

THE DISCOURSE BASIS OF ERGATIVE MARKING IN GOONIYANDI

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates “optional” ergative marking in Gooniyandi (Kimberley, Western Australia): that is, the phenomenon whereby the ergative case-marking postposition may be either present or omitted from an Agent phrase. On the basis of an investigation of a corpus of narrative texts it is argued that the presence vs. absence is semantically significant. In particular, it is suggested that use of the ergative marker foregrounds the agentivity or Agent-status of the Agent (A), whilst omission relegates this relational quality to the background. Foregrounding may be understood as an aspect of the organisation of the text as a text, and hence we can speak of “discourse basis” of the ergative marker in Gooniyandi. On the other hand, the reasons for a speaker deciding to foreground agency may relate to matters other than textual organisation, including lexical-semantic properties of verbs.

1. Introduction¹

1.1 Preliminary remarks

Recent years have seen a burgeoning of interest in discourse studies, and a proliferation of arguments that (many, if not all) grammatical categories have their foundation in, and can be in some sense accounted for in terms of the organisation of discourse. Ergativity is a relatively recent addition to the set of such grammatical categories, e.g. Du Bois 1987a and 1987b, Kachru 1987, Cooreman, Fox & Givon 1984, among many others. This type of approach is strongly associated with functional theories of language such as Dik’s functional grammar (Dik 1978) and West Coast functionalism (e.g. Givon 1979, 1984)² see also Heath (1983, 1984). My own theoretical framework is a different, less well known, variety of functionalism, namely systemic functional grammar (see especially Halliday 1985). I will, however, be drawing on some methodological strategies from other functional theories, particularly West Coast functionalism

Gooniyandi is a non-Pama-Nyungan language spoken by a hundred or so Australian Aborigines in the Fitzroy Crossing region of the southern Kimberley, Western Australia. As the title suggests, I will be concerned with discourse phenomena, and arguing that in Gooniyandi some aspects of the phenomenon of ergative marking cannot be accounted for in purely and simply formal terms. More specifically, the problem which I will be addressing is as follows. Gooniyandi is an ergative language according to the standard characterisation of e.g. Dixon 1987:

¹ This is a revised version of a seminar presentation given to the Department of Russian and Language Studies/Linguistics in November 1988. I am grateful to Mark Dune and Nick Evans for their stimulating comments on that presentation. I am also grateful to Kate Burridge, Susanna Cumming, Talmy Givon, Cliff Goddard and Alan Rumsey for their many useful comments on an earlier draft, not all of which I have been able to take into consideration in the current revision. The data on which this paper is based was collected during the course of two periods of fieldwork in Fitzroy Crossing, Western Australia. I am grateful to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies for partly funding my fieldwork. Last, and most importantly, I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to my Gooniyandi teachers, particularly to Jack Bohemia and Dave Lamey, who were unstinting in their efforts to teach me their language.

² The term West Coast functionalism refers to the emergent tradition based in California, and associated with the names Wallace Chafe, Talmy Givon, Sandra Thompson, John Du Bois and their students.

A language is said to show ergative characteristics if, at some level, S is treated in the same way as O, and differently from A. (Dixon 1987:2)

where the labels A, S, and O are defined roughly as follows: A refers to the subject of a transitive clause; S to the subject of an intransitive clause; and O to the object of a transitive clause. Although these labels have become almost standard within the literature, I will not be employing them in the body of this paper. This is because they do not appear to be useful in accounting for Gooniyandi grammar (see McGregor 1985 and in press). Instead, I will usually use functional labels such as Agent (corresponding to A), Medium (corresponding to S and O), Actor (corresponding to A and S), etc. (all of which will be given initial capitals), except when discussing the literature. (We will return to this point again shortly.)

The rank (or ‘level’) at which S and O are treated the same, and differently from A in Gooniyandi is the nominal phrase. Gooniyandi has a postposition,³ *-ngga ~-ga*, which occurs on an Agent (A) NP, but not on a medium (S or O) NP, which goes unmarked. This is irrespective of the person and number of the Agent. However, the ergative postposition is not obligatory in the context of marking human Agents: in whatever context in which it may occur marking human Agents, it may equally well not occur, without leading to ungrammaticality. For non-human Agents, animate or inanimate, the ergative postposition seems to be obligatory. (Here I am regarding as human those animates which are personified in myths.) I will be arguing that the postposition is not in fact optional, and attempting to identify the type of meaning its presence carries. To begin with, we can reject the assumption of optionality on purely methodological grounds - it is a fundamental assumption of systemic theory (as other functional theories of language) that there is no such thing as optionality in grammar (see also Haiman 1980). Accordingly, I will be making some hypotheses as to the function of the ergative postposition, and the meaning contrast between the presence vs. the absence of the ergative postposition.

