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## Series B Volume 11

### LANGUAGE SURVEY

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## PREFACE

These Work Papers are being produced in two series by the Summer Institute of Linguistics, Australian Aborigines Branch, Inc. in order to make results of SIL research in Australia more widely available. Series A includes technical papers on linguistic or anthropological analysis and description, or on literacy research. Series B contains material suitable for a broader audience, including the lay audience for which it is often designed, such as language learning lessons and dictionaries.

Both series include both reports on current research and on past research projects. Some papers by other than SIL members are included, although most are by SIL field workers. The majority of material concerns linguistic matters, although related fields such as anthropology and education are also included.

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INTRODUCTION TO  
SERIES B VOLUME 11

In order to determine the needs of various language groups for translation and literacy projects, it is necessary for the Summer Institute of Linguistics to carry out various types of language surveys. The three surveys reported on in this volume represent a wide spectrum of survey types.

The Western Desert Survey was an attempt to evaluate mutual or inherent intelligibility between languages or dialects spoken in the Western Desert region of Australia. That is, it was trying to answer the question of 'how well can speakers of language A understand language B because of linguistic similarity?' One complicating factor in such a survey is the question of bilingualism. How much of the intelligibility is due to linguistic similarity, and how much is due to contact between the language groups?

The Northern Territory Survey was a more general survey. It was an attempt to determine the locations and numbers of speakers of several language groups. In addition, the surveyor tried to answer some preliminary questions of language usage.

The Hopevale Survey was more of a sociolinguistic survey. It looked at a single community and tried to come to grips with the questions of language attitudes and usage: who speaks what, to whom, and in what circumstances? How do people feel about their traditional language?



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# OBSERVATIONS ON LANGUAGE CHANGE AT HOPE VALE

Noreen Pym

## 0. INTRODUCTION

The traditional language at Hope Vale has been documented by John Haviland in his article, Guugu Yimidhirr in *Handbook of Australian Languages*. Today this language is spoken only by the elderly. The younger people speak a mixture of Guugu Yimidhirr and English. This paper attempts to give some of the reasons for this language shift and to describe some of the changes taking place. It is written for the people at Hope Vale.

The non-traditional material used in this paper was obtained during a visit to Hope Vale in August to November, 1983. The language was collected during the last two weeks of that period from two women who gave some sentences on condition they were not identified. In order to respect their desire to remain unidentified, I have named one woman A, the other B.

Before asking the women for language, I chose as a control two hundred sentences from John Haviland's article, rather than try to elicit traditional language for myself. Using his analysis I chose sentences which would give an overview of the grammar of the language, moving from simple to complex structures. I had hoped to collect 400 sentences (200 from A, 200 from B). However, when I began working with the women it soon became apparent that they reverted to English for anything except simple sentences. The final result was a total of 187 sentences (95 from A, 92 from B) which ranged from complete Guugu Yimidhirr (110 sentences) through various mixtures of Guugu Yimidhirr and English (66 sentences) to complete English (11 sentences). When both women gave sentences completely in English, these sentences were not included.

## 1. HISTORY

The Guugu Yimidhirr, also known as the Cooktown tribe, are the descendants of the people Captain Cook met in 1770. Earlier there were two main language dialects, coastal and inland. The older people can still distinguish these, as well as give a few words of some of the lesser dialects, but the language in general use is a mixture of the two dialects, with the larger component being coastal. This is largely because the Lutheran Mission settled with the coastal group and their dialect was used and given prestige.

The Mission began in 1886 when a Lutheran pastor on his way to New Guinea spent some time in Cooktown working with the local Aborigines. After his departure a young German, Pastor Schwartz, was sent to begin work with the Aborigines. He set up a mission station at a place he named Hope Valley, on the coast about 25 km north of Cooktown in 1887. He later married an Australian and continued to work with the people, except for a period during World War II, until his death in 1959. Most of the older people now living at Hope Vale were brought up and went to school at Hope Valley. Schooling was in English but the use of the language out of school hours was encouraged. The result was a group of people who spoke both their own language and good English. Most of the older people at Hope Vale speak excellent English.

