Indigenous language and social identity:
papers in honour of Michael Walsh

edited by
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Ku Thithay Sugarbag Dreaming by Lawrence Kolumboort.

The people left the place Mawurt because two women drowned as they tried to recover their dilly bags of cycad nuts that they had been soaking. The cycad nuts are poisonous if they are not prepared and cooked properly.

The ancestors travelled throughout the country forming hills, creeks and waterholes. The ancestors settled in different places.

Ku Thithay (Native Bee) and Ku Nguluyguy (Echidna) continued to the hill known as Bathuk and they settled there.

Nguluyguy said, "I am going up to the top of the hill and I will stay there."

Thithay said, "I am too tired and my legs are too short for me to climb up there, I will stay here at the bottom."

Ku Thithay stays in the stone arrangement at the base of the hill.
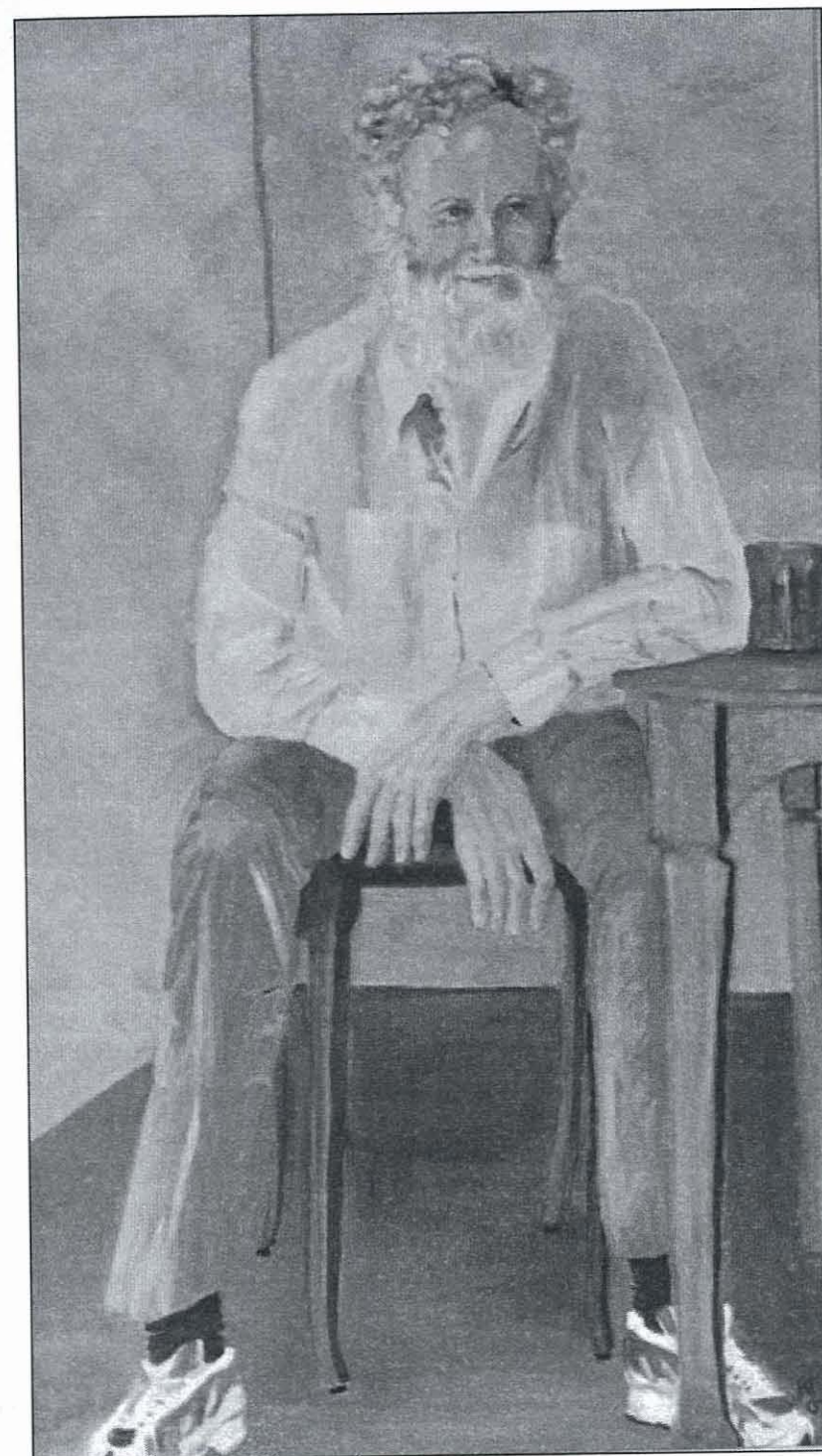
Michael Walsh
Painting by Ros Fraser

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GC:	*pámvl 'la 'pámvl thànvngk*	*'these people*
NB:	*pa la pámvl 'warrétvmvnt*	'these people were bothering
	ngènyvthantvw	me (for my wives)'

GC:	*kut '(y)e*	*so*
	kórvy 'línyvltvmvy wìchvnt pùlvw	*they had taken the string there* 405
NB:	*kórvy 'línyvltvy wìchvnt*	had taken the string there
	'wálpvy	to the west
GC:	*>> kert*	*the end*
NB:	*kert*	the end

16   *A tale of many tongues: documenting polyglot narrative in north Australian oral traditions*

NICHOLAS EVANS

bili woŋanina julŋu munal wuldjamin jigulju	People of different clans sit there, talking together
buduruna daa-walwalaruruina riŋguraŋa madandja	Words flying into the air, as they speak, in those different dialects ...
jiguluŋ-ŋubanŋu ŋari-ŋariuruna	Talking quickly together, like the voices of birds.
junbalalŋa mada woŋana ruŋiiri diwiljun jigul-ŋuban	Talking to one another, twisting their tongues to make strange noises like birds ...
ŋari-waidbaidjun junbalal-ŋuban wuldjamin daa-walwaljun lilia-woŋa	Speech of different clans, mingling together ...
duandja mada-gulgdun-maraŋala dualgindiu	Dua moiety clans, with their special distinct tongues.
wulgandarawiŋoi murunuŋdu jujululwiŋoi garaŋariwiŋoi garidjalulu mada-gulgdun-maraŋala	People from Blue Mud Bay, clans of different tongues talking together ...
buduruna ŋari-waidbaidjun woŋa ŋari-ŋariun	Words flying over the country, like the voices of birds ...
jigulul-ŋuban daa-wudbrugdun junbalal-ŋuban mada-ŋagul	They talk, now quickly, now slowly: hear the sound of their words! ...
jigulul-ŋuban galawalŋ-ŋagu julŋu nargalaŋala nuŋburindina nuŋbulna	Talking together quickly: hear the sound of their voices, those people of southern clans!
ruŋiiri-woŋa manjalgama daa-wudbrugdun garldjalulei mada nundeia wurdboiŋa malaŋari dambul-dambul	Twisting their tongues as they talk, speaking slowly in different dialects, all the clans together ...
lilii balwariŋ mareialwirŋu balwariŋundja	In those places at Rose River, among the clumps of bamboo.

Song 2, Rose River Cycle (Berndt 1976:86-87, 197-198)[1]

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[1] I retain Berndt's (now-superseded) orthography.