As adumbrated above, Gooniyandi speakers do not designate as ungrammatical transitive clauses in which the A is not followed by this postposition. Furthermore, I was unable to elicit any comments from native speakers of the language that threw any light on the difference between the presence and the absence of this postposition. Thus, we are forced to look beyond the isolated clause, to connected discourse, in order to identify motivations for the contrast between the presence and absence of the ergative postposition.

I will be arguing that the presence vs. absence of the ergative postposition has nothing directly to do with either information flow or thematic relations in Gooniyandi, possibilities one might expect on the basis of the recent literature (see e.g. Du Bois 1987a, Kachru 1987, Blake 1987a, 1987b, and Cooreman, Fox & Givon 1984; see also discussion of section 3 below).

Rather, it relates to the foregrounding, or giving a type of prominence to the agency of an agent. (This type of foregrounding must be clearly distinguished from phonological (intonation) focus, which concerns information status; we attempt to refine the notion below.) I argue my case indirectly, by suggesting hypotheses to account for the use and non-use of the ergative marker in particular contexts, which hypotheses may be regarded as special cases of the more general hypothesis.

³ Briefly, I call it a postposition because it is a phrase-level item which occurs typically one to a phrase. I do not treat it as a case suffix because the noun followed by the postposition does not constitute a distinct case *form*, belonging to the paradigm of the noun — see McGregor in press:276-279.

The paper is organised as follows. I begin, in the next subsection, by briefly discussing the corpus on which the investigation is based. Section 2 then describes the relevant grammatical phenomena in Gooniyandi, providing necessary background information for an understanding of the discussion. Section 3 briefly reviews the literature pertaining to ergativity in discourse, showing that none of the hypotheses currently available in the literature account for the distribution of the ergative postposition in Gooniyandi. In section 4, I turn to a detailed discussion of my hypothesis that the ergative postposition marks foregrounded agency, in the course of which I describe some important aspects of text organisation in Gooniyandi. Section 5 makes some suggestions concerning the wider applicability of my hypotheses to related grammatical phenomena in Gooniyandi. Section 6 concludes the paper by providing a summary, and some comments on the drive to attribute discourse motivations to grammatical categories and phenomena - to see formal categories as the grammaticalisation of discursial tendencies (as suggested by e.g. Givon 1984, Du Bois 1987a, 1987b, etc.). In so doing, I will argue for a more constrained conception of what counts as a discourse motivation.

1.2 The data base

This investigation is based on of a corpus of some seventeen monologic texts in Gooniyandi. These consist of sixteen narratives, and one expository piece. In all, they contain approximately 600 clauses (exact figures are difficult to provide, due to problems of identification of clausal units). All but two were narrated (to me at my request) on separate occasions by three Gooniyandi men, Jack Bohemia, Dave Lamey, and Mervin Street. The remaining two were told by Fossil Pluto (deceased) to Howard Coate in 1966.⁴ The narratives include both first person reminiscences (autobiography), and third person narratives; they cover a variety of fields, including traditional and modern “mythology”, and police tracker stories (McGregor 1988b) (one of which is published in McGregor 1988a). The single expository piece describes traditional marriage practices. One of these texts (a traditional myth) appears as a sample in the appendix; for a detailed discussion of this text see Hodge & McGregor (in press).

This corpus is supplemented by a computer database consisting of over 5000 sentences of text, which I have occasionally used - though not systematically - as a secondary source of data. In addition, a few elicited examples have been alluded to and used in a relatively unsystematic way when they illuminate the discussion, and one class of elicited examples have been incorporated into the discussion.

2. Grammatical background: Transitivity in Gooniyandi

It is generally believed that Australian languages characteristically have just two classes of verbs, transitive (with an A and an O NP) and intransitive (with a single S NP), and that typically there is very little overlap between them (see e.g. Dixon 1980:278). Gooniyandi, however, is exceptional. Not only is it impossible to divide verbs into two such disjoint classes, but also it is impossible to divide the class of clauses in the language into two such classes, transitive (again with an A and an O NP) and intransitive (again with a single S NP). Rather, we must distinguish at least *four* transitivity types in verbal clauses: intransitive, transitive, middle, and reflexive/reciprocal. In addition, there are important classes of verbless, or relational clauses, which I will ignore in this paper (but see McGregor forthcoming-a).

