and muttered 'my old *banydyi* [brother-in-law]' — as if to say 'what a character!') is, correspondingly, uncertain and underspecified by any *rules* of interpretation. Moreover, the examples I have given here are particularly vexing: marginal, infrequent, highly marked. When we try to analyze the complexities of everyday talk, we need tools at least as powerful as those that we, as participants, routinely apply. Interpretation must be rich, not to do violence to the power and the subtlety of speech in constituting social life.

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Appendix

The following transcript is taken from a film soundtrack of a conversation at Wakooka outstation in August, 1980. The following conventions apply to the transcript. The symbols '[' and ']' mark the beginnings and ends of overlaps, when two speakers (or

more) are talking simultaneously. The symbol '=' links two utterances which follow each other directly, without a pause. Each line of the transcript has three parts: the original text as transcribed, a morpheme-by-morpheme gloss, and a free translation into English. The following abbreviations are used for grammatical morphemes:

NOM	nominative	PERF	perfective aspect
3	3rd person	CONTR	contrafactual mode
2	2nd person	DAT	dative case
1	1st person	EMPH	emphatic particle
p	plural	INDEF	indefinite pronoun
s	singular	INCHO	inchoative
TV	transitive verbalizer	GEN	genitive case
REDUP	reduplicated verb stem	NEG	negative
PAST	past tense	CAT	catalytic formative in genitive+case forms
NONPAST	nonpast tense	LOC	locative case
PART	particle	PL	plural formative
ABS	absolutive case	ABL	ablative case
DEMON	demonstrative	PURP	purposive inflection
IMP	imperative	COMIT	comitative case ('with')

Transcript

- 1 g; *dhirraayngurr* () *nyulu* been here too?
 old man 3sNOM
 Was old man () here too?
- 2 bf; *inya u.mi:n* =
 meat+NOM wild pig+NOM
 (this is, or: we call this) wild pig
- 3 rh; =*yu*=
 right
- 4 tg; =*dhana- dhana warra* Fred Grogan work *manaarmaya*
 3pNOM 3pNOM bad -TVizer+REDUP+NONPAST
 that mob with old Fred Grogan were working (here)?
- 5 gr; [*yu:*
 yes
- 6 rh; *inya* =
 meat+NOM
- 7 tg; =Billy McGreen=
- 8 rh; =*um:n.ga* (1.2)
 wild pig+NOM
 (No, it's really called) *inya um:n.ga*.
- 9 bf; *um:n.ga*?=
 wild-pig?
 (It's called) *um:n.ga*?
- 10 rh; =*mmm*
 yes

(Several lines deleted here.)

- 40 rh; *bama nyulu yii binin.gu budaaral gurra minha*
man 3sNOM here end-EMPH at+REDUP-NONPAST also meat+ABS
(Hey), this fellow is eating the meat right to the end.
- 41 tg; |
(*guugulu gurra*) *nyundu* =
thigh-bone also 2sNOM
... more of that leg (meat)!
- 42 =*wagiilgila* (.2)
cut+REDUP-IMP
... Keep cutting!
- 43 rh; yeah (1.5)
- 44 *dagu yarra bada wunaa (dhiigal) bininbi . . binin.bi* (3.1)
thin(=PART) there down exist+NONPAST straight? on the end
Hey, there is some down over there at the end.
- 45 jj; (*ngaanii?* then you see there. . .)
why?
- 46 bf; *inya awudha maleymbi imbay* =
meat+ABS NEG traditional owner-GEN kill-PAST
It wasn't a traditional owner (of the territory) who killed the meat.
Or: The meat of (someone other than a traditional owner) was killed.
- 47 rh; =*bama nay-adhu* (2.6)
man I- 1sGEN
Well I- my- . . .
- 48 gr; () *ngayu dhanaan gadaaray minha baawaanhu*
1sgNOM 3plDAT come+REDUP-PAST meat+ABS cook+REDUP-PURP
I came to keep cooking meat for them.
- 49 rh; (*nyundu yii*) *nagagu nhanuumi nyundu yii loya* =
2sNOM here east-EMPH 2sgGEN-CAT-LOC 2sNOM here loya
To the east in your country (they) always get caught on loya-canes. . .
- 50 *cane-bi yidyidyirr yiway*.
cane-LOC get stuck+REDUP-NONPAST here
=|
- 51 jj; *awu:n!*
That's right!
|
- 52 tg; [laughs]
- 53 rh; *minha* () *loya-cane-bi wawumurrarra dudaa*
meat/animal loya-cane-LOC soul-unable(=can't) run+NONPAST
The game can't run away (because of getting stuck) on the loya-cane.
- 54 tg; *ahh minha buurraaybi* () *wawu muwrgarra*. nearly *biini* =
yes meat/animal water-LOC soul unable. nearly die+NONPAST
(but here) the game can't (run) in the water. It nearly dies . .
- 55 jj; =*hah hmm hmm*
- 56 rh; (*wanhdhaa*) *yii naga bubu dhanaan mundal bidhagurr warra yii* =
Where here east ground+ABS 3pl+GEN others+ABS small-PL bad here
(Well, but) in the east in their country (the animals are) mostly small.