16.1   Multilingualism and narrative in Aboriginal Australia

The exuberant multilingualism of Indigenous Australia raises many questions of general importance to linguistics and studies of verbal art. The overall societal value placed on knowing many languages has been relatively well-explored since foundational studies by Brandl and Walsh (1982), Elwell (1982) and Merlan (1981). It has been widely reported that appropriate etiquette demands the use of appropriate linguistic varieties for particular countries (Garde 2003), both to guarantee one's safety from malignant spirits (Trigger 1987), and to signal one's status as a non-aggressive guest when on others' land (Sutton 1997). In many parts of Australia founding narratives describe ancestral figures who people the land with groups speaking different languages which show who they are in the overall scheme of things. A well-known example is the Warramurrungunji myth in northern Australia, which extends from Croker Island for a couple of hundred kilometres inland, and which has been recorded in a number of languages of the region including Iwaidja and Kunwinjku (see e.g. Nganjmirra 1997:16). Multilingualism where each country is associated with its own distinct language, in the cosmology expressed in these myths, is a desirable state of social affairs that has been present since the beginning of human life on the continent.

The rich mosaic of languages found across the Australian continent is not just an incidental by-product of over 40 millennia of Aboriginal settlement here. It is due at least in part to an ongoing cultivation and promotion of both multilingualism and linguistic diversification in many forms (e.g. Sutton 1997, Evans 2003b). One consequence is the profusion of names for languages can make it difficult to establish the exact repertoire of language, dialects, patrilects, and special registers, as Walsh (1997) has shown for the Daly River region.

Multilingualism at this level has many consequences for how people use language in Indigenous Australian societies, and raises questions of deep interest for the field of linguistics. How are different varieties deployed semiotically in narrative and song? What are the psycholinguistic implications for individual bi- and multilingualism? How well do people speak the languages they know, and how do they learn them? What are the relative roles of learning long rote passages, as opposed to shorter productions? What is the balance between productively constructed new phrases and sentences, and prelearned chunks?

In terms of language transmission, is it the case that certain sorts of texts serve as an important medium for the transmission of multilingual repertoires? Could it be the case that practices of quoting speech in the original language, in the interests of portraying characters' language affiliations and localising the action, actually provide a matrix for language preservation?

To answer these and other questions about Aboriginal multilingualism, the first thing we need is actual recorded material in which these polyglot practices are illustrated. Yet despite widespread assertions about multilingual narrative and conversation, there are all too few publically available examples or analyses. For example, Berndt and Berndt's (1989) collection of Aboriginal myths contains assertions of language shifts during travels of ancestral heroes (e.g. pp. 30-32, 36, 53-56, 78, 170) but all of them are rendered in English so we cannot see what the original storytellers did. To my knowledge there are just a handful of honourable exceptions, most importantly Strehlow (1971), Wilkins (1989) and Hercus (1990) – I return to these below. It is my purpose in this paper to make a modest contribution to remedying this gap through the addition of some further case studies from recorded narrative. It gives me great pleasure to dedicate it to Michael Walsh, whose pioneering role in the study of Aboriginal multilingualism, conversation and narrative has always been stamped with a special sort of originality: the ability to put your finger on what many other investigators have felt dimly without being able to put it into words.

16.2   The social significance of multilingualism in traditional Australia

Before getting down to the case studies, it is helpful to expand the assertions made in the preceding section so as to give a richer picture of traditional Aboriginal ideologies regarding multilingualism. I see no better way of doing this than by reproducing the 'Seven propositions' spelled out in Sutton (1997:240) regarding Aboriginal multilingualism, which represent widely shared views of the phenomenon in most parts of Australia.[2] I quote these almost verbatim below, with only minor exegetical reduction.

1.   Languages are owned, not merely spoken. They are inherited property.

2.   Languages belong to specific places, and the people of those places.

3.   Use of a particular language implies knowledge of, and connectedness to, a certain set of people in a certain part of the country. The direct implication always is: if you can speak my language you must be my relation (somehow).

4.   Like totems, (languages) are relational symbols, connecting those who are different in a wider set of those who are the same, all having totems and languages. This variety itself is part of the common condition.

5.   At the local level, such differences are internal to society, not markers of the edges of different societies.

6.   The ancestors moved about and spoke different languages, and this is how people still do or should live today …

7.   It is important, not accidental or trivial, that we speak different languages … The heroic ancestors knew that cultural differences made for social complementarity, in a world where cultural sameness alone could not prevent deadly conflict … There is no balance without complementarity. There is no complementarity without distinctions and differences.

To this succinct and persuasive list one might add two more, more oriented to aesthetics and the attendant status of performers:

8.   The existence of multiple languages enriches the texture and beauty of life, and particularly of verbal art. The quotation from the Rose River Cycle given at the beginning of this paper gives an Indigenous poetic representation of this position. And we might predict that, if polyglot practice is indeed so highly valued, we would find wide exploitation of multiple codes in narrative performance.

9.   The ability to be a multilingual verbal artist, both in narrative performance and in face-to-face discussion, was one of the marks of people who rose to social eminence. Polyglot mastery suggested an unusual breadth of ceremonial contacts and far-flung social capital, eliciting expressions of admiration like 'he travellin man himself'.[3]

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[2] The most obvious exceptions are in isolated monolingual island communities, such as is the case with the Kayardild people of the South Wellesley Islands in Queensland, who were resolutely monolingual. Even for them, though, at least 2, 3 and 7 of the propositions below would be adhered to.

[3] I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting I add this ninth proposition, and for supplying the 'travellin man' quote.

Stepping across for a moment to the very different world of western literary studies, we find that, since Bakhtin, the aesthetic cultivation of heteroglossia (*raznorečie* in Bakhtin's original Russian formulation) is assumed to be closely intertwined with the novel as a literary genre:

> The novel as a whole is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice. In it the investigator is confronted with several heterogeneous stylistic unities, often located on different linguistic levels and subject to different stylistic controls. (Bakhtin 1981:261)

> The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. (p. 262)

> Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia (raznorečie) can enter the novel. (p. 263)

Traditional Aboriginal narrative performance offers a useful perspective here, for we find a systematic harnessing of heteroglossia in ways that are rather similar to those that interested Bakhtin. This suggests that the novel, and more generally written literature, have no monopoly on the harnessing of different varieties for aesthetic purposes.

I will now consider three narratives from northern Australia, in each of which the narrator deploys more than one linguistic variety in complex and effective ways. I will order them in a way that works upwards in terms of linguistic difference, beginning with a dialect switch (section 16.3), then passing to a switch between two closely related languages (section 16.4), then finally to a narrative involving four very different languages (section 16.5), before passing to a general discussion of the issues they raise (section 16.6).

16.3   A dialect switch: Mick Kubarkku's story of Ngurdyawok and Nawalabik

Our first case study is from a recording made during an evening storytelling session by Mick Kubarkku at his outstation of Yikarrakkal, southwest of Maningrida in the Northern Territory, on 21/11/1989. During this session he related a number of vivid and often hilarious traditional stories to a mixed audience of around 20, of all ages. The session was recorded by Murray Garde, Carolyn Coleman and myself, and subsequently transcribed and translated by Murray Garde and myself.

Mick Kubarkku was somewhat unusual for a traditional western Arnhem Lander of his age in being essentially monolingual, in the Kuninjku variety of Bininj Gun-wok. His English was limited, despite the opportunities that his celebrity status as a well-known artist offered him late in life to visit large southern cities.

On the other hand, he had a deep knowledge of traditional varieties of Bininj Gun-wok: dialectal (as illustrated here), in addition to particularistic patrilect differences associated with individual clans (see Garde 2003) and kin-based register varieties such as the respect variety *Kun-kurrng*[4] and the trirelational kin system *Kun-derbi*. In this narrative he draws systematically on lexical and grammatical differences between his own dialect (Kuninjku) and the more westerly Kunwinjku dialect. Since Kuninjku and Kunwinjku look

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[4] Which he deploys at a later point in the same narrative (not considered here) to represent the speech between Nawalabik and his brother-in-law. See the original text in Evans (2003a) for the actual material.

so similar graphically, differing only in the loss of w in the Kuninjku dialect, I will use the abbreviations KI and KW in what follows.