⁴ I am deeply indebted to Howard Coate for providing me with his recordings of the Gooniyandi texts he gathered in 1966. These are the earliest extant tape recordings of the language.

These transitivity types are defined according to the possible case frames of the inherent participant roles (or “core arguments” in Dixon’s terminology (Dixon 1979, 1980)) in the clause: that is, the roles which must be selected in the clause irrespective of whether or not some nominal phrase bearing the role actually occurs in the clause. These are the roles which must be represented in full, non-elliptical clauses. The four types are defined as follows:

| | | |
|----------------------|--------|--------|
| Intransitive: | NP | |
| Transitive: | ERG PP | NP |
| Middle: | ERG PP | DAT PP |
| Reflexive/Reciprocal | ERG PP | |

Two qualifications should be mentioned. Firstly, the ergative postposition marks the Agent in a non-intransitive clause, optionally if it is human, obligatorily otherwise. However, ergative marking in Gooniyandi by means of the ergative postposition is not split in the classical sense, and the ergative postposition may occur irrespective of either the person and number of the Agent, or of tense/aspect of the clause (see e.g. Dixon 1979:79ff, Silverstein 1976: 122ff). In distinguishing transitivity types in Gooniyandi clauses, the omissibility of the ergative postposition in each of these clause types has been ignored under the assumption that the presence/absence of the postposition does not affect the classification of the clause in terms of transitivity. If it did, we would need to distinguish a further three transitivity types: NP NP, NP DAT PP, and NP. The arguments presented in section 4 of this paper will lend support to this assumption. Indeed, they also demonstrate that ergativity is a crucial property of Gooniyandi clauses, and that this language is as worthy of the label “ergative” as any language in which the ergative marking is obligatory (cf. Cooreman, Fox & Givon 1984:3).

Secondly, this typology is somewhat of an oversimplification as at least one other clause type must be distinguished: the impersonal clause, which involves just a single unmarked NP, but which is distinct on certain grounds from intransitives - see McGregor (forthcoming-b).

Examples of the four clause types are:⁵

- (1) *nganyi* *warangngiri*
I I:sit
'I am sitting.' (INTRANSITIVE)
- (2) *nganyi-ngga* *wayandi* *jardli*
I-ERG fire I:lit:it
'I lit a fire.' (TRANSITIVE)
- (3) *nganyi-ngga* *mariyali-yoo* *ganbilingira-nhi*
I-ERG mother:in:law-DAT I:experience:shame-on:her
'I am shamed (in the presence) of my mother-in-law.' (MIDDLE).
- (4) *nganyi-ngga* *milangarni*
I-ERG I:saw:myself
'I saw myself.' (REFLEXIVE/RECIPROCAL)

⁵ The following abbreviations and conventions are used in this paper: ABL — ablative; ACC — accusative; ALL — allative; ERG — ergative; COMIT — comitative; DAT — dative; LOC — locative; MNR — manner; NOM — nominative; NP — nominal phrase; OBL — oblique; and PP — postpositional phrase. In transcribing the Gooniyandi examples, tone units — which coincide almost everywhere with pause units — have been indicated by a single slash. A colon following a vowel indicates that it has been lengthened.

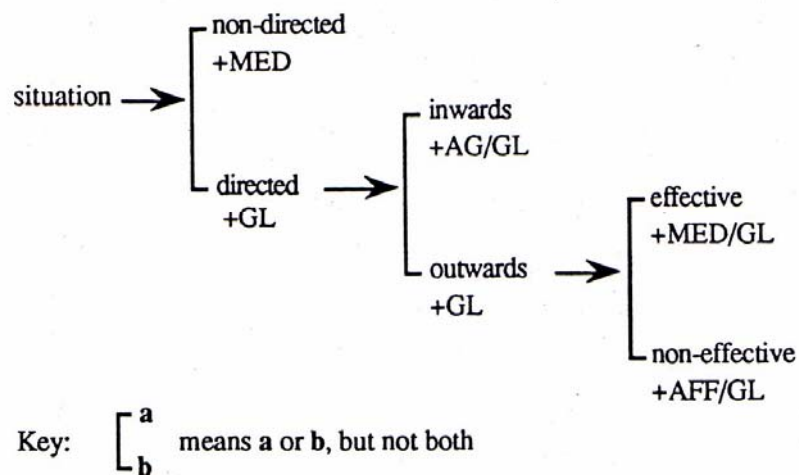
I have argued elsewhere (McGregor, in press:322ff.) that there is a primary bifurcation between intransitive, and the other three transitivity types. In intransitive clauses there is a single inherent participant, realised by an NP; and the process is entirely immanent in this participant. This is, in Halliday's (1985) terminology, the *Medium*, the thing through which the process comes into being, or is enacted. In the other clause types, there is a participant which directs the process, either towards some other entity, or towards the self. This participant is the one which may be denoted by an ERG PP; I refer to it as an *Agent*. (Thus the role of Agent is defined here by its potential for denotation by an ERG PP.) This potentiality has also the semantic function which might be glossed as follows: it is the thing which directs the activity of the process from itself to some entity (possibly identical with itself); see McGregor in press:323 for details, and cf. also Blake 1987b. The two labels Medium and Agent are thus functions (in the systemic sense) - they are identified on both formal and semantic criteria.

