Doing Referring
in Murriny Patha Conversation

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Dedication

For Jacqui, *purrina ngay*, and Zoe, *wakal ngan’gungintha*

and for my teacher, the late Elizabeth Cumaiyi  
*ku kalngaynu, wurdanngiyetjiti*
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.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost I wish to thank those Murriny Patha speakers in Wadeye and Kununurra who have assisted as consultants for the PhD research and as team members on the larger Murriny Patha Song Project, to which this dissertation also contributes. I deeply regret that some of these people will not see the fruits of their contributions as they are no longer with us. I especially wish to acknowledge Phyllis Bunduck, the late Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Lucy Tcherna and Gertrude Nemarlak. The steadfast dedication of these women to this research, to the Murriny Patha Song Project and to cultural maintenance in general is seemingly unbounded. They are national treasures. Heartfelt thanks also goes to the late Lawrence Kolumboort, the late Felix Bunduck, Mary Bunduck, Mary Magdellene Birrarri, Rita Thawurl, William Parmbuk, Carmelita Perdjert, Ernest Perdjert, Dolores Narbarup, May Melpi, Christine Cumaiyi, the late George Cumaiyi, Majella Chula, Marita Chula, Patricia Karui, Tobias Nganbe, Julian Dumoo, Josita Cumaiyi, Alicia Cumaiyi, Maxine Cumaiyi, Theodora Narndu, Jacinta Crocombe, Naomi Tcherna, Beatrice Tcherna and Geradine Jabinee.

Many thanks to the rest of the song language team: Allan Marett, Linda Barwick, Michael Walsh, Nicholas Reid and Lysbeth Ford. It has been a pleasure working with you all. Thanks also to Jane Simpson, who, along with Linda and Michael, make a phenomenal supervisory team.

Whilst on fieldwork in the Northern Territory and in Western Australia I have been recipient of assistance, advice and kind hospitality from Dan Herbison, Frances Kofod, Marie Klesch, Chel Roxborough, Dominic McCormack, Gregor and Aquaria Renwick, Glenn Wightman, Dominique Sweeney, Bill Ivory, Robyn Seiboth, Greame and Sue Ward, Damon and Yvette Bradley, Phil and Beth Taylor, and Fr Leo Wearden.

It’s not possible to overstate the help that Mark Crocombe has been, not just to my work, but for just about everything positive that happens in Wadeye (of which there is a lot). Mark is a tireless, dedicated, largely self-taught documentor of endangered cultural knowledge, a superb bushman, and surely one of Wadeye’s greatest assets. He is doubtless one of the world’s most unique individuals. Thanks
Mark, it’s been a lot of fun working with you and I hope to keep doing so for many years to come.

The research has been greatly enriched by three and a half months spent as a visiting scholar at the University Of California Santa Barbara. Whilst there, I greatly benefited from the tuition and guidance of Sandra Thompson, Matt Gordon, Gene Lerner, Geoff Raymond, John W. Du Bois and Mary Bucholtz. These academics have been instrumental in giving me the tools with which I analyse the data in my corpus. Thanks also to the grad-students and visiting scholars who made my time there so enjoyable and stimulating. In particular, I’d like to thank Andrea Berez, Ed Luna, Eleonora Sciubba, Bert Cornillie and Christy Bird.

In addition to those already mentioned, the following people have provided tuition, useful advice, constructive criticism of draft papers or portions of the dissertation, or discussed relevant theoretical issues. Many thanks to Rod Gardner, Ilana Mushin, Johanna Rendle-Short, Celia Kitzinger, Rachel Nordlinger, Mark Harvey, Nick Evans, Alberto Furlan, Ian Green, Claire Bowern, David Nash, Nick Riemer, Nicoletta Romeo, Tom Honeyman, Fiona Blake, Hilario de Sousa, James McElvenny, Aidan Wilson, Jason Lee, Sophie Nicholls, Sarah Cutfield, Myf Turpin, Mim Corris, Peter Newton, Frank Davey and Marie Elaine van Egmond.

During my candidature I have received huge support from Rachel Blythe, Mary Anne Taylor, Peter and Georgie Blythe, and Peter and Gwyn Tosi. Special thanks also to Richard and Sylvia Blythe whose assistance helped me to buy the 4WD campervan that was to provide both my transport and accommodation whilst on fieldwork.

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.

This research was funded by the ARC Discovery grant into Murriny Patha language and song (DP0450131 2004-8).

Finally, special thanks to Jacqui Tosi. Your patience and love has made both the task doable and the journey enjoyable.
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 twenty-four 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 /’g/.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VOWELS</th>
<th>+ front</th>
<th>– front</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+ high</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– high</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
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Table 1 Vowel phonemes.