In the following transcription I have bolded any words or morphemes that are distinctive of KW. Some are lexical items, like KW *yewelk* for 'bubble' instead of KI *burrng-burrng* (l.25) or *djunj* (l.28), or KW *burrkyak* for 'no' instead of KI *kayakki*. Others are grammatical affixes, namely the distinctive dual pronominal object prefixes characteristic of KW (*kanhbene-* in line 19, *ngunhbene-* in line 20), whereas KI uses the more semantically general prefixes *kan-* and *ngun-* (see Evans 2003a:402-406 for details of this cross-dialect difference). At one point, in line 25, the narrator interrupts the boy's quoted speech to comment overtly on one lexical difference, following the KW term *yewelk* with the explanation 'they say *yewelk*, whereas (we say it's) *burrng-burrng*'.

This racy text draws its humour from the scandalously inappropriate behaviour of a young novice in the Mardayin ceremony, Nawalabik, who at a time when he should be scrupulously avoiding contact with women larks about naked in a billabong with his two sisters, diving under the water to tug at their pubic hair then quickly swimming away under the water to surface somewhere else, and trying to blame the nibblings of grunter fish for the incursions on their private parts.

The comic repartee of graphic complaint by the girls to their mother, followed by the boy's protestations of innocence and absurd alibi, is rendered as direct speech, unframed by any verb of quotation or identification of speaker. In general, quoted passages, whether by the boy or by his sisters, employ KW forms, while the narrator employs KI forms. (There is just one slip from this rule, where one quote from the girls (l.21) employs the KI form *kanh-*, instead of the KW form *kanhbene-*.) Semiotically, then, the alternation between codes signals the difference between narrator's voice and the voice of all reported characters, and does not distinguish between the characters. The story is said to have taken place in a Kunwinjku-speaking area, so the use of KW by the characters roots the story in a more westerly locale than the narrator's own country.

An illustrative excerpt from the text follows. For a full transcription and translation see Evans (2003a:690-703); I have retained the line numbering of the original.

(1)

1.16. *ø-djal-yulyulme-ng   kure   ø-na-ng   kure   ø-na-ng*
3P-just-swim.under.water-PP   there   3P-see-PP   there   3P-see-PP
'He swam along under the water, looked this way and that,

1.17. *ø-na-ng   kabene-bebbeh-bo-rro-ng,*
3P-see-PP   3ua-DIST-liquid-strike-NP
and saw them each striking the water in a different place

1.18. *djilu   lahlarrk   wanjh   ø-wabwabme-ng*
splash   naked   then   3P-sneak.up-PP
splashing about naked; then he snuck up on them

1.19. *durrk durrk. "Ah,   karrang   na-ni   ladjkurrungu   ngudda*
tug   tug   aa   mum   MA-DEM   mardayin.novice   you
***kanhbene**-kornmud-yirridjme-ng   ngarrewoneng."*
3/1aIMM-pubic.hair-snatch-PP   1ua
Tug! Tug! (he pulled their pubic hairs). "Aa, mother, this son of yours, the *mardayin* ceremony novice here, has been snatching at our pubic hair!"

1.20. *"Aa, kare   ngudman   nakka   nuk   burd   kare*
aa maybe youEMPH MA:DEM DUB grunter.fish maybe
***ngunhbene-kornmud-baye**   ngudberre la   ngayi nga-mungu."*
3/2uaIMM-pubic.hair-biteNP you   CONJ I   1-uninvolved
"Aa, it was you yourselves, it might have been a grunter fish or something nibbling at your pubic hairs, because I had nothing to do with it."

1.21. *"Ngudda   wanjh,   ngudda kanh-kornmud-yirridjme-ng   ngarrewoneng."*
you   then   you   2/1aIMM-pubic.hair-snatch-PP lua
"It was you, you were snatching at our pubic hair." [here *kanh-* is the Kuninjku form; the Kunwinjku form would be *kanhbene-*]

1.22. *"Ngayi wanjh **burrkyak**, la   burd   nakka."*
I   then nothing CONJ grunter.fish MA:DEM
"It wasn't me at all, but that grunter fish." [KW = KI *kayakki*]

1.23. *Rawoyhno   wanjh,   "Ngane-rawoyh-bo-rro-ng",   wanjh   bene-bo-rro-y*
again   then   lua-again-liquid-strike-NP   then   3uaP-liquid-strike-PP
Again they said: "Let's clap on the water again", and they clapped on the water.

1.24. *djilurlh djilurlh djilurlh djilurlh djilurlh djilurlh   bene-bo-rro-y.*
splash splash splash splash splash splash   3uaP-liquid-strike-PP
Splash! Splash! Splash! Splash! Splash! Splash! they struck the water.

1.25. *Wanjh,   "Konda   ngune-na   nga-wurlebme, wanjh **yewelk** kondah ngah ..."*
then   here   2ua-seeIMP 1-swimNP   then bubble here   1IMM
*njamed   **yewelk**,   burrng-burrng,   nawu   yewelk kabirri-h-wokdi, wanjh*
whatsit bubble   bubble-bubble   MA:DEM bubble 3a-IMM-sayNP then
burrng-burrng
bubble-bubble
Then he said: "You two look at me swimming here, bubbles here I'm –" whatsit, *yewelk* (bubbles), (we say) *burrng-burrng*, they call bubbles *yewelk* –

1.26. *"konda ngune-na   nga-h-baye   **yewelk** mak la   ngudda*
here   2ua-seeIMP 1-IMM-biteNP   bubble also CONJ you
ngune-bo-rro."
2ua-liquid-strikeIMP
"You two watch me swallow the bubbles here, and you two clap on the water."

1.27. *Wanjh   bene-bo-rro-y   rawoyhno bene-rawoyh-bo-rro-y*
then   3uaP-liquid-strike-PP again 3uaP-again-liquid-strike-PP
Then they clapped on the water and clapped on the water again. (*rawoyhno* is a clearly Kuninjku form; Kunwinjku is *yawoyhno*)

1.28. *ø-wurlebme-ng yiman ku-mekke djunj   ø-bayeh-baye-ng la   ø-djal-wam*
3P-swim-PP   like   LOC-DEM bubbles 3P-ITER-bite-PP CONJ 3P-just-goPP
He swam again, and acted like he was swallowing bubbles there but he just went along.'

16.4   A switch between close languages: Lardil and Yangkaal in the Thuwathu/Rainbow Snake Story (Mornington Island)

We now move several hundred kilometres east to a rather different sociolinguistic setting. Lardil was already under siege by English at the time Ken Hale began working on it in the early 1960s, and Yangkaal – about as close to Lardil as English is to German – was already severely endangered. Its sister dialect Kayardild has hung on longer, though now, some half a century later, it is not much better off than Yangkaal was around 1960. Hardly any Yangkaal was recorded before it disappeared, but Hale made about a day's worth of field notes. Most of this is elicited, and Hale's recordings include precious little actual narrative material, though they do include an autobiographical sketch by Mick Charles.[5] In addition to this, though, Hale recorded some additional Yangkaal material as quoted speech by one personage (the greedy and uncooperative Rainbow Serpent) inside a Lardil narrative, which we now examine.