During World War II the people were moved by the Australian Government, as part of security precautions, to Woorabinda, in the mountains about 170 km west of Rockhampton. This took them away from their own land to a colder, wetter climate than what they were used to. Many people died of pneumonia and it was a miserable time for all. By the time they were permitted to return to their own country there were very few of the older generation still living. After their return, at the end of the war, the mission site was transferred from the isolation of Hope Valley to an inland site about 25 km away, which was named Hope Vale. The aim

was to begin farming on the better land with plenty of water. It also made for easier access to Cooktown, 50 km away. It is difficult to assess how much language and culture were lost during the time at Woorabinda, but undoubtedly the period spent there was detrimental to the people. Today it is looked back on as a time of real hardship.

In the period immediately before the arrival of Pastor Schwartz, the people had been affected by the Palmer River gold rush which occurred in the mid 19th Century. The main port for the gold diggers was Cooktown and they swarmed ashore in their thousands. The story of the gold rush is a story of violence and murder and the Guugu Yimidhirr were caught in the middle. Whilst many were murdered by the diggers, the gold rush did not have the effect on language and culture that the subsequent introduction of English and European culture was to have. With the coming of Europeans (missionaries and others) to live amongst them came the introduction of ideas and philosophies that were to result in the tremendous changes which have taken place in the life and language of the people.

## 2. PRESENT SITUATION

Today the Guugu Yimidhirr live in a town with a population of about 700. It is a pleasant town, with wide streets and well built houses situated on large blocks of land. The houses are surrounded by fences and have gardens with trees and flowering shrubs. In many ways the town resembles a small country town in rural Australia with the usual services of shop, post office, etc. There is an old people's home and a hospital with a doctor who comes out each week from Cooktown. The town uses state electricity, houses have septic tanks and the local council provides a regular garbage collection and services the water reticulation system.

The life style of the people is very similar to that of other Australians. The women delight in cooking and craft work. Cake stalls, macrame and rug making are means of raising money for both charity and personal use. The men are employed in a variety of occupations although there is a lot of unemployment because there are fewer jobs than people.

For recreation, people watch videos, ride horses, go out in their vehicles to a variety of places, including the beach which is a favourite place for holidays. The beach is about 25 km from Hope Vale and many families have permanent beach houses, ranging from wood and iron sheds to fibro and timber houses, where they spend their holidays. An added attraction at the beach is that TV reception is excellent while it is very poor in Hope Vale itself.

There is a Lutheran Church, with a full time pastor, which provides all the services to be found in a church in any town. One of the social problems of the town is alcoholism and the Church provides a rehabilitation centre for alcoholics and arranges training for those interested in helping in such work.

The school is a government school with all teaching in English. At present classes go up to Grade 8 and children who wish to continue their education beyond this level have to go to school in another town, either by boarding with a family or attending boarding school.

### 3. CHANGES IN CULTURE AND LIFE STYLE

The people of Hope Vale have changed from being a hunter-gatherer traditional Aboriginal culture to being a settled European-style culture. Over the years there has been a gradual accommodation to the European way of life with a consequent loss of Aboriginal life style. Employment and buying of goods in shops have replaced the traditional hunting until today no one uses a spear even for fishing, and European tools and skills have replaced Aboriginal tools and skills. No longer is a meal cooked on an open fire. Now an electric stove is used. The telling of traditional stories to children has been replaced by the watching of videos and films. The traditional art forms, dancing, songs and painting, are known only by the elderly and the young are not interested. Their interest is in modern forms of art as expressed on the TV screen and in films. The traditional kinship system is largely gone and traditional marriage rules and mourning rites are no longer followed. Alcoholism, unknown in traditional life, is a major social problem.

### 4. EFFECTS UPON LANGUAGE USE

The major result of the changes in life style is that the young people are no longer acquiring the traditional language. The language is dying, not because it is becoming less capable of expressing the people's need for communication, but because people are using it in fewer and fewer situations. Traditional language in all its fullness is now only spoken by the elderly to each other. Less traditional forms of the language and a mixture of Guugu Yimidhirr and English are spoken only in some homes and between some people, mainly in social situations. Outside the home and in formal situations the universal language is English. Education, employment, recreational activities of watching TV, listening to radio and socialising with outsiders all demand English. Constant exposure to English is improving the ability to understand it as well as lessening the need for any other language. If a language is

not seen as necessary it will not be used. For today's young people the language with prestige is English. Whilst traditional Guugu Yimidhirr has not yet disappeared the areas of use have narrowed considerably and changes are taking place in the Guugu Yimidhirr which is being used.

