

LIFE HISTORY OF A SPEECH COMMUNITY

- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| 25 | nyulu bin come with one hand stand up
3sNOM

yarra bin
over there
 | She came up with one hand, and she was standing up like that. |
| 26 | I; you wasn't using your shampoo my boy | |
| 27 | shampoo nyundu wasn't using it
2sNOM | The shampoo, you weren't using it. |

I have tried to give the reader a taste of the fascinating complexity and richness of Hopevale speech. It should at least be clear that Guugu Yimidhirr *lives*, although it is certainly neither static, nor unchanging, nor, sadly, prospering. There is no support for the overly simply idea of fixed and idealised codes, in the face of subtle gradations between different speech varieties. A speech community is a *social* entity, whose members' biographies are at least as important as their linguistic 'competences' in setting the form of speech. Nor should we think in absolutes: it is possible to speak a language more or less well, and even the barely-competent or the half-competent speaker can *use* a speech variety for effective communication. The relationship between identity and language is difficult and ambivalent even for members of a speech community; their ambivalence appears importantly in their relations with outside observers and experts. Still, I am in complete agreement with Noreen Pym when she concludes that "[i]t is the present speakers of Guugu Yimidhirr themselves who will decide whether the language dies out completely.' It is these same speakers who must seize responsibility for their community, and the languages that help bind it together.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Our research at Hopevale has been supported by the Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, and by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. Archival investigations have been facilitated by the Lutheran Church of Australia, the Neuen-dettelsau Mission Society, the Hopevale Mission Board and aided by grants from the Director, Research School of Pacific Studies, A.N.U., and a grant to Dr Leslie K. Haviland from the A.R.G.S. I am especially grateful to the late Billy Jacko, and my friends Roger Hart, Walter and Lizzie Jack, and Tulo Gordon, for their help and encouragement in my work at Hopevale; and to Bruce Rigsby, Tom Dutton, Leslie Haviland, Norman McQuown, and Thomas Smith-Stark for suggestions on earlier versions of this paper.

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- 8 m: guya guya
not not
[
- 9 ca; you fella tell lies
- 10 co; he was playing inside
[
- 11 b; there you just telling
- 12 you just tellin lies
- 13 you four
- 14 m; we four but not nhila
now
- 15 co; and S***** bin go
[
- 16 m; ngambaaygu
in secret
- 17 ngambaaygu nhamidhurr yirrgau 'Ngambaaygu', is that how you
in secret that way speak say it?
- 18 and S***** slowly
- 19 ca: gambul! That's not true!
stomach
- Children, that year, used the Guugu Yimidhurr word *gambul* to signify that something another had just said was untrue, or that something the speaker had said wasn't really true but only intended to fool. In line 20, B, unsure of the proper word, repeats her *own* version *nambaalgu* (which really means just 'stone').]
- 20 b: (??) nambaalgu, eh? C***** J***
in secret
- 21 m; nyulu bin do it slowly nhambaaynggu He did it slowly and secretly.
3sNOM in secret
- 22 ca: gambul, boy! You're lying, boy!
stomach

Let me end this excursion into Hopevale conversation with a brief example of the varieties of English that combine with Guugu Yimidhurr in ordinary speech. Today people at Hopevale watch television and video movies, listen to country music and rock 'n roll, and they also talk with people from outside Hopevale, some of whom use varieties of English that diverge rather sharply from standard Queensland speech. In the following fragment, Lo, a boy in his mid-teens has just returned from a year at High school in Bamaga, at the tip of Cape York Peninsula, where Cape York Creole is the community and school vernacular. His language is heavily influenced by Bamaga teenager speech, even as he mixes pivotal Guugu Yimidhurr words and pronouns into his description of being confined to his dormitory while ill.

43 m: social-service-bi dhana They're on social services.
social-service-LOC 3pNOM

44 still on social

45 l: (L comments in English that social and un-employment benefits are different)

[M continues his explanation, now using standard English until, at line 51, he switches his attention away from L and back to B and J.]

47 m: it's different

48 I think it's different to man and girls like you
know

49 but if they want to get a job they have to go
down Brisbane

50 or Cairns to get a job

[Here M switches his audience, and begins to talk about the work experience of his sister, who worked for a time in Cooktown.]

51 but I know this one here been working in

52 nagaar pub-bi In the east (i.e., Cooktown),
EAST+ALL pub-LOC in a pub.

If it were the case that children at Hopevale were *not* acquiring Guugu Yimidhirr, then, whatever the complexities of code-switching in the community, and despite the possibilities for subtle communication offered by the competing language varieties, Guugu Yimidhirr would have little chance to survive. Children's Guugu Yimidhirr is certainly flawed, in the ears of older speakers, and many young people at Hopevale claim that they cannot understand the 'deep' words of adults' speech. For example, several of my elderly teachers at Hopevale joked with me about the speech of one fourteen-year-old boy in the household where I live, who asked me, holding up an old T-shirt,

yii Leslie-bi Is this Leslie's?
this Leslie-GEN

The error here is the choice of the genitive suffix *-bi*, instead of the correct *-wi*, which follows a vowel-final noun. (The mistake parallels the misuse of the English articles *a* and *an*.) Such mistakes provoke laughter, rather than dismay, at Hopevale, perhaps because language skills, like most other skills, are not acquired quickly in Hopevale society. Instead, there is little pressure on children to become fully competent, either linguistically or socially, until well past the age acceptable in many European circles.