16.4.1   A look at the text

Once again, this plot involves conflict between a brother and sister, though this time the brother is selfish rather than libidinous. The sister is trying to persuade her brother, Thuwathu the Rainbow Serpent, to make room in the shelter for her little baby, to get it out of the rain. Wherever she wants to put it, Thuwathu protests, using Yangkaal (bolded) to name whichever of his body part(s) the spot is needed for. The narrator's part and the sister's part are in normal Lardil – so this time, the choice of language in quoted speech can be used to work out the identity of the character. The basic routine can be illustrated from its first occurrence:

(2.1) *"Kunu--   ngithun   mangarda yuurr-kunthawu. Kiin-ma   wurdu-ma"*
bro-VOC my   child   PERF-get_cold   that-TR.AL corner-TR.AL
ngambirr-mar laa-ma   lii-ma.
house-TR.AL south-TR.AL east-TR.AL
"'Brother, my child has got a chill. Put him in that southeast corner of the house.'"

(2.2) *"Mmm ... **naliyar-** lelk-in"*   *Oh, I go talk Yangkal. **Nal-iyarwani**.*
(for my head) head-OBJ   head-?
"Mmmm ... that's for my head (for my head)" – oh, I go talk Yangkal.
"That's for my head."

(2.3) *"Kunu--   ngithun mangarda ma-tha   kunu   Mutha waa wunda*
bro-VOC my   child   get-IMP bro:VOC big   come rain
Kiin-ma   laa-ma   lii-ma   wurdu-ma   ngambirr-mari."
that-TR.AL south-TR.AL east-TR.AL corner-TR.AL house-TR.AL
*"Mmm ... **mariyarwani**."   "Kunu   ngithun   mangarda   yuur-kunthawu."*
(for my 2 hands) bro-VOC my   child   PERF-get cold
"Brother, get my child, brother. A big rain is coming. Put him in that southeast corner of the house." "Mmmm ... that's for my two hands." "Brother, my child has got a chill.'"

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5 Another short Yangkaal narrative was recorded by Normal Tindale – see the transcribed and translated version in the Appendix to Evans (1995).

A similar routine is repeated seven times, with the state of the sister's child getting worse and worse. Each time she tries a different corner or side of the humpy, and each elicits a Yangkaal phrase applying the same structure to a different body-part:

(2.4) ***Mmmm ... kirdil liyarrwani***   'Mmmm ... that's for my backbone.'
(2.5) ***Mmmm ... bungkali yarrwani.***   'Mmmm ... that's for my knees.'
(2.6) ***Mmm ... jayi yarrwani.***   'Mmm ... that's for my feet.'
(2.7) ***Mmm ... murnu yarrwani.***   'Mmm ... that's for my elbows.'
(2.8) ***Mmm ... naliyarrwani.***   'Mmm ... that's for my head.'

The child dies, and in anger the sister burns down the humpy with her brother inside it. Writhing inside in his death throes, he sings an abusive falsetto song, in Yangkaal:

(2.9) *Birdi waang-inji. Yuud-tha.   Wirde   werrirne.*
        come   go-RECIP   done-now   inside   suffer_death_throes   (falsetto)
      'He was overwhelmed. Now it's done. Inside, he writhes in his death throes, (singing).

        "jiriny jiriny jiriny jiriny jiriny jiriny jiriny jiriny jiriny jiriny jiriny jiriny jiriny
        "Jiriny jiriny jiriny jiriny jiriny ... (suffering-sounds)

        *jiriny jiriny. **wakatha   yarrajalbuthayarra   wakatha   yarrajalbuthayarra.***
                         sister   #@$!¡@%[6]   sister   #@$!¡@%
        Jiriny jiriny. My own sister, the cunt, my own sister, the cunt, my own –

        nganjal-birri   nganjal-birri   nganjal-birri   nganjal birri."
        fire-?   fire-?   fire-?   fire-?
        she burned me with fire, she burned me with fire, she burned me with fire,
        she burned me with fire."'   (sung several times)

The story continues in Lardil with a description by the narrator of his travels, final death throes, and transformation into part of the landscape. Interestingly, his final words are in Lardil (though admittedly the opening two words (*ngada thaathu*) would be identical in Yangkaal and Lardil):

(2.10) *natha   thaa   niya   kangka   dene   dang-an.*
        night   return   he   speak   leave   person-OBJ
       Ngada   thaa-thu   la-wu   ba-thu.
        I   return-FUT   south-FUT   west-FUT
       Ngerr-uru   nyerrwin-u   kirne-thu   wirdeminhal-u   Dene-thu
        self's-FUT country-FUT   die-FUT   middle_burnt_ground-FUT   leave-FUT
       kilmungku.   Dilan   warnawu-tha.   Thaa   dene   dang-an   bana   dangka   likur
        2plDIS-FUT   recent burn-NONFUT   return leave   person-OBJ   and   person   cry
       wayi-nji   juuri.   Warngej-irr   maarn   tharda-a   Junka   laa.   Ditha
        sing-RECIP left_behind one-only   spear   shoulder-LOC   straight   south sit
       'At night he returned and spoke as he left his people. "I will go back southwest, to die in my own country, in the middle of the burnt ground. I will leave you. I was recently burned?" He went back, leaving his people, and his people cried and sang to each other, having been left behind. He had only one spear on his shoulder. He went straight south.'

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[6] Not all morphemes in this obscene expression are recognisable but it clearly contains the root *jal-*, meaning 'vagina'.

16.4.2   A linguistic note on the Yangkaal used

Not all the material in the above text is recognisable. All the roots are clearly identifiable as Yangkaal (and generally identical to Kayardild – see material in Evans (1995)) but some of the bound material is not, in particular the recurring sequence *i yarrwani* or *i yarwani*. It is most likely that *bungkaliyarrwani*, for example is either

        bungkal-iyarr-wan-i   or   *bungkal-iyarr-wan-inj*
        knee-DU-ORIG-MLOC   knee-DU-ORIG-OBL

but this then doesn't make sense when applied to 'head' or 'backbone': even the Rainbow Serpent only has one head.

In the swearing passage, *wakatha* 'sister' and the root *jal-* 'vagina' are readily recognisable, but the rest of the material is not. *Jal-* is the same root in Lardil (Ngakulmungan Kangka Leman 1997) but Lardil has no form *wakatha* – the word for sister is *yaku*.

It is possible that the unanalysability of some of these words reflects our ignorance of Yangkaal. But it is also possible it reflects an imperfect knowledge of Yangkaal on the part of the narrator, who was primarily a Lardil speaker, and whose opportunities to acquire Yangkaal fully are likely to have been limited given the receding number of Yangkaal speakers at the time he was growing up.

16.5   A more complex language palette: Ilgar, Marrku, Kunwinjku and English in Charlie Wardaga's Rainbow Serpent Destruction Story

We now pass to the most complex case of polyglot narrative that I will consider, from Croker Island in the Cobourg Peninsula region of north-western Arnhem Land. I recorded this story in December 1999 from the late Charlie Wardaga, who was in his 70s at the time and died a few years later, in 2003. The complex array of languages made it particularly difficult to transcribe, particularly since Charlie Wardaga's death took away the last person having some fluency in Marrku. However, I was able to transcribe it in February 2007 with some assistance from Khaki Marrala, a fluent speaker of Iwaidja and a partial speaker of Marrku and Garig (see Evans, Malwagag & Marrala 2006).