We can now distinguish within the second class of clauses between 1-valent and 2-valent clause types, and separate reflexive/reciprocal from transitive and middle clauses. In the former, action is directed back to the Agent; in the latter pair, it is directed to a conceptually distinct entity, the Goal. The Goal may be a Medium, in which case the clause is transitive; or it may be a Recipient, in case the clause is middle. Middle clauses refer primarily to processes of communication, and of seeking something, in which the Goal is not crucial to the process, as it is in a transitive clause (which has a Goal/Medium, without which the process could not come into being).

This revised account of Gooniyandi clauses imposes a hierarchy within the clause types, which may be represented in terms of the system network of Figure 1.

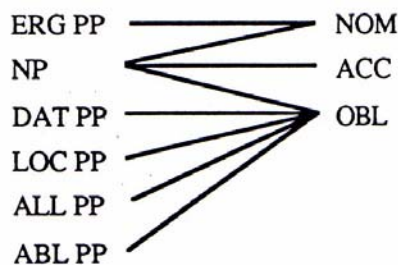
It is possible to account for transitivity in terms of two intersecting phenomena: (a) "case" marking by the postpositions, and (b) verbal cross-referencing. We have already dealt with (a), and demonstrated that Gooniyandi is in these terms ergative, and that corresponding to the postpositions there are clause-level roles of Agent, Medium and Recipient. We have not looked closely at the verbal cross-referencing pronominals: to do so would be beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that there are two systems. One is a system of pronominal prefixes which operates on a largely nominative/accusative basis - one form cross-references both the Medium of intransitive clauses and the Agent of clauses of directed action; the other cross-references the Medium of transitive clauses. Examples (1), (3) and (4) show a form involving *ng* in the first person in these roles; in example (2) the form has a *I*, which is from another set of prefixes. The other is a system of oblique pronominal enclitics, which cross-reference oblique participants to the clause - either Recipients, or Affected participants (roughly, entities which are affected by the action, without being involved in its direction). In example (3), the encliticised form *-nhi* cross-references the dative-marked Recipient of the communication.

FIGURE 1: *System of Gooniyandi clauses*



The two systems, the system of postpositions and the system of cross-referencing pronominals, are intersecting rather than coincident. Not all possible combinations of the respective roles occur, however; in fact, it is only a small subset of the possible ones — indicating that although the systems are different, they are interrelated. The possible combinations are shown in Figure 2:

FIGURE 2: *Pairing of phrase types and cross-referencing pronominals*



We have seen that each of the forms from the first column correlates with at least one role or function. The same goes for the second column: I would argue that the NOM pronominal prefix cross-references the Actor role; the ACC cross-references the Patient; and OBL, the Affected.

It follows from the above discussion is that we must reject Dixon's (1979, 1980) A, S and O as grammatical primitives, and put in their place two sets of primitive roles (for Gooniyandi). One set includes Agent, Medium, Recipient, Location, and so on; and the other includes Actor, Patient and Affected. All of these are, I would claim, grammatical categories - that is, they are correlations between some specifiable *form*, and some meaning or function. A, S and O are derivable from the intersection or combination of the more primitive elements as follows: A = Agent/Actor; S = Medium/Actor; and O = Medium/Goal. (It will be noted, however, that this does not exhaust the possible combinations in Gooniyandi.)

