

Doing Referring
in Murriny Patha Conversation

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Dedication

For Jacqui, *purrima ngay*, and Zoe, *wakal ngan'gungintha*

and for my teacher, the late Elizabeth Cumaiyi
ku kalngaynu, wurdanngiyetjitj

ABSTRACT

Successful communication hinges on keeping track of who and what we are talking about. For this reason, person reference sits at the heart of the social sciences. Referring to persons is an interactional process where information is transferred from current speakers to the recipients of their talk. This dissertation concerns itself with the work that is achieved through this transfer of information.

The interactional approach adopted is one that combines the “micro” of conversation analysis with the “macro” of genealogically grounded anthropological linguistics. Murriny Patha, a non-Pama-Nyungan language spoken in the north of Australia, is a highly complex polysynthetic language with kinship categories that are grammaticalized as verbal inflections. For referring to persons, as well as names, nicknames, kinterms, minimal descriptions and free pronouns, Murriny Patha speakers make extensive use of pronominal reference markers embedded within polysynthetic verbs. Murriny Patha does not have a formal “mother-in-law” register. There are however numerous taboos on naming kin in avoidance relationships, and on naming and their namesakes. Similarly, there are also taboos on naming the deceased and on naming their namesakes. As a result, for every speaker there is a multitude of people whose names should be avoided.

At any one time, speakers of the language have a range of referential options. Speakers’ decisions about which category of reference forms to choose (names, kinterms etc.) are governed by conversational preferences that shape “referential design”. Six preferences – a preference for associating the referent to the co-present conversationalists, a preference for avoiding personal names, a preference for using recognitionals, a preference for being succinct, and a pair of opposed preferences relating to referential specificity – guide speakers towards choosing a name on one occasion, a kinterm on the next occasion and verbal cross-reference on yet another occasion. Different classes of expressions better satisfy particular conversational preferences. There is a systematicity to the referential choices that speakers make. The interactional objectives of interlocutors are enacted through the regular placement of particular forms in particular sequential environments. These objectives are then revealed through the turn-by-turn unfolding of conversational interaction.

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Documentary linguistics, perhaps more than any other field, builds on the work of those who come before. In this respect, I am indebted to the prior linguistic and ethnographic work of Michael Walsh, Chester and Lynette Street, Father William Flynn, W.E.H. Stanner, Johannes and Aslaug Falkenberg and Alberto Furlan. In different ways they have all contributed towards this research.

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Declaration

This is to certify that except where otherwise indicated
this dissertation is entirely my own work

Joe Blythe

2009

A Brief Note on the Use of Personal Names

This thesis contains personal names of actual people who have passed away. Readers are urged to exercise caution in pronouncing out loud the names of such persons when in the company of relatives or others who may feel discomfort upon hearing these names.

Most conversation analytic research tends to anonymize persons by substituting names or using initials. The key Murriny Patha speaking collaborators in this research were the same conversationalists taking part in the fragments discussed in this dissertation. These people wished to have their own names used in the transcripts. Initials have been used for relatives of these people partaking in the conversations who gave permission for the material to be used, but weren't expressly asked about whether their names should appear in print. Names of persons referred to within the transcripts have not been anonymized as this can have unfortunate consequences for analysis. None of these names are unique identifiers. If any such persons are recognizable, it is hoped that no embarrassment is caused. No offence has been intended.

A Brief Note on Fragments vs. Examples

The distinction between fragments and examples is mainly one of treatment. Fragments are primarily considered from an interactional perspective. Examples are primarily considered from a morphosyntactic perspective. Fragments usually consist of more than one turn at talk and all are extracted from naturally occurring talk. The examples are usually single utterances or single turns at talk. Many are also extracted from naturally occurring talk though some examples were elicited.