Charlie Wardaga was a typically multilingual Arnhem Land elder. He spoke fluent Ilgar and Garig, two closely related varieties for both of which he ended up as the last speaker; Ilgar was particularly important to his social identity because it is associated with lands and waters of his clan, Mangalara. He also had some fluency in Marrku, the language associated with his mother's clan, and said he also spoke Manangkardi (of which he would also have been the last speaker), though he died before this language could be investigated so his fluency couldn't be evaluated. His dominant language of daily conversation was Iwaidja, the community lingua franca at Minjilang and the prime language of his household. He also spoke Kunwinjku, the language of his wife and of one of his cross-grandparents. Though fluent, his Kunwinjku was heavily accented and idiosyncratic (conflating the five-vowel system of Kunwinjku onto the three vowels found in Ilgar or Iwaidja, eliminating the long-short stop contrast, and eliminating glottal stops). In addition, he spoke passable English, though this exhibited strong influence from the above-listed traditional languages.

Turning to the relationships between these various languages, Ilgar and Garig are almost identical; both are in turn rather close to Iwaidja (either as distant dialects or as very closely related languages, depending on one's criteria). Manangkardi, probably in a dialectal relationship with Mawng, is also close to all these languages, and all are members of the Iwaidjan family. See Evans (2000) for details.

Marrku was formerly classified as a member of the Iwaidjan family (including in Evans 2000) but new evidence suggests that the putative shared morphological traits used in this classification may in fact be loans, and my current best guess is that it is a family-level isolate.

Finally, Kunwinjku (which we have already encountered in section 16.3) belongs to another family again (Gunwinyguan): it has given and accepted many loans to and from all the above languages, but has a significantly different structure both grammatically and phonologically. The languages in our text, below, are thus drawn from three completely different families – about as different as Chadic, Semitic and Cushitic, and probably more distinct than members of three different Indo-European families. The range of language is comparable to a narrator telling a story where some characters speak French and others Russian, while giving his authorial comments in a mixture of Hindi and Chinese.

I now give the entire text. The original text (whatever the language) is in italics, followed by my English translation in square brackets, and the language(s) used are shown in the right-hand column. Because of the length and multilingual complexity of the narrative, I do not give glosses in this passage.

(3)

Line		Language
1	*malayaka yimalkbany* [The Rainbow Serpent appeared]	Ilgar/Garig
2	*ara raka, rak'ambij* [he went along there, that Rainbow Serpent]	Ilgar/Garig
3	*well, Marrku, Marrku, people he said, not people, only one man* [Well, in Marrku, Marrku]	English
4	*one man he said*	English
5	*'Iyi, muku ngurnu, ngurnu minyiwu ngurnu jang.* ['Well, someone has struck a sacred place (*jang*) – a sacred place.[7]]	Marrku
6	*jang miyiwuwu* [he struck the *jang* way over there]	Marrku
7	*muku makalany ngurnu marruyaj* [that Rainbow appeared there]	Marrku
8	*yeah, miyiwuwu* [yes, he struck it (the *jang*)]	Marrku
9	*imin killim, he kill that ah, antbed or something, stone,* [he hit it, he hit a termite mound or something, a stone]	English
10	*ya, ngurnu mika ... muku ngurn miyiwu ngurnu'* [yes, there he ... struck it']	Marrku
11	*'ngurnu jang makalany, makalany ngurnu marruyaj, iyi'* ['and that *jang* appeared, the Rainbow Serpent appeared, yes']	Marrku
12	*'Yangbalwura rakabara'* ['Oh, I say,[8] that's what happened']	Ilgar/Garig
13	*he said, that Garig man.*	Ilgar/Garig
14	*Yeah, he talking one another.* [Yeah, they were talking to one another]	English
15	*'Yaa, yiharlu ngabi raka yiharlu nganami raka* ['Well, it wasn't I, I wouldn't do that.']	Ilgar/Garig

Line		Language
16	*'Rakabara ngabi ka ngabi arrarrkbi amurnduruny aniwung'* ['That was my countrymen who defiled that place, striking it.']	Ilgar/Garig
17	*'Wularrud aniwung raka kuyak.'* ['They struck that dangerous place.']	Ilgar/Garig
18	*'Ee! Muku ngurn durrumarni.[9] Ngan ... ngan ... durrumarni ka ...'* ['Hey, look at all the flattened landscape. I say … I say … flattened landscape.']	Marrku
19	*'Ngan niyad. Ngan nirti ngurn.'* ['I say to him. I say to you there.']	Marrku
20	*'Iyi, yanbalwura raka ...'* ['Yes, indeed,']	Ilgar/Garig
21	*Like this (laughs)* [NE: *talking back and forth*] *yeah, Marrku and Ilgar*	English
22	*'Ee, rrkanhi, karrkanhi yihanymany rrkanhi?'* ['Well, now what are you going to do?']	Marrku
23	*'Muku ngurn, irriminyawun nga wiruku, irriminyawun.'* [That place, I'm going to leave from there.']	Marrku
24	*I leave him.* [NE *irriminyawun*] *irriminyawun I leave him.*	English+ Marrku word
25	*'Ee, rakabara kunardudban raka.'* ['Yes, you better leave that place now.']	Ilgar/Garig
26	*'Aniyaldi yinang raka angmurndurukbun.'* ['Let it be, don't desecrate that sacred place.']	Ilgar/Garig
27	*'Yinang angmurndurukbun.'* ['Don't desecrate it.']	Ilgar/Garig
28	*Because he was stop him you leavim that one.* [Because he stopped him: 'You leave that one!']	English
29	*'Yinang angmurndurukbun, yiharlu nanayaldi raka.'* ['Don't desecrate it, no, it should be left alone.']	Ilgar/Garig
30	*'Rakabara anjilkukun, nuyi ... nuyi wiyu anjilkukbun' 'Yimuku ngurn ...'* ['You better treat yourself with medicine..' 'There ...'[10]]	Ilgar/Garig‖ Marrku
31	*'Ngarta nm ... marbany nkawart wanhi ngarta .., aa:'* ['I … we said that word of mine … aa']	Marrku
32	*Yeah, I'm hangry[11]... (NE: I'm silly?) I'm silly, because I bin kill that dreaming you know.*	English
33	*Mm, marrku ngurn, marrku ngurn, Marrku people.* [Mm, that Marrku, Marrku people.]	English/ Marrku
34	*'I'm Marrku man' he said. But Garig man he said 'you leave him'.*	English
35	*'Kunardudban raka, kunardudban, you leave him.'* ['I'll leave you now, I'll leave you, you leave him.']	Ilgar/Garig‖ English
36	*'Ee, irrkanhi ngurn minyawu.'* ['Yes, you leave it now.']	Marrku
37	*'Alright, this time I leave you.'*	English
	[discussion and clarifying questions in English with NE, then CW goes back to story:]	
38	*Rainbol, but he said, 'Don't kill that rainbow he coming. You leave him.'*	English
39	*Because marndi yibenbun bininj.* [Because you might kill people.]	Kunwinjku
40	*You killim all the people.*	English

[7] In this case, the *jang* is one a place where it was forbidden to strike the landscape features, a law violated by the character's behaviour.

[8] The word *yangbalwura* (which has various inflected forms according to the number of speaker and hearer) is difficult to translate. It is the stereotypical Garig/Ilgar word – interestingly, without exact equivalents in neighbouring languages – and conveys a tone of solicitous, courtly politeness. Both Charlie Wardaga and Nelson Muluriny typically translated it with the English phrase 'thankyou very much', and it can indeed be used to render thanks (e.g. for a gift of meat), but its use is in fact much more widespread. The point is that here it immediately identifies the speaker as Ilgar/Garig.

[9] The Marrku word *durrumarni* refers to the flattened, devastated landscape after a cyclone, with the ground covered with fallen or broken trees; so far no exact equivalent in Ilgar/Garig or Iwaidja has been found.