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- 57 =*ngadhu bubu*=
 1sGEN country+ABS
 Whereas here, my country. . .
- 58 =*ngalba buurraay*
 covered with water+ABS
 . . . is covered with water.
- 59 jj; *nhaadhi yii bubu ngalba buurraay*
 see-PAST here country+ABS covered with water+ABS
 You see this country covered with water?
- 60 rh; [laughs]
- (Several lines deleted here.)
- 75 rh; *minha nganaarru* .
 meat+ABS what-INDEF
 What's that meat called. . .
- 76 tomorrow shell-*gu galbaaygu* . . .
 shell-EMPH long-EMPH
 tomorrow (we'll have) lots of shellfish
- 77 jj; tomorrow *ngayu daamba dyinmanhu*
 1sNOM damper knead-PURP
 Tomorrow I'll make damper.
- 78 gr; *yii nagaalu wargaaygu nhayun .dagu shell .baabaa*
 here east big-EMPH that .thing edible-shellfish
 Just east of here there are lots of those .*baabaa* shells.
- 79 rh; *dagu shell galbaaygu .baabaa-budhun*
 thing long-EMPH shellfish-really
 There are lots of shells, true *baabaa* .
- 80 ?; *minha budala*
 meat+ABS eat-IMP
 Eat some (more) meat!
- 81 jj; *yalmburr gayinhu yurra ?*
 meat+ABS take-PURP 2plNOM
 Do you want to take (more) meat? (BIL polite speech.)
- 82 bf; *minha galmba ganaa budhu .gambuul-dhirr*
 meat+ABS also enough indeed stomach-COMIT
 I've had enough meat, I'm full.
- 83 jj; *warra gambul gaari*
 bad stomach NEG
 (?You can't really be full enough. . .)

Notes

1. I am indebted to the Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, and to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies for financial support in my work at Hopevale, and to the Hopevale people and the Hopevale Council for their help and encouragement.
2. There is considerable evidence that the original Cape Bedford missionaries fomented

a division between people of fully Aboriginal descent and the part-European inhabitants of the mission — most of whom had been brought to the mission by police from widely separated areas of Queensland.

3. All the examples presented are excerpted from transcripts of natural conversation recorded, and in some cases filmed, at Hopevale and environs in August 1980. Quoted examples take the following form: for each line, I show the original spoken words (1st line), followed by a morpheme-by-morpheme gloss (2nd line), followed by a free English gloss. Usually each example has a brief situational identification following the example number. Notational conventions for synchronic organization and abbreviations are listed in the Appendix, together with a full conversational transcript.
4. The semantic connection between bandicoots and wild pigs (which are not native to Australia) is not limited to BP. GY distinguishes two varieties of bandicoot, called *yarrbay* and *wudyiir*, and uses the loan *bigibigi* for wild pig. All three words, however, are rendered in the respectful BIL style by a single replacement, *nyiwa*.
5. BP words had occurred spontaneously twice in the conversation immediately preceding the section of transcript considered here. BF had summoned RH to the brief prayer that preceded our morning repast by saying

3. *ayindhin* *arrwa-la*
 boy+PL come-IMP
 Come (here), boy!

(Both words are from the BP language.) A BP word also appeared when the men were discussing words from different Aboriginal languages for a variety of lily (see example 9 below).

6. The morphology suggests that the wild pig was perceived as like, but not identical to, the true *umi'n*, with a gloss something like '(deriving) from bandicoot'.
7. If I have transcribed this remark correctly, it is probably not a grammatical BP sentence, since the evident agent does not bear ergative inflection. There is no longer reliable evidence available about how BP originally managed such piggyback inflection. See Haviland (1979a, section 3.2.3[b]) for a description of GY genitive+case forms.
8. In fact, RH seems to be thrown into some confusion, or embarrassment, by BF's remark. His response is hesitant, lexically mixed, and incoherent (line 47).
9. The GY BIL replaced singular second-person pronouns with plural forms as a general rule of politeness. One survival from this usage, which continues even when the protagonists do not substitute other BIL words for ordinary GY, is the use of the second-person plural pronoun *yurra* as a conventionalized polite address term. Thus, for example, once when JJ was asking BF about his genealogical relation to a third person, he said

7. asking about a kinsman:
nyulu nhanu ngaanaa, yurra
 3sNOM 2sGEN what 2pNOM
 She is your what (i.e., what is she to you), you?

with a second person singular genitive pronoun *nhanu* in a 'referential' use, but the plural *yurra* in the vocative use.

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