3. Hypotheses about Ergativity, and their application to Gooniyandi

The recent literature contains a number of hypotheses which might be invoked to account for the problem of the non-obligatory ergative postposition in Gooniyandi. Four would appear particularly promising:

1. Discrimination. This has frequently been suggested (e.g. Dixon 1979, Comrie 1978, 1979) as the primary function of case marking of “core” or participant roles: the two arguments of a transitive clause must be marked differently (either morphologically or syntactically) in order that A be distinguished from O.
2. Grounding. Hopper & Thompson 1980:294-295 suggest that the grammatical category of transitivity is associated with the discourse notion of foregrounding/backgrounding, foregrounding being associated with high transitivity and backgrounding with low transitivity.
3. Topicality. It is widely accepted by typologists that discourse is universally aligned on a nominative/accusative basis, A and S being prototypical topics. However, it has been occasionally suggested that in some ergative languages S and O may be treated together as distinct from A, on the basis of predominant participant topicality. Particularly for so called “syntactically ergative” languages (Dixon 1979:101ff, 1987:4-5) it has been claimed that the role of topic is associated with S and O, rather than with the more usual A and S (see for instance Dixon 1972, Mallinson & Blake 1981 and Wierzbicka 1981).
4. Given information. A fourth, more recent, and in many ways more fully elaborated view links ergativity with information. Du Bois (1987a and 1987b) has suggested that in Sacapultec the grammatical role A (which is encoded by an ergative cross-referencing pronominal) is associated with given information, whereas the roles S and O are associated with both given and new. Du Bois (1987a:850) has suggested that the former association may be universal.

In the following subsections, I examine the validity and usefulness of each of these four proposals in turn, elaborating and extending where necessary. As will be seen, none of them provides an adequate account of the function(s) of the ergative postposition in Gooniyandi, although they do all provide some interesting and useful observations.

3.1 Role discrimination

Many linguists have suggested that the main function of both ergative and accusative marking is discriminatory, and derives from the need to distinguish between the A and the O in transitive clauses (e.g. Dixon 1979:69, Comrie 1978, 1979, 1981:118-120). This being so, either A or O should have some distinctive form of morphosyntactic marking. By the principle of economy, this form (whether it be a morpheme or a sequential placement) will typically be the same form as marks the S of an intransitive clause.⁶

Not surprisingly, this explanation has been extended to “optionally” ergative languages. Thus, it has been suggested that the presence of the ergative marker in Dalabon (Capell 1962:111), Murrinh-patha (Walsh 1976:405), and Motu (Dixon 1979:69), among many other languages in which the ergative marker is not obligatory, is governed by the need to distinguish between

⁶ Of course, there are languages in which the form is different from the form used for S; but these may be discounted in as much as they do not constitute counterexamples to the general principle. There are also languages in which the form for S is sometimes like A, and sometimes like O. These are the so called ‘active’ languages, and clearly discrimination of A and O is not involved here.

the A and O arguments of a transitive clause. In other words, in these languages, it is only when other grammatical or contextual factors do not distinguish between the A and the O that distinctive NP-marking is employed.

It should be clear that the discriminatory function alone cannot account for the Gooniyandi facts. To begin with, there are two clause types (middle and reflexive/reciprocal) in which the ergative postposition may occur in which there is no possibility of confusion in the roles of the participants. In middle clauses the other participant is marked by the dative postposition -*yoo*, and so clearly there would be no possibility of confusion between the Agent and the Recipient, even if the former were denoted by unmarked NP. Secondly, in reflexive/reciprocal clauses there is a single inherent participant, and so nothing to distinguish it from.

More importantly, if we look at actual usage, we find many instances of occurrence of an ERG PP in a transitive clause in which there is no possibility of confusion between the Agent and the Medium. In a preliminary investigation of half a dozen narrative texts (this included both first and third person narratives) which I undertook in 1984, I found that the use of the ERG postposition was much more frequent in narrative texts than in elicited utterances (where it was quite rare) - see also below. The relevant participant role was realised by an ERG PP in fifty instances, and by an NP in ten cases, across transitive, middle and reflexive/reciprocal clauses. In only a handful of the fifty instances of use in this corpus could there have been any reasonable possibility of ambiguity had the ERG postposition been omitted, and an NP occurred instead.