[10] Exceptionally, this turn switches from Ilgar/Garig to Marrku inside a single breath group. Its role here is to signal a change of speakers.

[11] Pronounced [hæŋgri], I assume this was the English word 'angry' with a hypercorrected initial h.

Line		Language
41	*Coming now from Ilgar. But Ilgar man he got more, he got more kundjak ..* [dangerous places], *lightning*	English [+Kunwinjku]
42	*ma.. am.. ngalyod, anything, yeah* … [umm, Rainbow Serpent, anything]	English+ Kunwinjku
43	*Only this one thamarl, only one, only one* [Only this place Nthamarl (is dangerous on Marrku territory)]	English+Marrku place name
44	*Only one, only one ngalyod* [rainbow serpent], *now, only one word ..*	English+ Kunwinjku
45	*to bolkkayime kabinbun* [up to now, he kills people]	Kunwinjku
46	*he killim*	English
47	*and ah, kuri, yiman my countryman* [and there, like my countrymen]	English/ Kunwinjku
48	*manguraka kayime, kurrurduk minj ng¹²abinbun bininj* [whatsit you say, poorfeller he doesn't kill people.]	Ilgar plus Kunwinjku
49	*miny ngabinbun bininj* [he doesn't kill people]	Kunwinjku
50	*like poor bugger, like that, yeah, kurrurduk.*	English
51	*he don't like to kabinbun bininj, kuyak* [it doesn't kill people any more, that dangerous place]	English| Kunwinjku
52	*because he know that rule, no kurrunu ...*	English
53	*binbum kundjak, birriyakminj rowk nawu bininj,* [The dangerous thing had killed them (long ago), and they all died, those people],	Kunwinjku
54	*birriyakminj rowk* [they all perished]	Kunwinjku
55	*yeah yildirrindirri raka* [yes, it's really dangerous]	Ilgar/Garig
56	*kayirrk rakabara yiwardudban* [so now they leave it alone]	Ilgar/Garig
57	*yiwardudban yiyaldi* [they leave it be]	Ilgar/Garig
58	*yiwardudban he bin leaveim, like he bin leaveim that aa djang yeah* [they leave it, like he left that sacred place (in the story)]	Ilgar/Garig| English
59	*but ah, but, but this I tell story for long time ago, but like today*	English
60	*naka minj minj kabirriburrbun na* [but they don't know this story, now]	Kunwinjku
61	*birriyawurd* [those kids]	Kunwinjku
62	*only young people minj kabirriburrbun, yaa,* [only the young people don't know it, yeah]	English+ Kunwinjku
63	*miny kabirriburrbun ngalyud* [they don't know about the Rainbow Serpent]	Kunwinjku

As in the other two texts we have examined, the various languages play quite distinct roles in the narrative. Ilgar/Garig – it is difficult to decide which, and commentators vacillated in their identification – is the initial default for the narrative, and is further used for one Ilgar/Garig character from off Croker Island. Marrku, the language traditionally

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¹² This sounds like *ngabinbun* 'I hit them', though from the meaning he should be saying *kabinbun*; this may result from Ilgar-style assimilation of nasality after the preceding *ny*. Note also that I am transcribing a very Ilgarised style of Kunwinjku, which maps the Kunwinjku five-vowel system onto three vowels (hence *kabinbun* instead of *kabenbun*), does not observe the consonant length distinction, and omits glottal stops (hence *kuri* rather than *kurih* for 'there').

associated with Croker Island, is used for the speech of one character, emphasising his provenance from Croker Island. English is used for some translations and clarifications, and for an overall summary of the story at the end. Kunwinjku is also used in a way rather like English, for an overall summary and final narrative framing, and is additionally used for grouching about young people's lack of traditional knowledge. Overall, then, different local languages are used in quoted speech to index their distinct country affiliations, while the narrator's voice is split between one local language (Ilgar) and two 'outside' languages, one Indigenous in a broader sense, and one the language of the wider non-Indigenous world – though it is possible that Charlie's use both of Kunwinjku and English are targeted to my presence, since we regularly used both languages together.

16.6 Some questions

A hallmark of the Walshian style is the listing of provocative questions to stimulate future research (see e.g. Walsh 2007). I will conclude this article by emulating this method, throwing up a series of questions that arise in the study of multilingual Indigenous narratives. Some relate directly to the texts presented above, others have been addressed by other researchers on polyglot narratives, and for yet others we are a long way from having any answer at all.

16.6.1 What motivates language choice by performers?

Four main motivations appear to drive language switching in narratives of Aboriginal texts: characterisation, localisation, framing, and accommodation to the audience. I will look at each of these in turn.

16.6.1.1 Characterisation

This was found in each of the three cases described above:

(a) In the Nawalabik text, all quoted characters use the Kunwinjku (KW) variety, while the narration line is in Kuninjku (KI). Code choice thus does not distinguish between individual characters, but does set them off from the narrator. The dialect used for the characters' speech marks them – and, metonymically, the story – as coming from another locale further west, though at no point in the story is any location mentioned.

(b) In the Thuwathu story, the narrator and the sister speak Lardil, but the Rainbow Serpent (= brother) speaks Yangkaal, at least in places. Essentially he speaks Yangkaal when he and the sister are still involved in some sort of conversation (including him abusing her), but once he flees, burnt, from the scene, he reverts to Lardil, which is the unmarked language used in this narrative. In addition to distinguishing one character from another, the use of Yangkaal again identifies the country of the character, since his own country is to the southwest of the main scene – Yangkaal country lies to the south of Lardil country.

(c) In the Rainbow Serpent Destruction Story, the two main characters each speak a different language – Marrku and Ilgar respectively, again indexing their respective country affiliations. In this story it is harder to identify the language of the narrator, since at least three languages are used (Ilgar, Kunwinjku and English). The situation is complicated by the narrator's use of English for the speech of some of the

characters, essentially as a translation device (see lines 32, 34, 35, 37, 38), occasionally using Kunwinjku as well for this purpose (l.39). This means that Ilgar is used for both narrative and characterisation, English and Kunwinjku predominantly for narrative but occasionally as translations of the characters' speech. Marrku, however, is never used except in characterisation.

These three case studies suggest that the use of direct quotation of different codes as a means of characterisation is widespread in Aboriginal narrative. Moreover, in each of these cases the code choices that are made persist through all or much of the character's appearance in the story – contrasting with the common practice in European literature of quoting a well-known word or two at the beginning of a character's appearance, with a rapid reversion to the language of the narrator. In section 16.6.1.4 I discuss the question of how far narrators adapt to the presumed language knowledge of their audience, but practices of sustained quotation like this suggest either that multilingualism (at least passive multilingualism) was so widespread that they could confidently employ several different languages without detracting from the story, or that the 'broadcast model' of Aboriginal communication (Walsh 1991) puts the onus to understand so far onto the hearer that the narrator feels they do not need to constantly accommodate to the language limitations of a less erudite audience.

Nonetheless, a wider consideration of texts, even from such a multilingual region as western Arnhem Land, shows many examples where code choice does not linguistically replicate what is asserted to occur. For example, in 2003 Murray Garde and I recorded the late Tim Mamitba telling the Warramurrungunji story, about the peopling of western Arnhem Land with different tribes and languages. Even though the story makes reference to a number of languages, and even though Mamitba spoke Kunwinjku at least as fluently as Iwaidja (including, regularly, to both Garde and myself), he used only Iwaidja in his telling of this story.[13]

(4) *ijbu-lda*   *an-nga-ldangan-ang*   *"rik'an-kaharrama Kunbarlang,*
    3plS:away-stand 3plO-3sgfA-put-P   this 2sg-talk   Kunbarlang
    ruka   nuyi   nuwung   inyman   Mawng" lda   j-arabarduwa.
    DEM   you   2sg:OBL language Mawng   and   1sgS:away-go finished
    'She went along and put them there, "this is your language, you talk Kunbarlang, and as for you, the language for you is Mawng" and "I'm heading on", right.'