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Orthography

The orthography adopted in this dissertation is the one developed by the Murriny Patha Song Project. The project orthography distinguishes four vowel phonemes (Table 1) and twentyfour consonant phonemes (Table 13). It differs from the community orthography used in Wadeye (Street 1987), which recognizes only a single laminal series. Velar nasals, represented with the digraph /ng/, are distinguished from alveolar nasal/voiceless velar stop clusters by an apostrophe /n'g/.

VOWELS	+ front	– front
+ high	i	u
– high	e	a

Table 1 Vowel phonemes.

CONSONANTS	bilabial	dental	alveolar	retroflex	palatal	velar
voiceless stop	p	th	t	rt	tj	k
voiced stop	b	dh	d	rd	dj	g
nasal	m	nh	n	rn	ny	ng
lateral			l	rl		
flap/trill			rr			
glide	w		r		y	

Table 2 Consonant phonemes.

Abbreviations and Glossing Conventions

1, 2, 3	first person, second person, third person
1-38	(when following person, number and subject marking) verb class
adj	adjective
adv	adverb
anaph	anaphoric demonstrative
br	brother
co	cousin (cross-cousin – fa.zi.ch, mo.br.ch)
COM	comitative
conj	conjunction
COV	coverb
ED	ethical dative
ES	experiencer ‘subject’ pronominal
EX	exclusive (of the addressee)
EXIST	existential
ch	[someone’s] child/progeny
CSP	classifier subject pronominal
da	daughter
DAT	dative
DAUC	daucal (i.e., the morphological collapse of dual and paucal)
DEM	demonstrative
DIST	distal
DU	dual
DO	direct object
DTRNS	detransitivizer
DUB	dubitative
EMPH	emphatic
EXIST	existential mood
F	“feminine” (i.e., non-masculine)
fa	father
FOC	focus
hu	husband
FPP	first pair part of an adjacency pair
FUT	future
FUTIRR	future irrealis
IBP	incorporated body part
INC	inclusive (of the addressee)
INDEF	indefinite
INSTR	instrumental
INT	interrogative
INTENS	Intensifier
INTERJ	interjection
IO	indirect object
IRR	irrealis
LEX	lexical root
LOC	locative

M	masculine
mo	mother
NEG	negator
NFUT	non-future
NOMCL	nominal classifier
NROOT	nominal root
NS	non-“singular”
NSIB	non-sibling
NUM	number marker
OIR	other initiation of repair
PART	particle
PAUC	paucal
PL	“plural” (i.e., the morphological collapse of plural and paucal siblings)
PLNAME	place name
POS	possessive
PREP	preposition
PRNAME	personal name
PRO	pronoun
PROX	proximal
PST	past
PSTIMP	past imperfective
PSTIRR	past irrealis
REDUP	reduplication
RELPRO	relative pronoun
RS	repair solution
S	“singular” (i.e., the morphological collapse of singular and dual)
S	subject
SERCSP	serial classifier subject pronominal
SERNUM	serial number marker
so	son
SOURCE	source
SPP	second pair part of an adjacency pair
STAT	stative
SUF	suffix
SS	Stative ‘Subject’ pronominal
TAGQ	tag question particle
TAM	tense/aspect/mood
TEMP	temporal locative
TOP	topicalizer
TNS	tense
UnId	unidentified speaker
VOC	vocative
wi	wife
zi	sister

Key to the Symbols Used in Kinship Diagrams

△	male
○	female
└─┘	sibling relationship
┌─┐	spouse relationship
▲, ●	key persons referred to in the relevant conversation (in the genealogies), ego (in the kin charts),
▲, ●	conversationalists