For example, consider line (8) of the text (see appendix). Up to this point in the text there have been three participant sets (or 'strands'): the people, the water, and Jilngirndi. The cross-referencing pronominals in the verb *ward-ji-widdangi* 'he went up to them' indicates that the Actor is third person singular - thus either Jilngirndi or water; and the Goal/Affected is third person plural. The presence of the ergative is thus not necessary in order to distinguish between the fillers of the two roles. Had it been left out, we would still have been forced to interpret the Actor as one of the singular participants. Moving on to the second clause in this same line, we see the ERG marking the expressions referring to the old people; however, the clause is 1-valent: a reflexive/reciprocal clause - and again it cannot be said that the ERG serves a primary role of discrimination. Similar remarks apply to the transitive clauses of lines (6) and (9): the verbal morphology is adequate to disambiguate between the potential role-fillers. Finally, a slightly different illustration is provided by the second clause of line (12), which, unlike the clauses discussed immediately above, has two overt nominal phrases: *wayandi* 'fire' and *ngoorndoo-ngga* 'someone-ERG. Clearly the cross-referencing pronominals in the verb are not adequate to the task of assigning roles to the two phrases (as both are third person singular). However, not only is it *a priori* unlikely that a fire would run away with someone, but also within the context of this text it is clear that this is not a possible interpretation. It must be concluded that the presence of the ERG postposition in this clause is not motivated solely - even primarily - by the discriminatory function. Many more examples of these types can be readily found; thus the discrimination hypothesis does not account for the facts of Gooniyandi.

3.2 Ergativity and foregrounding

Hopper & Thompson 1980 have suggested that transitivity is a continuum or *dine* rather than a simple binary contrast, and that this clausal property is associated with a discourse property, grounding. They argue that high clausal transitivity is associated with foregrounding in the discourse; and that low transitivity is associated with backgrounding. This suggests an explanation for non-obligatory ergative marking in Gooniyandi. Given that a clause with an

ergatively marked Agent would be ranked more transitive than the corresponding clause with an unmarked Agent, it seems reasonable to expect that clauses with ergatively marked Agents would be foregrounded, whilst clauses whose Agents are not ergatively marked would be backgrounded. Thus the presence/absence of the ergative postposition would signify whether a transitive clause is foregrounded or backgrounded.

There are difficulties with this suggestion, although it does seem to be the case that backgrounded clauses are quite frequently intransitive. The problem is that transitive clauses do on many occasions provide background information, in the nature of qualifying comment, and they often have an ergatively marked Agent. Consider the following example:

- (5) *ngoorndoongoorni-ya / gardiya-ngga goowajgoodda binibig yard /*
 what:cha:ma:call:it-LOC white:person-ERG they:call:it spinifex yard
 At what-cha-ma-call-it. White people call it Spinifex Yard.'

This example is entirely typical; all clauses expressing such information about place names occur with ergatively marked Agents. Yet it would seem to be impossible to argue that these clauses are anything but backgrounded in the texts in which they occur. They represent a movement off the narrative line, and are never followed by a clause indicating further activities of the sayer, who is indefinite/generic. Indeed, they do not constitute part of the narration, and do not belong to the event or time line of the narrative.⁷

In conclusion, even granted that there is a correlation between transitivity and foregrounding, this would not seem to account for the occurrence vs. non-occurrence of the ergative postposition in Gooniyandi clauses. Indeed, it wrongly predicts that the ergative would not occur in backgrounded clauses - in clauses which represent situations off the time line of the narrative.

3.3 Ergativity and topicality

The idea that S and O (to the exclusion of A) may be associated with topic has not won wide support among linguists, and has been challenged on a number of fronts. For one thing, proponents of this view have universally failed to adduce supporting discourse-based evidence for their claims, which remain at the level of 'intellectual rationalizations' (Heath 1980:885), or at best syntactic generalisations; see also Cooreman, Fox & Givon 1984 and Tsunoda 1986. On the other hand, Cooreman, Fox & Givon (1984) argue that S and A as a pair are more topical than S and O in two ergative languages (Chamorro and Tagalog).⁸ An even stronger case is made by Tsunoda 1986:173, 245), who argues that even in a syntactically ergative language (Warrungu) A and S may be associated with topic.

It is generally accepted that the roles of A and S are prototypical topic roles, universally associated with high topicality.⁹ In other words, topicality is assumed to be normally aligned

⁷ There is an alternative means of conveying this information, which does not involve another situation or verbal clause. Instead, a verbless clause of naming is used, of the type: *gardiya-nhingi yingi binibig yard* (white:person-ABL name Spinifex:Yard) 'the white man's name is Spinifex Yard.

⁸ That Tagalog is ergative is a claim which has of course been challenged (e.g. Blake 1988, Cumming & Wouk 1987:278 for recent discussions). There is even doubt as to the status of Chamorro as a morphologically ergative language — Cumming & Wouk 1987:273.