16.6.1.2 Localisation

Although the language choice by particular characters in the examples above shows where particular characters originate, it does not show where the action actually takes place. However, there are reported cases in the literature where narrative can harness language choice to this goal.

Before giving a couple of examples from the literature, it is worth considering the Gurindji word *jamarrarn* (Nash 1990:215), which indicates a clear metalinguistic emphasis on this particular semiotic. In one of its meanings, a *jamarrarn* word is a word or phrase characteristically uttered by a major Dreaming when it changes direction or begins a new

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[13] Perhaps because the context was one of documenting the Iwaidja language, but his premature death has robbed us the opportunity to ask him about his motivation.

action. *Jamarrarn* words can also be purposely used (tagged on to questions etc.) by living humans who have this Dreaming as their patrilineal Dreaming (*kuning*), as a marker of their identity.

David Nash (pers. comm.) has recorded stories in Warumungu and Warlmanpa that illustrate two slightly different motivation switches of this type.

In the first, the character(s) begin to see Warumungu country from afar and begin talking in Warumungu even though they are not yet there. Hence the site name Manuwangu at the place where this occurred, which is in Warumungu even though the country is Warlmanpa. The site record for Manuwangu made by Peter Sutton (pers. comm.) says the following:

> The two Milwayi made this soakage as they journeyed south, heading for distant Jalyirrpa. The limestone here is of the same kind as at Jalyirrpa itself. The name of the place is in Warumungu (*manu* 'country', *wangu* 'bad'), and marks the beginning of associations with Warumungu language, as one heads south. The country is nonetheless identified as principally Warlmanpa country, but here the Milwayi started using Warumungu language at least to refer to this place. (Peter Sutton, email to author)

In the second such story, two dogs travelling east through Warlpiri country begin to talk in Kaytetye about smoke they see on the eastern horizon of fires that they know would be in Kaytetye. In this case the switch to Kaytetye

> indexes the action – of the burning – if you like; but in the Manuwangu case there isn't any action in Warumungu country mentioned. In both cases I got the impression that the protagonists were kind of practising for when they would soon be needing to converse in the neighbouring language. (Nash, email to author, 7/3/07)

In neither of these cases do we possess a transcription of the story to demonstrate how much, or how accurately, the language switch was employed. However, we do have a rather similar example from Wilkins (1989:3), which contains an extract from a Dog Dreaming text in which the ancestor moves from Mparntwe country into Anmatyerre, though here it is more a matter of a switch between dialects than between languages. The linguistic indicator of the language shift is the switch from the Mparntwe Arrernte form of the allative suffix (*-werne*) to its Anmatyerre equivalent *-werle*. In other words, the choice of a dialect-associated allative form metonymically anchors the action to particular tracts of country associated with those dialects.

(5) *Re   lhe-me-le,   lhe-me-le   pmere arrpenhe-**werne**. Pmere-k-irre-me-le,*
    3sgS go-NPP-SS go-NPP-SS place other-ALL   place-DAT-INCH-NPP-SS
    re   inte-ke. Ingweleme kem-irre-me-le   aweth-anteye   lhe-ke. Lhe-me
    3sgS lie-PC   morning   get.up-INCH-NPP-SS again-AS.WELL go-PC go-NPP
    *anteme pmere   kngerre-**werle**. pmere   kwatye-rle   ne-me-rle-**werle**.*
    now   place   big-ALL   place   water-REL   sit/be-NPP-REL-ALL
    'He travelled and travelled to another place (in Mparntwe) and when he got there he camped. When he got up in the morning he went off again. Now he's going to an important place (in Anmatyerre country), to a place where there's water (in Anmatyerre country).'

For further examples of language shift serving to metonymically localise the action, see also the examples in Strehlow (1971), and the shift to Arrernte words in one stanza of the Wangkangurru Carpet Snake song cycle depicting their travels through the Simpson desert (Hercus 1990:134-135).

16.6.1.3   Framing

A third function of language-switching, which we have already seen figure prominently in the third text, is to frame the overall narrative, for example by commenting on the present-day results of narrated events such as leaving particular sacred sites in the landscape (such as Thamarl in l.33 of the Rainbow Serpent Destruction text, commented upon in English), commenting on dangerous properties of the Rainbow Serpent (same text, l.45, in Kunwinjku), summarising the story (l.53-4, in Kunwinjku) and commenting on the origins of the story (l.59, in English), and who does and doesn't know it (l.60-63, in Kunwinjku).

In that outer framing section, Ilgar too is employed for summarisation and commentary on the sites' contemporary properties (55-58), so that in fact the summary and commentary appear in three languages (Ilgar, Kunwinjku and English) even though the main story contents were in the much more obscure (and local) languages Ilgar and Marrku – rather comparable to journal articles containing abstracts in two or three other languages plus one in the language of the article itself.

16.6.1.4   Disseminating

This brings us to a fourth function, that of 'disseminating' the material. The session at which Charlie Wardaga told me the text above was on the balcony of his house; though I was the only other person in close proximity, there were many other family members drifting around, who according to their age and life history were sometimes more competent in Kunwinjku and English. His use of those languages near the end of the narrative, I believe, wasn't only for my benefit, but was also a way of putting 'on-record' at least the main gist of the story so that others would know what information was being divulged. (He was also well aware that the recording would be archived and made available to people who would be unlikely to understand Ilgar or Marrku.) Speakers are thus tugged in opposite directions by the wish to perform in an authentic way that reproduces local associations of character and action through language, on the one hand, and on the other to make sure the meaning of their narrative is 'on-record' to at least some degree. The end result, in the Charlie Wardaga text, is that the narrative contains 'inside' passages in the more local and less well-known languages, and 'outer' passages in languages that are more generally known, echoing the widely noted tendency for Aboriginal cultural manifestations in a range of forms (ceremony, art, song, narrative) to have both 'inner' and 'outer' levels of accessibility.

Another form of disseminating, this time involving more than one person, has been pointed out by Peter Sutton (email to author, Feb. 2007):

> I also have recorded but not transcribed narrative-telling events where the primary storyteller is echoed in translation at the end of each 'paragraph' by audience members using their own languages (Wik region again). There would be one or two formal respondents whose 'job' it was to perform this function.

To summarise this section, I have mentioned four functions carried by code choice in traditional multilingual (or multidialectal) narrative. Undoubtedly more would be revealed by a more thorough investigation than the preliminary surface-scratching I have carried out here. There are also cases where boundaries can be difficult to draw – when choosing a more widely known language for framing, is this because some narrative moves (such as summing up, or giving a moral) are associated with 'outside' discourse styles, or because the storyteller is giving at least summary access to the story to those unfamiliar with the more esoteric local varieties? A much larger corpus, paying particular attention to the language knowledge of all audience members, would be needed before we could answer this question.

It is also like to be the case that some of the shift from one language to another is simply generalised code-switching, perhaps habitual in particular speakers, without any clear discourse reason. However, from a heuristic point of view it is better to begin by looking for clearer functional reasons since they are easier to identify or refute.