Nonetheless, children and adolescents at Hopevale are actively learning Guugu Yimidhirr. Their everyday speech displays considerable and sophisticated knowledge of the multiple varieties of Hopevale speech. Even their speech play, as the next two fragments show, involves use of Guugu Yimidhirr words. In the first short fragment, two opposite sex cousins, both pre-teenagers, engage in a brief word game in which one gets the other to pronounce a word, so as to be able to append an insulting or challenging remark.

tual, but *organisational*: speakers seem to respond to another's turn *in the same language*, although they may switch languages between such sequences of linked turns.

The sensitivity of speakers to the *linguistic context* in which a turn at speaking may occur is well demonstrated in the following short fragment in which an elderly man (a recognised expert on Guugu Yimidhirr) and his thirty-year-old son describe to my wife and me the subtleties of social security payments. Speaking to me, M (the son) uses Guugu Yimidhirr or Hopevale English; speaking to my wife Leslie (who at the time understood very little Guugu Yimidhirr), he switches clearly into a more elaborate standard English.

[Fragment 4: talking about the dole, Hopevale 26 October 1977. B is a sixty-year-old expert Guugu Yimidhirr speaker, M his thirty-year-old son. J is the author, and L (whose speech is not quoted) the author's wife.]

- 1 m; that gotta pay us
 2 social
 3 ngandhanun wudhil nambal (That) gives us money.
 1p1DAT give money

[Although B is an expert speaker of Inland Guugu Yimidhirr, his son M here uses the *Coastal* word for 'give' in a form, *wudhil*, which B told me repeatedly was incorrect. M's mother, however, does use the word.]

- 4 so much, you know
 5 j; that social
 6 m; yeah
 7 like ngayu dyiiraal-dhirr Like me, with a wife . . .
 1sNOM wife-having
 8 might get 59
 9 well nyulu might be dyiiraal-mul Well, someone who doesn't have
 3sNOM wife-PRIV a wife
 10 he might get 30 35 or something like that

[I break in to ask whether unemployed adult women also receive social security payments.]

- 11 j; nhila gabiirr-gabiirr warrga walu J Well, now (what about) big girls
 now girl-REDUP large like like J?
 12 m; yo
 13 ganaa (?work?) That's alright (for them to work).
 alright
 14 but they can't get a job
 15 yii
 here
 16 they gotta get job round Brisbane somewhere,
 you know

[

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- 9 d; ngayu galmba yugu nhanma-y So I also grabbed a stick.
 1sNOM also stick take-PAST
- 10 j; oh no!≠
- [But D performs his alleged challenging reply in Guugu Yimidhirr.]
- 11 d; =ma gad-ii nganhdhaan Ok, come on, let's start poking
 Hey! come-IMP 1p1NOM each other!
 бага:dhi-nhu
 poke-REFL-PURP
- 12 r; ha ha
- 13 d; duda-y wugurr-in wali They ran away, and I chased
 run-PAST follow-PAST around them around.
- 14 dhawuunh manaadhi And then we made up and
 friend become-PAST became friends.

Most ordinary conversation at Hopevale is a more balanced mix between English and Guugu Yimidhirr, and there is unquestionably an asymmetry between ages: younger people speak more English and less Guugu Yimidhirr than do older people. But this generational skewing is not absolute, and in the context of practical activities switching between codes is rapid and often seemingly arbitrary. In the following fragment, several Hopevale people are packing up a four-wheel-drive vehicle in preparation for a return to the Mission after several days camping and fishing by a river. Everyone is tired, and there is a certain anxiety in the air about reaching a difficult river crossing before the light fails. In the transcribed speech, several different mini-conversations are taking place within the overall framework of packing the truck. T is a man in his sixties, L a woman of about the same age, D a woman slightly younger; H is T's twenty-year-old daughter, and C is L's daughter of a similar age. Thus, as a practical matter, T and H must negotiate the packing of their joint belongings, as must L and C. All people present are comfortable in both Guugu Yimidhirr and English.

[Fragment 3: packing a truck, Jepsen's crossing, 10 August 1979]

- 1 c; yarra wanhun-bi? Whose is that thing over there?
 that who-GEN-GEN
- 2 t; hmm
 {
- 3 h; ngadhu towel leave the towel That's my towel, leave the towel!
 1sGEN
- 4 leave that bag out!
- 5 I carry one bag you carry one bag!
 { }
- 6 d; all in one, H****
- 7 all in one
 [. . .]
- 10 t; H****, yii nhanu? H****, is this yours?
 this 2sACC

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[A member of the audience objects that R** was not a smoker.]

- 10 j; nhanuugu wunay? You had some yourself?
 2sGEN-EMPH exist-PAST
 {
 11 r; he don't smoke
 {
 12 d; yeah
 13 j; nhanu-gu bada wuna-y You yourself still had some?
 2sGEN-EMPH down exist-PAST

[Another interlocutor wants to know whether D himself still had tobacco or not at that point.]

- 14 d; yeah ngadhu Yeah (I had) some.
 1sGEN
 15 ngayu gurra-y gaari I said, 'No.'
 1sNOM say-PAST NEG
 16 I got ngaigal I have some tobacco (still).
 tobacco
 17 j; heh heh

[The next scene-setting comment could not be easily said in Guugu Yimidhirr, which has no straightforward way to express numbers as large as 18; talk about age belongs to English discourse at Hopevale.]

- 18 d; ngayu was
 1sNOM
 19 eighteen, I think
 20 j; iii
 21 d; mmm

[D returns to his dramatised dialogue with R**.]