The three main areas of language, the vocabulary, the sound system, and the structure of the language (grammar), have all been affected and each in the same three ways: some parts have been retained, some parts are changing, and some parts have been lost.

#### 4.1 VOCABULARY

The vocabulary in use today is no longer as extensive as that of the traditional language. English is taking over in some areas.

Retention. Guugu Yimidhirr words which were always used in the sentences collected are: *dyindal* 'bite', *biini* 'die', *gudaa* 'dog', *mayi* 'food', *yarraman* 'horse', *bayan* 'house', *wanhdharra* 'how?', *dingga* 'hungry', *gaga* 'sick', *galga* 'spear', *wawu* 'want', and *walaa* 'watch out!'. The 'having' marker, *dhirr*, is in regular use and is used with both Guugu Yimidhirr words and English words.

*Nulu galga-dhirr* 'He has a spear.'  
he spear-having.

*Nulu money-dhirr* 'He has money.'  
he money-having

Change. Some Guugu Yimidhirr words seem to be used interchangeably with the English words having the same meanings. It is as if the vocabulary system is changing to include both the Guugu Yimidhirr word and the English word for a particular idea or thing. The sentences collected contained:

Guugu Yimidhirr	<i>dhadara</i>	and English	'go'
	<i>gadara</i>		'come'
	<i>biiba, baba</i>		'father'
	<i>gundal</i>		'hit', 'kill'
	<i>nambal</i>		'money'
	<i>gaari, garu</i>		'no', 'not'
	<i>dharrba</i>		'snake'
	<i>yirrgal</i>		'talk'
	<i>yii</i>		'this'.

Another change which is taking place is that some words are being shortened, e.g. *gambagamba* 'old woman' is now *gamba*.





The traditional word	<i>nyulu</i>	'he, she'	has become	<i>nulu</i>
	<i>nyundu</i>	'you'		<i>nundu</i>
	<i>nhanu</i>	'your'		<i>nanu</i>
	<i>nganhi</i>	'me'		<i>ngani</i>
	<i>nhila</i>	'now'		<i>nila</i>
	<i>nhaadhi</i>	'saw'		<i>nadi</i>

But *wanhunbi* 'who?' is still *wanhunbi*.

The change in the 'd' sounds is not so consistent and there is more alternation between the two sounds. This was also noted by John Haviland earlier in the speech of traditional speakers, especially at the beginning of words.

<i>dyindal</i>	'bite'	is now	<i>dindal</i>	or	<i>dyindal</i>
<i>dhana</i>	'they'		<i>dana</i>		<i>dhana</i>
<i>dyaarba</i>	'snake'		<i>darrba</i>		<i>dharrba</i>

Uncertainty about the 'dh' sound is shown in the verb 'eat'. Traditionally it was *budal*; today it is *budhal*, the 'd' being replaced by 'dh'.

Loss. In traditional Guugu Yimidhirr some words had the final vowel lengthened when an ending was added.

<i>yugu</i>	'wood'	became	<i>yuguungu</i>	'for wood'
<i>nambal</i>	'rock'		<i>nambaalbi</i>	'on the rock'
<i>balgal</i>	'make'		<i>balgaalga</i>	'making'.

At the same time the stress shifted from the first and alternate syllables of the word to the syllable with the lengthened vowel.

*'nambal* 'rock' became *nam'baalbi* 'on the rock'.

In the sentences collected these vowels were not lengthened and the stress remained on the first syllable.

*'nambalbi* 'on the rock'

A similar loss of length with a corresponding shift in stress occurred regularly in the verbs 'go' and 'come'. The traditional forms *dha'daara* 'going' and *ga'daara* 'coming' were replaced by *'dhadara* and *'gadara*.

As well as loss of length there was also loss of syllables in some words.

<i>dyindayigu</i>	'expect to bite'	became	<i>dyindu</i>
<i>dagaadhinhu</i>	'to sit self'		<i>dagadnu</i>
<i>budala</i>	'eat!'		<i>budla</i>

There are not enough examples to draw any conclusions as to the reasons for such loss.