⁹ Blake (1987b:172) makes the intriguing suggestion that:
 'The unmarked case [i.e. the one with zero realisation] is the natural slot for expression of topic since the noun or noun phrase can be presented on its own as a direct dependent of the verb without any form such as an affix or adposition that acts as a semantic predicator.'

on a nominative-accusative basis, irrespective of the characterisation of the language as ergative or accusative (see e.g. Cooreman 1982:360, Cooreman, Fox & Givon 1984, Du Bois 1987a, and Tsunoda 1986, among many others). We will shortly see (section 4.1) evidence lending some support to such a claim in Gooniyandi. However, if discourse is organised on a nominative-accusative basis, irrespective of morphological or syntactic characterisation as ergative or accusative, then this discursal property will shed no light on the problem of the non-obligatory ergative postposition in Gooniyandi.

3.4 Ergativity and information status

Du Bois (1987a and 1987b) argues that discourse in Sacapultec is ergatively based in the sense that A tends to function differently from S and O in terms of information. He proposes that in narratives in this language A tends to be associated with given information, to such an extent that there are few instances of new A NPs.¹⁰ Others have shown similar correlations in narratives in other languages: Acehnese (Dune 1987:391-392), Papago (Payne 1987), Hindi (Kachru 1987), Chamorro (Scancarrelli 1986), and English (Ricento 1984, cited in Cumming & Wouk 1987). Du Bois formalises this observation in terms of what he refers to as the “Given A Constraint” - that is, “Avoid new A’s” (Du Bois 1987a:827). Along with this goes a preference for introducing human participants in the S role (Du Bois 1987a:830).

Du Bois’ ideas are, I believe, important enough to warrant an investigation of their validity in Gooniyandi narratives. The upshot of such an investigation of the seventeen texts of my corpus show that this constraint does not apply particularly strongly to Gooniyandi narrative texts. This is shown in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 indicates the number of items in each participant role that are first mentions (that is, new in Du Bois’ operational definition (Du Bois 1987b:816), and compares these with the total number of items in each role in the form of a percentage. Table 2 shows how first mentions are distributed across the participant roles. Two lines of figures are provided in each table: the second line differs from the first in that it excludes those instances in which the first mention is a subset of an already mentioned participant set.

TABLE 1: *First mentions in each participant role*

| n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
|-------|----|------|----|-------|---|-----------|----|-------------|----|
| 29 | 12 | 37 | 15 | 23 | 8 | 3 | 11 | 10 | 18 |
| 26 | 11 | 36 | 14 | 16 | 6 | 3 | 11 | 10 | 18 |
| Actor | | Goal | | Agent | | Recipient | | Existent &c | |

That is, he is suggesting that the noun plus marker can be topic, but not the noun itself. (Here Blake seems to be using the term topic more in its usual sense of what a clause is about than in the West Coast functionalist sense.) This would seem to predict that when the ergative postposition was omitted the Agent is topic, and that when it did occur, the Agent would be non-topical. There seems, however, to be no evidence for these associations in Gooniyandi. There are numerous examples of topics (themes) marked by the ergative (see for instance, examples (14-16, 21), and line 8 of the text in the appendix.

¹⁰ I must remark here that I find certain of Du Bois’ assumptions questionable. In particular, his consistent classification of pronouns and subsets of given sets as given. If any sense is to be made of given as a discourse notion, it must relate to discourse, and not to universal alignments — that is, it must be demonstrated from an investigation of discourse that these particular associations actually obtain. All of the Gooniyandi evidence points towards the fact that pronouns and subsets of given sets may be new, and behave like other new items.

TABLE 2: *Distribution of first mentions among the grammatical roles*

| | | | | |
|-------|------|-------|-----------|-------------|
| 28% | 36% | 22% | 3% | 10% |
| 29% | 40% | 18% | 3% | 11% |
| Actor | Goal | Agent | Recipient | Existent &c |

It is clear from these figures that there is no striking connection between A and given, by comparison with S and O, and certainly not of the order Du Bois finds in Sacapultec (Du Bois 1987a:827-828), or Kachru's finds for Hindi (Kachru 1987).

Du Bois 1987a proposes three additional constraints: the One Lexical Argument Constraint, the Non-lexical A Constraint (avoid lexical A's), and the One New Argument Constraint. The first and third of these seem to hold true in the Gooniyandi narratives, as Table 3 indicates.

TABLE 3: *Number of lexical arguments (=participants) per clause*

| | | | | |
|---|--------------|------------|--------|----------------------|
| 0 | 148 | 123 | 15 | 2 |
| 1 | 85 | 116 | 12 | 1 |
| 2 | - | 16 | 1 | - |
| | Intransitive | Transitive | Middle | Reflexive/Reciprocal |

As can be clearly seen, very few clauses have more than one participant role. The one new argument constraint would seem to be a consequence of this constraint; and in fact, the corpus contained no more than one or two examples in which there were more than one new participant role.