- 22 nyundu dhaabanga-la You ask him!
 2sNOM ask -IMP
 23 gaari ngayu yinil No, I'm afraid.
 NEG 1sNOM afraid
 24 gaari-ga ngayu gaimba yinil No, I'm scared too.
 no-EMPH 1sNOM also afraid
 25 ha ha ha
 26 ngaigal dhaabangadhi So I asked for tobacco.
 tobacco ask-PAST

[The dialogue now switches to English.]

- 27 heey, Roy
 28 these fellows run out of smokes

- 60: *wanhdharra*, I got no money boy
[What shall I do?]
- 61: *ganaa ngayu* book-em-*gural*
[How about if I book (the stuff) on credit?]
- 62: yeah book-em
- 63: before long
- 64: the *wangarr* seen it
[white men]
- 65: *dhana* never helped him
[they]
- [The speaker begins to slide back into formal English.]
- 66: they went on and went on and went on
- 67: I think it went
- 68: the last I heard it was
- 69: I think it was 40,000 dollars that store was in debt
- 70: and what did the *wangarr* do then?
[whitemen]
- 71: they just told him to get out of the store
- 72: the last time I went down there
- 73: that young fella
- 74: he was a drunkard
- 75: you wouldn't think
- 76: that was that same young fella that was runnin the
store
- 77: he has
- 78: wrecked
- 79: completely wrecked

Notice that the speaker makes a gradual transition to Guugu Yimidhirr, moving through a reduced pidgin-like English register (at lines 37ff., where verbs are no longer fully conjugated on the standard pattern), to a syntax that mixes Guugu Yimidhirr and English words, and finally to nearly full Guugu Yimidhirr sentences (at lines 58-61, where the verb bears the *ga* 'habitual' affix appropriate to traditional Guugu Yimidhirr storytelling). Having finished painting his vignette of Aboriginal exploitation of kinship relations — a vignette which obviously works most vividly in the Aboriginal language — he slides back, around line 67, to standard English. Using Guugu Yimidhirr allows this skillful speaker not only to describe but to evoke the pattern of Aboriginal dependence on kin that, in this context, he wants to warn against.

Similarly, even those contexts where one might expect full Guugu Yimidhirr conversation are not always occasions for the unadulterated Aboriginal language. The following fragment was recorded on October 3rd, 1984, as a group of elderly men sat in the shade of a mango tree, recalling events of their youth.⁷³ The storyteller, D, appears to intersperse an

⁷³ Of course, my presence in the conversation may have induced people to use English instead of Guugu Yimidhirr on occasion, although people seem to address me directly at least as much in Guugu Yimidhirr as in English over the duration of the encounter.

the context of trend-conscious teenagers, does not unambiguously accrue only to English.

Neither is it clear that Guugu Yimidhurr never appears in 'formal' contexts outside the home. The following fragment of a transcript is taken from a formal meeting of the Hopevale church council on 17 August 1980, called to discuss plans for reorganising Hopevale administration. Both the white staff and Aboriginal elders were present as an Aboriginal pastor explained financial aspects of the new plan. This man, in his mid-fifties, learned Guugu Yimidhurr as a child at Cape Bedford. He is also accomplished at standard English. After some initial language switching, the speaker settled into formal English for making his presentation. Interestingly, he makes a brief foray into Guugu Yimidhurr in the midst of the monologue,⁷² for rhetorical reasons which seem obvious in the context of his overall purposes and intentions, as an advocate for a new scheme of self-management for the community.

[Fragment 1: Speech to Church Council meeting, 17 August 1980 discussing self-management at Hopevale]

- 1: so the government then will
- 2: give the money to Council
- [. . .]
- 5: when they give the money to the council
- 6: then the council divide it to these heads
- 7: so much money
- 8: and of course they gotta work out how much they
- gonna have too
- 9: as their budget
- 10: to work for these other things
- [Each department will be responsible for maintaining its own budget, and making requests to the Council who in turn make direct financial requests to Government funding agencies.]
- 11: but (cough) its not going to come on
- 12: to you straight away
- 13: but this is what
- 14: uh
- 15: we gotto work into the place
- 16: and
- 17: it might take a long time for us to learn
- 18: nothing new [. . .] for the white people
- 19: it's simple
- 20: because they grew up with it
- 21: but for us we got to learn
- 22: and we got to be prepared to learn
- 23: if we going to run this place ourselves
- 24: and if we not gon' to learn
- 25: then we gonna make a muck of everything

⁷² Fragment 1 is transcribed as a monologue, with occasional contextual notes enclosed in square brackets, and with the scattered Guugu Yimidhurr words glossed as they occur.

or even the following mouthful:

dhana ngamugurrayga-mun nganhi tease-*it*-gurraalay galbaaygu
 3pl+NOM many-ERG 1sg+ACC 'tease'-TR-do+PAST+CONT long
 They all kept teasing me all the way (along the road).

The existence of significant variation in English registers is, here, imported to Guugu Yimidhirr.⁶⁸

A last important feature of language at Hopevale is both obvious and unexpectedly complex. Choosing one language or another (or more accurately, selecting a particular mix of available varieties for a given moment of speech) is clearly a matter of matching appropriate talk to context. But the conditioning criteria may be subtle and multifold. One selects a register for the time and place, but also for the topic, for one's interlocutors, even for people who are in a position to overhear.⁶⁹ And if the context *under*-determines the choice, one also selects a register creatively, to communicate something further by one's very choice of words.