#### 4.3 STRUCTURE OF THE LANGUAGE (GRAMMAR)

The influence of English grammar can be seen in some of the change and loss which is occurring in the Guugu Yimidhirr now being spoken. The structure of simple sentences is being retained but some of the other structure is becoming more like English structure.

Retention. Simple sentences still have the traditional Guugu Yimidhirr form.

*Ngadhu biiba gaday.*  
my father came  
'My father came.'

*Yii galga wanhunbi?*  
this spear whose  
'Whose spear is this?'

Where there is a mixture of Guugu Yimidhirr and English there is a tendency for the first word or two to be in Guugu Yimidhirr.

*Garrbila* you might break it!  
hold!  
'Hold it, you might break it!'

*Manaa* before he goes!  
get!  
'Grab (him) before he goes!'

*Nayin nulu* made me fall.  
that she  
'She made me fall.'

Change. There is a tendency for a pronoun to replace a word representing a person at the beginning of a sentence. This was more noticeable in the speech of B than A.

*Nhayun gabiirr walu dabaar budhuungu.* (Traditional)  
that girl face good very,very  
'That girl is very pretty.'

was given as *Yarra nulu warra dabaar* (A)  
that she very good  
'That one is very good.'

and *Nulu walu dabaar* (B)  
she face good  
'She is pretty.'

*Gudaa ngaanhduwi biini.* (Traditional)  
dog woman died'  
'The woman's dog died.'

was given as *Nhangu gudaa binii* (B)  
her dog died  
'Her dog died.'

In traditional Guugu Yimidhirr there were three main classes of verbs, these classes being based on the Present/Future form of the verb. They were: those ending in *l*, those ending in *rr*, and those ending in a vowel. As well there were two small classes of irregular verbs. Most of the verbs belong to the *l* class, with the *rr* class being the next largest. Haviland noticed that there were some verbs which appeared to be changing their class, e.g. *yirrgaa* 'speak' (vowel class) was beginning to act as if it were *yirrgal* (*l* class). This tendency is shown in the sentences collected. The *rr* class verb, *yidharr* should have as its continuing action form, *yidharrin*, but instead the form *yidhara* was given. This appears to be a shortening of *yidhaara* the form expected if *yidharr* was changing its class to vowel class. Based on this very limited collection of language, it appears that *rr* class verbs are shifting to vowel class verbs and that vowel class verbs are shifting to *l* class, and that ultimately all verbs will take the endings of the *l* class.

The form of the verb which gives the idea of continuing action, i.e. 'going', has been simplified by omission. The long vowel and its following consonant in the middle syllable have been lost.

*bagaargal* 'digging' is now *bagagal*  
*baadhiildhil* 'crying' *badhidil*

Also the ending 'ay' is often shortened to 'i', as noted by John Haviland in the speech of younger people.

*wunaarnay* 'lying' is now *wunani*  
*yirrgaalgay* 'talking' *yirrgagi*

The difference between the verb form Present/Future and the Continuous Present/Future has almost gone. The women between them gave the expected Present/Future form only three times, but gave the Continuous Present/Future form instead of the Present/Future form eleven times and the English continuous form five times.

In traditional Guugu Yimidhirr there were varying forms of some of the endings. The ending which meant 'to, for' or 'belonging to' had two forms; *bi* after a consonant and *wi* after a vowel. The form *bi* is now being used for both.

<i>Yarrgabi biiba</i>	<i>shade-bi</i>
boy's father	shade-in
'The boy's father'	'in the shade'

The form *wi* can still be used after a vowel.

*ngaanduwi guda*  
woman's dog  
'the woman's dog'

As the old forms cease to be used some new forms are appearing. In traditional Guugu Yimidhirr the possessive marker, *bi*, was not used with body parts, but English does use a possessive marker here.

*yarrga mangal* (Traditional)  
boy hand  
'the boy's hand'

has become *yarrgawi mangal*  
boy's hand  
'the boy's hand'

The ending which marks 'to', 'at', 'in' is now being used in places where it was not used traditionally but where English would use it.