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

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
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
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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M</th>
<th>masculine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mo</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEG</td>
<td>negator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NFUT</td>
<td>non-future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOMCL</td>
<td>nominal classifier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NROOT</td>
<td>nominal root</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS</td>
<td>non-“singular”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSIB</td>
<td>non-sibling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUM</td>
<td>number marker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OIR</td>
<td>other initiation of repair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART</td>
<td>particle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAUC</td>
<td>paucal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>“plural” (i.e., the morphological collapse of plural and paucal siblings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLNAME</td>
<td>place name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POS</td>
<td>possessive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREP</td>
<td>preposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRNAME</td>
<td>personal name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>pronoun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROX</td>
<td>proximal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PST</td>
<td>past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSTIMP</td>
<td>past imperfective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSTIRR</td>
<td>past irrealis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REDUP</td>
<td>reduplication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RELPRO</td>
<td>relative pronoun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RS</td>
<td>repair solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>“singular” (i.e., the morphological collapse of singular and dual)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SERCSP</td>
<td>serial classifier subject pronominal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SERNUM</td>
<td>serial number marker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>so</td>
<td>son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOURCE</td>
<td>source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPP</td>
<td>second pair part of an adjacency pair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAT</td>
<td>stative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUF</td>
<td>suffix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS</td>
<td>Stative ‘Subject’ pronominal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAGQ</td>
<td>tag question particle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAM</td>
<td>tense/aspect/mood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEMP</td>
<td>temporal locative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOP</td>
<td>topicalizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TNS</td>
<td>tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UnId</td>
<td>unidentified speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VOC</td>
<td>vocative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wi</td>
<td>wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zi</td>
<td>sister</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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, l, l, ] Overlapping speech.
   A: =Oh yeah, fyeh!.
   B: \[ the 𤧛ănggay.
(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\(-) pam\+ng\+bat dam\+a\+mat\+a\+ da\+ nig\+un\+uma\+ ward\+a\+:thu\), (0.2)
      She re- Now she really reckons that the
      ward\+a\+ nga\+ war\+de\+ye pa\+ng\+yu\+i
      who\+l\+ that the country around Wade\+ye belongs to her.
= Latching (no gap or overlap between different speakers).
   A: \( Liz\+a\+\+et\+.\)
      Elizabeth.
   B: =H\+ey.
= Disjoined transcription of the same speaker's utterance.
   A: \( Pann\+gib\+atk\+a\+:f\+:m\+l nig\+ru\+nyu\+:\+:\:,
      She was beating me,
   B: \[ h\+hh\]
   A: =k\+ardu ng\+ay pak\+pak \( +\+mem\+a\+dh\+a\+ng\+ar\+di\+yu\+:\:i\)
      I couldn't handle her I was too young
= Where the `e` sign occurs mid-line, this indicates the immediate continuation of
the turn after a point of possible completion.
   A: "+Ya perenin\+ta th\+ang\ku\+g\+u \+da\+nn\+in\+th\+ang\+k\+a\+\+rd\+u\+:=perenin\+ta=
      "Dunno. What, what were the two boys looking at?" The two men
      \( w\+u\+rd\+a\+nn\+in\+\+th\+a\+\+\+ay\+i\+\+we\+p\+arl\+w\+a\+rd\+a\+:thu \+n\+a\+i\)
      spoke at the same time, didn't they.
xxx xx Indiscernible speech.
Difficult to discern text. Bracketing indicates either a best guess at transcription or text alleged by consultants that I believe to be dubious.

Audible aspiration.

Audible inhalation.

Utterance is softer than surrounding talk.

A: "Da wangu ngimbilyi." (0.4) "***" = Ngimbilyi way, ***.

Also marks expected yet indiscernible phonemes.

A: thg:ng gu:.

What!?

Utterance delivered faster than surrounding speech.

Utterance delivered slower than surrounding speech.

Quick uptake of speech, a rush-through.

Stress is marked by underlining.

Colons (without underlining or adjacent underlining) indicate lengthening or drawl.

Marked shift to higher or lower pitch.

Entire utterance delivered at higher than normal pitch.

Entire utterance delivered at lower than normal pitch.

A downward pitch-glide.

A: nyindaathu ngunawurdaeng; (1.0) ngunawarlkdhangini:::~; (.)

From there I crawled. I crawled on my stomach.

A drawn-out syllable that drops suddenly in pitch.

A: ngungurrkurrrthra pangu:::. (0.4) tjiinang.

I laid down there. On the promontory.

An upward pitch-glide.

A: *Bë:~:hë* (0.6) Nukunu kudhununa~:~:~:~:

Right. After hunting he... (1.9)

B: Manda.

(He came up) close.

A drawn-out syllable that rises suddenly in pitch.

A: ñu:rmë (0.6) marru.

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).

Rising-falling intonation.

A: Yg:;

I don't know.

Rising-falling intonation

A: Manangga rum tha:ilde kordanga`dh'a panibe:engime neki:me:~

There isn't even room in the truck to spit.
A preceding middle dot serves as a hardener, staccato.

Utterance delivered forcefully or with emphasis, not necessarily loudly.

Utterance is louder than surrounding talk.

Utterance is delivered forcefully, but not loudly.

Utterance has an animated or excited voice quality.

A: thomshy:-ny. ku thanggu ka:ma:; “Grandson” “What can it be?”

Point of interest relevant to discussion.

Particular point of interest relevant to discussion.