Let me illustrate the brute facts of contextual determination with a personal anecdote. One dark night in October 1984 I was with a group of Hopevale people trying to right an overturned Land Rover which had slid down a steep bank after trying to push a stalled motorcar. Our conversation was almost entirely in Guugu Yimidhirr, punctuated by individual English words: 'spanner,' 'torch,' 'oil,' etc. At one point, speaking to a youth who had been helping hold the bonnet lid up, I said, in Guugu Yimidhirr: 'Hey, shine that torch over here, will you?' Another person present came up to me and said, in a whisper, 'No, that's one of those Lockhart boys; he only knows English.' Except for a single crucial fact (that the boy I didn't recognise came from Lockhart), of which I, only recently re-arrived in the community, was ignorant, Guugu Yimidhirr (supplemented in the predictable automobile garage way) was the appropriate language for the moment: but being a competent speaker *also* involves knowing who one's interlocutors are, and tailoring one's words to their ears. In this respect I had demonstrated my socio-linguistic incompetence.

I will end this paper by examining Noreen Pym's main conclusions about language change at Hopevale, in light of my own observations, and some specific fragments of actual Hopevale speech from natural contexts. Pym argues (p.156):

The major result of the changes in life style is that the young people are no longer acquiring the traditional language. [. . .] Traditional language in all its fullness is now spoken only by the elderly to each other. Less traditional forms of the language and a mixture of Guugu Yimidhirr and English are spoken only in some homes and between some people, mainly in social situations [sic]. Outside the home and in formal situations the universal language is English. [. . .] For today's young people the language with prestige is English.

⁶⁸ Bruce Rigsby has suggested, in a letter, that the historical evidence indicates that both the *-em* and *-it* forms existed very early in Queensland pidgin English, and that the *-it* form may in fact have preceded the *-em* form. Nonetheless, at Hopevale, the best synchronic evidence for the sociolinguistic values attached to these forms is, I think, the fact that certain speakers regularly 'upgrade' or 'correct' their borrowed English verbs, by substituting an *-it* form for *-em* when correcting their own speech, in citation forms.

⁶⁹ Having a tabooed relative *within earshot* was enough to induce traditional Guugu Yimidhirr speakers to use the avoidance vocabulary of 'brother-in-law' speech. See Haviland 1979b.

6 CODES AND COMMUNICATION.

This extended historical sketch underlines several important features of Hopevale as a speech community. In the first place, far from being a homogeneous group of 'traditional' Aborigines, speakers of 'traditional' Guugu Yimidhirr, the mission comprises an extremely varied collection of people from different parts of Queensland, along with their descendants and kinsmen, whose linguistic repertoires were and are similarly heterogeneous. Even in the heartland of Guugu Yimidhirr territory, there have clearly always been multiple dialects, and multilingualism has been a normal condition of Aboriginal social life. (In fact, I have argued elsewhere that the existence of multiple words for the same 'thing' is an inherently exploitable device for communicative subtlety, that survives even drastic changes in the nature and availability of language varieties.)⁶⁵ Moreover, 'owning' a language and being able to 'talk' or to 'hear' a language are not at all the same things: one can be (and, sadly, in modern Queensland, often is) a fluent speaker of somebody else's language, and a non-speaker or a semi-speaker of one's *own*.⁶⁶ Many people at Hopevale find themselves in exactly this situation: they have learned Guugu Yimidhirr as native speakers, growing up at Cape Bedford or Hopevale, but they are aware that it is not *their* language. (And *their* language, or that of their fathers or mothers, may be known, lost, only barely remembered, or only partially re-learned in adulthood. All of these alternatives are represented in modern Hopevale.)

Let me give an example. A number of people at Hopevale trace their ancestry to areas south of Cooktown where the language spoken is Gugu Yalanji. However, only some of these people still speak that language (which is widely spoken from Bloomfield down to Mossman and Daintree) and are often embarrassed by this fact when confronted with their countrymen. One such man is a fluent and eloquent speaker of Guugu Yimidhirr who has only as an adult learned a few words of his *own* ancestral Gugu Yalanji. But *despite the fact* that his *native* language is Guugu Yimidhirr and not Gugu Yalanji, which he inherits but does not speak, he recently took the remarkable (and obviously ambivalent) position, in conversation with me, that a policy for 'preserving' Guugu Yimidhirr at Hopevale was 'up to these people' (i.e., the Hopevale people themselves) since 'my language is all right.' He was referring to the existence of a nascent bilingual literacy program in Gugu Yalanji (and its absence in Guugu Yimidhirr).

Similarly, one of my closest friends and collaborators at Hopevale came to Cape Bedford as a little boy, speaking only his own northern language. (He is the person who took the pussycat as his playmate, as a little boy.) He became a fluent speaker of Guugu Yimidhirr, but he also took great pains, as an adult, to *relearn* his own language from elderly countrymen, and he is now the last remaining speaker of the Barrow Point language, though he has no one with whom to speak it. For Cape York people, *owning* a language is a function of social and genealogical descent, whereas *knowing* a language is little more than historical accident.

⁶⁵ See Haviland 1982. Dixon 1977 (3.1.3, 112-118) suggests what may have been an extremely common principle of speech aesthetics in some Aboriginal communities: that felicity of discourse (one might say 'proper and appropriate speech in context') often depends heavily on the possibility (and exploitation) of lexical or syntactic variation. What Missionary Pfalzer interpreted as deliberate attempts to confuse may well have been nothing more than Aboriginal efforts to speak politely and eloquently.