*bayan muguunh* (Traditional)  
house back-up  
'on top of the house'

has become *mugun bayanbi*  
back-up house-on  
'on top of the house'

*Ngayu dhadaa Gan.gaarr.* (Traditional)  
I will go Cooktown  
'I'll go to Cooktown.'

has become *Cooktownbi dhadara.*  
Cooktown to going  
'I'm going to Cooktown.'

Loss. There are some case endings which are no longer in use. These were the less common ones. The women either used English or a different

construction to express the same idea. The 'not having' ending was not known; instead the women both used a negative with the 'having' ending.

*Nyulu dingga-mul.* (Traditional)

he hunger-not having

'He's not hungry.'

has become *Nulu ga dingga-dhirr.* (A)

he not hunger-having

'He's not hungry.'

and No he's not *dingga-dhirr.* (B)

hunger-having

'No, he's not hungry.'

There are also instances of endings which mark the doer of an action being omitted. This is probably the influence of English which does not use these endings.

*Guda-garr yarrga dyinday.* (Traditional)

dog-doer boy bit

'The dog bit the boy.'

has become *Gudaa dinday bidha.*

dog bit boy

'The dog bit the boy.'

In traditional Guugu Yimidhirr the case markings occurred on the last word in the phrase and also on any pronoun in the phrase. This meant that where there was a possessed noun, e.g. 'the boy's father', then the possessing noun would have two case markers, one for the possession and one for the case of the whole phrase. This double case marking is no longer used, making the phrases more similar to English phrases, and the pronouns more similar to English pronouns.

*Biiba yarrga-wi-mun* (Traditional)

father boy-poss-actor

'The boy's father (hit the dog).'

was given as *yarrga-bi biiba*

boy-poss father

'The boy's father'

*biiba ngadhu-umi* (Traditional)

father my-to

'belonging to my father'

was given as    *ngadhu biiba-bi*                    (A)  
                  my        father-to  
                  'belonging to my father'

                  and    *baba-bi*                                    (B)  
                                 father-to  
                                 'belonging to father'

Some meanings are being combined into one form. There was a form for 'on top of', *nh*, and a form for 'towards', *ga*. These today are now both included in the general form used for 'at' or 'in' or 'on', *bi*.

Some imperative forms are losing their final imperative ending. This may be because the English imperative does not have a different form. e.g. *garrba* 'hold it!' instead of *garrbala*.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The section, EFFECTS UPON LANGUAGE USE, shows that in the sentences collected from the two women we have a typical example of language change which will, unless halted, lead to the death of the language. Guugu Yimidhirr is in grave danger of disappearing completely. The effects discussed in this paper are the same type of effects seen in other languages which are dying. The editors of the book, *Language Death*, say, in the Introduction, that such effects are signs of a dying language, and that the changes themselves make the language die faster because the speakers think less and less of it. (see note 1)

In another article in the same book, Norman Denison says that 'there comes a point when multilingual parents no longer consider it necessary or worthwhile for the future of their children to communicate with them in a low-prestige language. . . , and (there comes a point) when children are no longer motivated to acquire. . . a language which is lacking in. . . youth, modernity, technical skills, material success, education. The languages. . . (are) displaced by higher prestige languages until *there is nothing left for them. . . to be used about.*' (see note 2)

This seems to be true of Guugu Yimidhirr. A person's language is said to be a symbol of his identity—but only if he himself considers it important. It is the present speakers of Guugu Yimidhirr themselves who will decide whether the language dies out completely or whether they will determine to teach it to their children and thus allow it to live.

## NOTES

1. The exact words, taken from page 9 of *Language Death*, were: 'The reduction and adaptation of linguistic structures are signs of threatening language death. But they also hasten language death, as an undermined, reduced, and alienated language may seem to its speakers less worthy of being spoken, and is thus even less likely to be preserved.'

2. The full quote, from page 21 of *Language Death*, is: 'we can say that there comes a point when multilingual parents no longer consider it necessary or worthwhile for the future of their children to communicate with them in a low-prestige language variety, and when children are no longer motivated to acquire active competence in a language which is lacking in positive connotations such as youth, modernity, technical skills, material success, education. The languages at the lower end of the prestige scale retreat from ever increasing areas of their earlier functional domains, displaced by higher prestige languages, until *there is nothing left for them appropriately to be used about*. In this sense they may be said to "commit suicide".'

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