16.6.2   How much of the language is used?

Another topic that awaits fuller study is the question of how much of each language is used. From the relatively short texts examined here it is difficult to know whether each language is being used in an equally fluent and productive way, or whether the use of second and further languages is confined to short and perhaps less-than-perfect gobbets. There appear to be distinct differences between the second text, where the Yangkaal does not always appear to be grammatical and is evidently less complex than the Lardil passage, and the third text, where the Ilgar and Marrku passages are much more on an even footing – 14 distinct Ilgar word forms to 18 Marrku ones, and 6 distinct person/number/mood prefixes in the Ilgar passages to 5 in the Marrku ones.

The answer to this question will partly be shaped by speaker limitations (how much of each language they know in a general way), partly by audience limitations (they might understand stereotyped short passages but not long, complex ones) and partly by limitations given by the function of that language in the text (e.g. limiting it to quoted speech will tend to restrict the range of person combinations, moods and so forth). In general, too, it cannot be satisfactorily answered from single short texts such as are given here, but would require us to look at much larger repertoires of performance by speakers to see how widely they range in each language, and how far they adapt their language choices to different audiences when telling the same tale. Recording multiple retellings of the story, to different audiences, would also help answer the question of how stylistically essential some of the language shifts are – is it something that is done every time a given story is told, or only when a particularly multilingual audience is present?

16.6.3   Do multilingual tales play a role in the transmission of less-known languages?

It seems likely, from my observation of cases like those given in sections 16.4 and 16.5, that the practice of quoting characters in speech other than that of the main narrative plays some role in maintaining the use of receding languages, albeit in a limited and formulaic way. The rehearsed nature of storytelling, the possibility of containing fixed and predictable elements, and the opportunity it gives to the teller to determine what is said (as opposed to the relatively unpredictable flow of conversation), all conspire to make storytelling a good set piece for the display and maintenance of some elements of languages that are otherwise all but lost. With Charlie Wardaga, for example, I was never able to record a complete story in Marrku, whereas I was in Ilgar. The only opportunity to record some sort of naturalistic Marrku from him, as it turned out, was in embedded-quotation contexts like that given in section 16.5.

This raises various questions about how storytellers actually accomplish multilingual narratives. How do they learn their performances? How far do they memorise snatches of the quoted language, rather than constructing them productively? How accurate or 'correct' is the language used in such situations? (Ideally, we would want to assess how their knowledge of pieces of language in quoted text compares with that in non-narrative contexts.) Finally, for how many generations can these snatches of quoted language

survive, if they are not being based on a wider knowledge of the language, and what changes do they undergo if they do in fact survive for more than one generation?

16.6.4   Are there significant differences between multilingual use in speech and song?

Though I have concentrated on spoken narrative in this paper, it is evident that song language is perhaps even more receptive to multilingualism than speech (see Turpin & Green, this volume). Many scholars have commented on the presence of esoteric or incomprehensible passages in Aboriginal song languages (see e.g. Clunies-Ross 1987, Merlan 1987), not to mention whole 'spirit languages' (Apted 2008), which at least in some cases may preserve aspects of what were originally spoken languages that have now been lost (though in other cases there is evidence they have been newly composed). There are also well-documented cases where songs transparently employ more than one 'normal' language, for reasons that sometimes include the characterisation of different personages.[14] Songs offer many advantages for the aspiring multilingual performer: greater opportunity for learning by rote, a briefer span of performance per item (at least in many traditions), the high prestige and public profile attracted to song performance, and a tolerance for incomprehensible language on the part of the audience that is even greater than with spoken narrative. For all these reasons, we would expect high levels of language-mixing in song language. On the other hand, the very compression, illusiveness and brevity of many songs makes it much harder to identify clear motivations for language alternation.

16.6.5   How valued is multilingual performance in these communities? How frequent? Are attitudes and praxis changing?

We lack systematic data on any of these questions. In general one gets the impression that the ability to command multiple languages in storytelling is valued, but it is difficult to find more concrete support for this. Our efforts as documentarists have been more focused upon the primary performance than on reactions to it by audiences or critics, yet any living tradition is shaped by the varied receptions that different performances evoke.

What is considered a good telling? Do multilingual performances enhance the perceived quality of the story? Do audiences expect parts of stories to be incomprehensible, favouring 'authenticity' over comprehensibility, or do they complain when the language gets too obscure? These are all questions we cannot currently answer in a well-founded way. However, the impression that I have gained as a fieldworker is that vivid and wide-ranging use of a number of dialects or languages is generally appreciated as evidence of erudition

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[14] An interesting example of using different languages to represent different personages comes from the following 'gossip song' composed by the Mawng songman Balilbalil of Goulburn Island, Northern Territory, and transcribed in Berndt and Berndt (1951). This forms part of a larger trilingual cycle (in Kunwinjku, Kunbarlang and Mawng), said to have been dictated to Balilbalil by a voyeuristic trilingual owl who observed the night-time goings-on of lovers and their spouses. In the following excerpt from one of the songs, language alternation is used to indicate that two distinct people are involved. (There is no overt indication in the song of what the relationship is between the two people; the information that one is husband to the other was supplied to the Berndts in commentary on the song.)

[Plain: Kunwinjku, in modern practical orthography; Italics: Kunbarlang, in the Berndts' orthography]

    yimray konda kanmang ngarrowen

    kadakŋunakbum ŋagaibiŋuk bi:ŋai bo:r bo:

    [The husband says to his wife:] 'You come and pick me up, I'm sick.'

    [The wife replies:] 'Someone must have given you a hiding, I feel sorry for you.'

and a well-modulated narrative palette. Moreover, the ethic that one should continually be learning new languages, beginning with learning how to 'hear' them, is widely shared in Indigenous groups in northern Australia, so that storytellers need have no fear of being reproached for not catering to their audience's knowledge level at every step (even if they do staple on a more accessible summary at the end, as discussed above).

The question of whether attitudes and praxis are changing is also an interesting one. Assessments of language shift typically attend more to active knowledge (speaking) than passive knowledge (listening and understanding). Yet it may be that one of the first and most sensitive indicators of the attitudes that trigger language shift is the degree to which younger people are willing to listen to stories and other texts in languages that they do not yet know – and that once that willingness goes, an important affordance for the remarkable levels of traditional multilingualism is removed.

16.7   Conclusion

It will always be the case that studying multilingual narrative is more challenging and difficult than studying its monolingual counterparts, since it takes researchers longer to acquire fluency in a number of languages, and because the number of preliminary descriptive materials needed to analyse the material (e.g. grammars and dictionaries of all the languages involved) are necessarily greater. However, it has become historically clear that the polyglot mosaic of traditional Indigenous Australia was not a simple accidental result of great time-depth or particular patterns of migration, but that it is shaped and promoted by powerful social factors that are linked to cosmology, the power of local authority, and an aesthetic of localism and textured linguistic difference. We cannot effectively study linguistic diversity without asking what it is used for, communicatively, or without charting who commands which codes across a broad range of situations, and how these codes interact. Developing models of communication that fully recognise the centrality of multilingualism to semiotic elaboration is a challenge that we are still a long way from meeting, but polyglot narrative is clearly one key site for studying it, and for appreciating the striking virtuosity of Aboriginal oral traditions.

Abbreviations

CONJ	conjunction	MLOC	modal locative
DEM	demonstrative	NONFUT	non-future
DIS	disharmonic	NP	non-past
DIST	distributive	OBJ	object
DU	dual	OBL	oblique
DUB	dubitative	ORIG	origin
EMPH	emphatic	P	past
FUT	future	PERF	perfective
IMM	immediate	PP	past perfective
IMP	imperative	RECIP	reciprocal
ITER	iterative	TR.AL	transitive allative
LOC	locative	ua	unit augmented
MA	masculine	VOC	vocative
#@$!¡@%	obscenity		
/	acting upon (e.g. 3/1 'third person subject acting upon first person object')		

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