⁶⁶ See Rigsby 1982.

selves used English,⁵³ but urged church Elders to maintain Guugu Yimidhirr in Gospel readings and instruction.⁵⁴ Even the nursing sister, in 1953, made an effort to re-establish the use of the native language, now enshrined in Schwarz's *Order of Service*.

One of my happiest moments I will always remember on this mission station is the talk to the girls in their dormitory, Sunday nights. First we read the Gospel for the day in Koko Yimidir altogether so that their language is kept up. Then we have a Chapter from our story simplified and explained as we go along, for their daily Christian living.⁵⁵

Into the early 1960s, the Hopevale Pastor and outside church observers expressed the opinion that Guugu Yimidhirr was of major importance in spiritual work: it was still a central element in weekly Sunday services,⁵⁶ in pastoral visits,⁵⁷ and in general religious instruction. Pastor Kotzur, asking for further copies of Schwarz's Guugu Yimidhirr prayer book, writes:

Natives like repetition and appreciate things that way. If a number [of prayers] are included in their own language, it will be all the better for them, as the parents can then read to the children, and thus all can still pray together. As far as teaching Christianity to the natives, as well as to whites, is concerned, I am a great believer in repetition.⁵⁸

When the Summer Institute of Linguistics placed Bible translators at nearby Bloomfield, there was considerable enthusiasm for their work, and hope that the linguistic inquiries there might ultimately lead to increased knowledge of both Gugu Yalanji and Guugu Yimidhirr on the part of white mission staff.⁵⁹

The Hopevale schoolteacher, in daily interaction with children, had more intimate exposure to the linguistic abilities of the populace than any other outsider at the mission. Her opinion was unambiguous:

⁵³ However, the original call to the first new Pastor at Hopevale (LCA 312:513 Box 4, undated 1949) specifies that the new recruit should work closely with Rev. Schwarz (who was by then living in Cooktown), and that he should learn Guugu Yimidhirr.

⁵⁴ An unidentified clipping, 'The Gospel came to Cooktown Natives', LCA Box 18:1, May 1954, reports that Pastor Wenke preached at the Cooktown Aboriginal Reserve and that the late Paddy Melvor also delivered a sermon to the people there in Guugu Yimidhirr. Prenzler's report to the Hopevale Mission Board (hereafter HVMB) June 1956 (LCA 1956-69 No.6) mentions the need for Guugu Yimidhirr, and stresses to the Elders of the community the role they can play in using the language to bring the Gospel to older people who do not know much English.

⁵⁵ Nursing sister's report for 1953 from Rohde to HVMB LCA 5:1.

⁵⁶ Schmidt report on Hopevale visit, August 1960, LCA 60's and 70's No.5, describes as the high point of his visit a service in which native elders both sang and read the Gospel in Guugu Yimidhirr. Schmidt also notes that people still come up to receive communion in the same groups in which they were originally confirmed at Cape Bedford.

⁵⁷ As late as 1969, Pastor Pohlner writes to I. Roennfeldt, 8 January 1969 (LCA 60's and 70's No.4) that he has taken a Guugu Yimidhirr evangelist along on a hospital visit 'where I felt a talk in Koko would help the patient understand'.

⁵⁸ Letter from Kotzur to Prenzler, 24 August 1962, LCA 60's and 70's No.4.

⁵⁹ Prenzler's minutes of HVMB meetings, 26 October 1959, LCA 1956-69 No.4; Schmidt report on visit of HVMB, August 1960, LCA 60's and 70's No.5; Prenzler report for 1963, p.1, LCA 60's and 70's box 13 No.3.

of speech. Friends recall that in this unfamiliar environment they took comfort and refuge in the company of their fellows, and that Guugu Yimidhirr was the medium of intra-group interaction. In church, Guugu Yimidhirr seemed to feel especially appropriate for the Cape Bedford Lutherans.⁴⁶ On the other hand, a serious issue throughout the period at Woorabinda was the extent to which Cape Bedford people would be *allowed* to establish normal relations with Woorabinda people. The Cape Bedford elders themselves opposed marriages between the two groups, for example, and people remember violent confrontations on the issue, in which the existence of Guugu Yimidhirr was cited as a device the Cape Bedford people used to keep to themselves.

At the same time, Guugu Yimidhirr provided a sometimes surprising link with an Aboriginal past that Hope Valley people might otherwise have forgotten. At Palm Island, at Cherbourg, and wherever people met other Aborigines, the possibility existed that they would encounter strangers who *also* spoke Guugu Yimidhirr: a relic of a nearly forgotten childhood in the north before the mechanisms of Aboriginal 'protection' had brought them south. Friends at Hopevale have told me of a time when a group of young men from Cape Bedford, living temporarily at Cherbourg while picking arrowroot or peanuts, began to gossip among themselves, in their own tongue, about the peculiarities of the Cherbourg people. Suddenly one old man approached them, saying, 'You boys can't run me down. I'm Guugu Yimidhirr too!' He was a victim of early deportation, having been exiled from the Cooktown area as a youth for fighting or drunkenness, but never losing his own real language after more than thirty years with no one to speak it to. Similarly, mission officials were amazed to discover that one of the Aboriginal policemen at Woorabinda spoke Guugu Yimidhirr, a language he had learned from his mother.⁴⁷

It is from Woorabinda that we first hear the voices of younger Cape Bedford people on the subject of their language. The insistent predominance of English in the south must have suddenly raised the spectre of language loss. The Lutheran archives contain several letters from Woorabinda schoolchildren asking for written materials in Guugu Yimidhirr (specifically asking that the church publish Schwarz's translations of Bible stories and hymns):