Key to Transcription Symbols

Text	Creaky voice.
Γ, ɹ, ɹ, ɹ	Overlapping speech. A: =0h yeah, Γyeahɹ. B: ɹ thaɹthangay.
(0.9)	Silence (i.e., 0.9 seconds).
(.)	0.1 seconds of silence.
[0.4]	Duration of a particular activity (seconds).
-	An abrupt cut off, usually a glottal stop. A: pam- pam+nubat damatha da nigunumana warda:thu, (0.2) She re- Now she really reckons that the warda nga- wardeye pa+nguyuɿ whol- that the country around Wadeye belongs to her.
=	Latching (no gap or overlap between different speakers). A: Lizabet.= Elizabeth. B: =Heyɿ
=	Disjoined transcription of the same speaker's utterance. A: Pangibatkana:Γ::mɹ nigurnuyu:::,= She was beating me, B: ɹhhhɹ A: =kardu ngay pakpak ɹmema°dh°a+ngardiyu::ɿ I couldn't handle her I was too young
=	Where the '=' sign occurs mid-line, this indicates the immediate continuation of the turn after a point of possible completion. A: °ɹYa pereninta thangu thangkugu damninthangka+rdurdu;=pereninta= "Dunno. What, what were the two boys looking at?" The two men =wurdamninta°dh°ayi+weparlwarda:thu ɹnaɿ° spoke at the same time, didn't they.
xxx xx	Indiscernible speech.

- (text) Difficult to discern text. Bracketing indicates either a best guess at transcription or text alleged by consultants that I believe to be dubious.
- hh Audible aspiration.
- .hh Audible inhalation.
- °Text° Utterance is softer than surrounding talk.
 A: °Da wangu ngimbilyi.° (0.4) °xxx.°=
 Ngimbilyi way. xxx.
 Also marks expected yet indiscernible phonemes.
 A: th_a::°ng°gu:.
 What!?
- >Text< Utterance delivered faster than surrounding speech.
- <Text> Utterance delivered slower than surrounding speech.
- >Text Quick uptake of speech, a rush-though.
- Stress Stress is marked by underlining.
- :
- Colons (without underlining or adjacent underlining) indicate lengthening or drawl.
- ↓, ↑ Marked shift to higher or lower pitch.
- ↑Text↑ Entire utterance delivered at higher than normal pitch.
- ↓Text↓ Entire utterance delivered at lower than normal pitch.
- :~↓ A downward pitch-glide.
 A: nyindaathu ngunawur↓eng; (1.0) ngunaw_urlakdhangini::~↓; (.)
 From there I crawled. I crawled on my stomach.
- ::↓ A drawn-out syllable that drops suddenly in pitch.
 A: ngungurrkurrktha pangu::↓:. (0.4) tji_u↓nang.
 I laid down there. On the promontory.
- :~↑ An upward pitch-glide.
 A: *Be::~↑:ḥ* (0.6) Nukunuka kudhangunuka_u::~↑::~↓;;
 Right. After hunting he....
 (1.9)
 B: Manda.
 (He came up) close.
- ::↑ A drawn-out syllable that rises suddenly in pitch.
 A: Ma:↑ṃ (0.6) ma↑rru.
 Mum, (what about) Marru?
- ? Fully rising terminal intonation.
- . Fully falling terminal intonation.
- ̣ Mid-high rising terminal intonation.
- ; Mid-low falling terminal intonation.
- , Slightly rising terminal intonation.
- _ Flat terminal intonation (neither rises nor falls).
- x: Rising-falling intonation.
 A: Y_a::;
 I don't know.
- x̣: Falling-rising intonation
 A: Manangga rum tha↑rde kardanga°dh°a panibebengime neki:me:̣;
 There isn't even room in the truck to spit.

- word A preceding middle dot serves as a hardener, staccato.
- text! Utterance delivered forcefully or with emphasis, not necessarily loudly.
- CAPS Utterance is louder than surrounding talk.
- SMALL CAPS Utterance is delivered forcefully, but not loudly.
- ÷Text÷ Utterance has an animated or excited voice quality.
 - A: ÷thə̃mhu:~ny.÷ (1.5) ÷Ku thə̃nggu kə̃ma:;÷
 "Grandson" (1.5) "What can it be?".
- Point of interest relevant to discussion.
- Bold** ← Particular point of interest relevant to discussion.