Although we can speak our language fluently, we can't read it and also cannot write it out. But by the help of these books we will be able to do so, like the older people do. We'll be able to read the Bible stories by ourselves without the help of the older people.⁴⁸

Every morning when I get up I get my Koko Yimidir book and sing hymns out of it and other girls join in singing the hymns with me. Every second Sunday we have Koko Yimidir service. It's beautiful to have our mother tongue printed with the word of God. Some words are hard to pronounce. It won't be long before we know them all.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Stolz letter to Theile after a visit to Woorabinda in May, 1943, reports that they had a Sunday service while he visited and 'at the request of some of the members they sang humns in their own tongue'. LCA 312:513. Similarly, Rev. Gribble at Palm Island wrote to Schwarz (October 1943, LCA 312:513) singing the praises of the elderly Cape Bedford people who had been sent there rather than to Woorabinda. 'Their much worn humn books in the Koko Yimidir dialect they brought to me and I had the hymns typed out and given to the Bishop of Carpentaria for their preservation'.

⁴⁷ Letter from Reuther to Thiele, January 1943, LCA.

⁴⁸ Letter from Monty Wallace to Mission Board, March 1946, LCA 312:513 Box 4.

⁴⁹ Letter from Mollie Billy to Mission Board, March 1946, LCA 312:513 Box 4.

LIFE HISTORY OF A SPEECH COMMUNITY

In the late 1920s when another missionary (a native German speaker) was recruited for work at the McIvor, a sore point in his relations with Schwarz and the mission authorities was his difficulty with Guugu Yimidhurr, although again there were differences of opinion about how necessary it was: Schwarz claimed that only Guugu Yimidhurr could 'reach the hearts of our people'³⁸, while the other man maintained that there was no language problem, since all the Aborigines spoke English.³⁹ In 1930 and again in 1937 Theile was still searching for a new man who would be able to learn the Aboriginal tongue:

Surveying the many and diverse duties resting on each one [of the staff], I can well understand that the study of the vernacular has been somewhat neglected, but I am insisting that the language of the aboriginal there must be acquired. No man, least of all a missionary, can hope to read a people's soul if he does not know the language.⁴⁰

And again, seven years later, Theile comments on the necessary qualifications for a new missionary:

A married man with some experience of parish life would be preferable. He should have a love for the Australian Aboriginal and have a desire to understand them. He must be willing to learn the native language [. . .] he who would wish to touch the soul of these people must know Koko Yimidir. Though all school-work is done in English [. . .] among themselves they converse in the vernacular only.⁴¹

In 1939, when the need for another missionary has become acute, Theile still observes that Guugu Yimidhurr is the common vehicle of communication, although Hope Valley people are literate in English:

I noticed that among themselves the aboriginals old and young use almost exclusively the Koko-Yimidir vernacular. The morning devotions are conducted in Koko-Yimidir. The Sunday service was in English [. . .] The natives all read English and many of them like to read.⁴²

Nonetheless, having found it nearly impossible to recruit an experienced pastor for the job, in stating the precise conditions of a 'call' (through which a Pastor is invited to take on duties in a new community), Theile, ever practical, softens his requirements: in doing so he mentions explicitly that many of the inhabitants at Hope Valley have *themselves* learned Guugu Yimidhurr only after coming to the mission.

Of course you will understand that 'the language is the shrine of the peoples' soul' and in order to really look into the very depths of the hearts of people you ought to know their language. But [. . .] as many of them have adopted the Koko-Yimidir dialect only when they were transferred to Hope Valley and all education is in English [. . .] knowledge of [English] with a smattering of Koko Yimidir is sufficient.⁴³

³⁸ Schwarz letter to Theile, 25 August 1928, LCA 2 No.1.

³⁹ Medingdoerfer Report for 1928, 29 March 1929, LCA Tape 1 1 No.2.

⁴⁰ Theile's report to the Board of Foreign Missions, 16 July 1930, LCA 2.

⁴¹ Theile's report on a visit of inspection from 22 July to 7 August 1937, dated 9 August 1937, LCA 5 No.2.

⁴² Theile report on visit to Cape Bedford, 29 December 1939, LCA 2 No.1.

⁴³ Theile letter to Petering, 18 June 1939, LCA1-2.

missionaries themselves began to feel that English was a more appropriate language for Bible study, both because it was conceptually better suited to the subject matter (whereas Guugu Yimidhirr was 'too poor with regard to words and concepts'),³⁰ and because training Aborigines in English (rather than Guugu Yimidhirr) Scripture gave them better armament with which 'to withstand being among disbelieving whites'.³¹ Indeed, by the beginning of World War I, Hope Valley schoolchildren routinely copied their favorite English Bible passages into their school copy books, with immaculate spelling and elegant hands.³²

After 1910, the Hope Valley community changed, as the parameters of Aboriginal life in Queensland altered drastically. Beginning with the Marie Yamba people, and at an accelerating rate through the first two decades of this century, a continual stream of children from other parts of Queensland entered the tiny Lutheran enclave at Cape Bedford. At first these were 'neglected' children (a euphemism for children of mixed descent), and later *any* children, found by police in Aboriginal camps, who could by law be taken from their families and placed in institutions for education and training. At Cape Bedford, Schwarz held a mass baptism in 1916, involving nineteen mission-born children, and sixteen girls who had been sent in over preceding years from all over Queensland: Cairns, Rockhampton, Townsville, the Gulf of Carpentaria, and some from the far south. Schwarz described the newly baptised as follows:

Most spoke good English when they came, which made schooling easier for them. Nonetheless some came directly from an Aboriginal camp and spoke not a word of English [. . .] But now all have found their true home. Whatever their descent they have found their Saviour.³³

Indeed, a few of these women are still living; they are faithful Lutherans at modern Hopevale, who describe life at 'home' (that is, at the old Cape Bedford station) in elegant, slightly old-fashioned English. One woman, who eventually became a school teacher at Cape Bedford, recalls arriving at the mission station to be greeted by Schwarz in English with words that she could not understand. (She came from a settlement on the Gulf of Carpentaria and knew neither English nor Guugu Yimidhirr at the time). Another Hopevale acquaintance was brought to Hope Valley as a small child, from his homeland several hundred kilometers to the north of Cooktown, again speaking only his local Barrow Point language, unknown to anyone at the Mission. He recalls spending the first months in his new home — before he learned to speak Guugu Yimidhirr — playing exclusively with the pussycat in the boys' dormitory.

[. . .] they had a cat there, you see. And then the boys was talkin' to me and I didn't understand them. I said, 'Oh, it's no use playing with them.' Well I got the pussycat, and I used to play around with the pussycat. That was my friend then.³⁴

³⁰ Schwarz letter to Inspector, July 1910, ND 572.

³¹ Extract from a Schwarz letter, June 1905, reprinted in KM 1905 No.12.

³² More than this, several elderly Hopevale women who were girls during this time have told us that they also pored over Australian women's magazines of the era, imagining cakes, domestic furnishings and clothes of which reality gave them no experience.

³³ Schwarz letter to Theile, April 1916, quoted in KMZ 23 May 1916.

³⁴ From a transcribed film, November 1981, Hopevale.

cooperate in helping him penetrate it.¹⁶ His best charges, the adolescent girls, for whom he and his wife had primary responsibility, began keeping personal diaries in Guugu Yimidhirr.¹⁷ Poland had more trouble with adults, because 'one must converse with them as children'.¹⁸ And he continued to feel that he had to be constantly on guard against unwittingly falling into their linguistic traps by saying awkward or obscene things. His efforts at translation were hampered by the fact that:

[b]lacks accept and repeat any nonsense, i.e., any incorrect translation, never questioning anything they don't understand.¹⁹

Nonetheless, in his letters back to Germany, Poland takes great pains to justify his continuing interest in a language, which, as early as 1889, he thinks must ultimately give way to English.²⁰ At this time, apparently stung by criticism from his German superiors, Poland began to teach English spelling and reading to his pupils.

People at modern Hopevale remember the oldest mission inhabitants, who were products of this early schooling, as devout, moralistic and well educated. They were able to read and write in the archaic orthography for Guugu Yimidhirr introduced by Schwarz and Poland, and many continued to write letters in Guugu Yimidhirr into the second World War.²¹ Some of the older women even remembered hymns in German that they had learned as little girls.²²

By the turn of the century, when the missionaries at Cape Bedford had been working for some fifteen years, a government bureaucracy was installed to oversee Aboriginal life

(Footnote 15 continued)

ships on the mission. His later reports from that period (KM 1889 No.3 and No.5) show his pleasure at discovering Guugu Yimidhirr terms that correspond to such notions as expiation for 'guilt' or Satan's 'temptation'. He also comments on the implicit metaphor in such expressions as ANA NUNDU ANI PUTAI 'How are you related to me?' (In modern Guugu Yimidhirr the sentence would mean something like 'How did you eat me?') 'Everything they like is in some way linked to eating. They must really delight in using the mere word for food.'

¹⁶ Poland letter to Inspector 6/1889 (KM 1889 No.8).

¹⁷ Poland newsletter, July 1891, reprinted in KM 1892 No.1.

¹⁸ Poland 1907, the pamphlet 'Working as a Sower.'

¹⁹ Poland letter to Inspector, January 1898, ND 416.

²⁰ Poland letter to Inspector, 8/1889 (ND 241-244).

²¹ Northern Protector of Aborigines Walter Roth reported in a letter to the Commissioner of Police, 24 June 1898, that he was keeping a collection of letters written to him in Guugu Yimidhirr by some of the schoolgirls at Cape Bedford. QSA Co. Poi 142 No.2. Later Poland received such letters during furlough in Germany (ND 521-23, and 536-537, 9 June 1906), and Schwarz received them from elderly people interned at Palm Island during the period from 1942 to 1948. Poland describes the mixture of German, English and Guugu Yimidhirr spoken both by his own son Hermann (Poland 1907, pamphlet 'Farewell'), and by one of the most promising of his early students. (Letter to 'Red School', Sept. 1888, KM 1888 No.12.)

²² One woman whose children still survive at Hopevale came to Cape Bedford from Bloomfield as a young woman, and was reported to speak good German. People remember during their long train ride south, when the entire mission was evacuated from Cape Bedford and sent to Woorabinda during the War in 1942, that soldiers and government agents used to walk among them on the train occasionally speaking to them in German, evidently hoping to confirm their suspicions that the Hope Valley station had been contaminated by the influence of the Superintendent, Rev. Schwarz, who was himself briefly interned as a German alien.

The early missionaries, who intended to set up a permanent and ultimately self-sufficient station at Cape Bedford, approached the question of language with a clear eye both to the practical secular goals of the bureaucracy, and to their own loftier purposes. The founding missionary was Johannes Flierl, a German who had had some limited experience with Aborigines in South Australia and who was on his way to New Guinea where he ultimately founded a large Lutheran mission. In his initial approaches to the Cooktown magistrate, Flierl argued that the mission should use both English and Guugu Yimidhirr, though on different grounds. Noting that the Cooktown Aborigines were said to know 'next to no English', he stated that 'in daily conversation and by teaching, all what is possible must be done to communicate in English with white people.' At the same time, he continued: 'the main point of all Missionwork is to christianise the heathen — so consequently they become good civilised too — and this chiefly has to be done by religious instruction and preaching of the Gospel. Thereby it is necessary to use as soon as possible the own language of the aborigines [. . .] so they acquire a right understanding of the gospel of truth.'⁶ The police supported the missionaries' requests for government backing, and provided an Aboriginal policeman as an interpreter for the first month after the mission was established.⁷ Thus began a struggle between English and Guugu Yimidhirr as the two extreme poles between which the local Aborigines would have to choose a language.

3 DEAD OR ALIVE?

Pym is not the first observer to be convinced that Guugu Yimidhirr is, if not dead, at least moribund. Since the turn of the century, policemen, Protectors of Aborigines, missionaries and mission officials alike have commented, sometimes with regret, but more often with relief, that the Cooktown people are on the verge of losing their own tongue in favor of English. The tension between the need for Aborigines to learn English in order to participate (or be of use) in wider Queensland society, and the counterbalancing communicative value of Guugu Yimidhirr as the language of people's hearts and souls appears to have been a theme (at least in the eyes of missionaries and administrators) from the foundation of Hope Valley until the present day.

As early as 1887, Missionary Meyer, working in a remote area on the Bloomfield River south of Cooktown, remarked that it was *easier* to learn the Bloomfield language than to learn the Cooktown language because the people of the Bloomfield area spoke less English than those of the Cape Bedford Reserve, who had already had more contact with Europeans⁸ than their brethren to the south. Meyer thus had to concentrate on the native tongue rather than try 'to communicate in a simplified form of English',⁹ as he had been tempted to do at Cape Bedford.

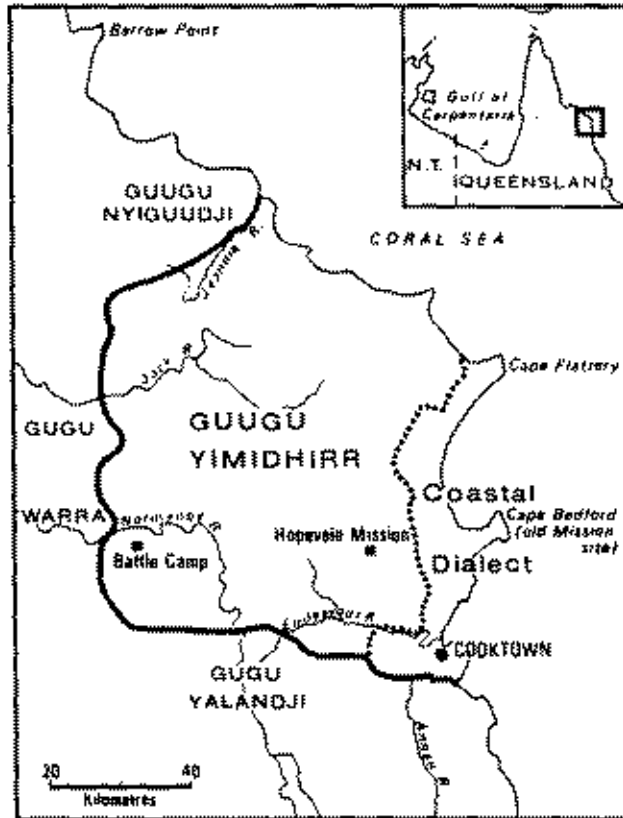
⁶ Neuendettelsau Archives (hereafter ND), 10 No.3, 26/12/1885. Letter from Flierl to Milman, Magistrate Ckin.

⁷ *Kirche-und Missions Zeitung* (hereafter KMZ) No.3 12/2/1886 p.19, quoting Flierl's report of 14/1/1886.

⁸ Lutheran Church of Australia Archives (hereafter LCA), 1.2 letter from Meyer to Rechner, July 1887.

⁹ LCA 1.2 Meyer report to SA Missions Congress, Oct. 1887.

LIFE HISTORY OF A SPEECH COMMUNITY



Guugu Yimidhirr and Neighbours

has been moribund or, in fact, died as often as observers have suggested, we seem to have not a case of language death at all, but rather one of miraculous language reincarnation.

There is, first, a clear distinction between a simplified outsider's view of speech and language skills, and the somewhat more complex understanding of abilities, codes and appropriate context for speech varieties that a competent member of the Hopevale community must possess. It is only in grammars and linguists' imaginations that idealised speaker-hearers possess monolithic linguistic 'competence'; in practice principled variation or haphazard extemporising, and sometimes downright error, is the rule. And this true for *individuals* as well as for different segments of a speech community. Such variation and complex contextual under-determination of speech are features of *all* language use. Hopevale is an Aboriginal community where the traditional multiplicity of language varieties is overshadowed only by an even greater range of social variation in origins, biography, loyalty and circumstance among speakers. In such a case, applying the simplified idealising lens of formal linguistics to language choices (even in the highly restricted context of a small corpus of 'sentences' like those Pym uses, elicited from only two informants) leads to an impoverished view of the linguistic phenomena.

Even more pernicious than the oversimplification of the linguistic situation, I think, is Pym's naive idealisation of the social and historical facts. Characterising 'changes in culture and life style', Pym writes (p.156) that '[t]he people of Hope Vale have changed from being