Unlike the other two constraints, however, the non-lexical A constraint does not have the degree of support in Gooniyandi as it does in Sacapultec. Table 4 shows the percentage of Agents and Mediums in the narratives that are represented lexically. (Here, unlike Du Bois, I count pronominals as lexical representations; I doubt whether this decision has any significant effect on the Counts, since the frequency of pro nominals across the various roles would seem to be approximately the same.)

TABLE 4: *Percentage of lexically filled participant roles*

| | | | |
|-------|------|-------|-----------|
| 36% | 37% | 21% | 40% |
| Actor | Goal | Agent | Recipient |

We can see that only about half as many of the Agent roles are overtly realised as the Medium and Recipient roles. This is no doubt significant, but is far less striking than the corresponding results in Sacapultec - A 6%, S 48%, O 45%.

Whether any of the above can be used to account for the presence vs. absence of ergative marking in Gooniyandi is by no means clear. Du Bois himself suggests that the ergative pattern in discourse is not a consequence of ergative structure in either syntax or morphology (1987a:839) - it is allegedly independent of the character of a language as ergative or accusative. If this is so, no light is thrown on the issue of motivation for the presence vs. absence of the ERG postposition in Gooniyandi. On the other hand, Du Bois does suggest (1987a:806) that "The ergative patterning of discourse constitutes the basis ... of the grammatical phenomenon of ergativity". This seems to be a claim that morphological and/or syntactic grouping of S and O against A correlates with information flow, perhaps further that the ergative patterning of discourse has grammaticalised in ergative languages. As we will

see, I disagree strongly with this suggestion.¹¹ (A similar disagreement is made by Cumming & Wouk 1987:293 who argue that “characterizing the discourse function of ergative morphology is not the same thing as identifying discourse ergativity”.)

But if the grammatical phenomenon of the ergative postposition in Gooniyandi is based on the “universal” ergative patterning of discourse (even though not strongly evident in the language), in terms of information, according to Du Bois’ suggestions, what predictions can be made? Herein lies the problem: two contradictory possibilities suggest themselves, both of which are impossible to support.

- a) Since the ergative postposition is associated with A, which is associated with given, it would seem that the ergative postposition should be associated with the information role of given. However, this association is not borne out by an examination of the Gooniyandi facts. There are a number of instances in the texts under study here in which a new A is ergatively marked - (5) provides just one example.
- b) Alternatively, by markedness considerations, A should be morphologically marked when it is functionally marked - that is, when (atypically) it conveys new information. However, this hypothesis fares no better. Consider again line (8) of text 1. Here *niyajingga* ‘that-ERG’ clearly refers to a given participant. Again, this is just one of a number of such counterexamples which could be cited.

The weight of evidence thus seems to strongly contradict any consistent association between the ergative postposition and information status, either as given or new. We must conclude that Du Bois’ hypotheses do not and cannot account for the distribution of the ergative postposition in Gooniyandi. Moreover, the proposal that narrative discourse universally shows ergative patterns in terms of the Given A Constraint is not strongly supported by the Gooniyandi data.

4. Discourse function of the Ergative postposition in Gooniyandi

We have seen that the literature contains no hypotheses which account for the presence vs. absence of the ergative postposition in Gooniyandi. I propose the following explanation. The ergative postposition *-ngga ~ -ga* carries the lexico-grammatical meaning ‘Agent’, and it is used in discourse to foreground agency. By this I mean to suggest that the status of an entity as an Agent is foregrounded, and thus rendered salient in the discourse.

There are, as we will see, a number of different reasons why a speaker may choose to foreground the agency of an entity. In narratives (ignoring for the moment quoted speech), it is primarily because the Agent is unexpected or surprising - a notion which we will be elaborating below. In conversation, on the basis of the limited evidence available, agentivity seems to be foregrounded primarily when the identity of the Agent is at issue. Conversely, when an Agent does not receive ergative marking - and thus is realised by a plain NP - this is because its agentivity is not foregrounded. In other words, the Agent is not unexpected, or it is unsurprising, or its identity is not at issue.

In this section I attempt to put these claims on a firm footing, and explicate the technical terms I have introduced. Section 4.1 investigates the distribution of the ergative postposition in narrative monologues; and section 4.2 investigates the use of this postposition in quoted speech in narrative monologues.

¹¹ A further difficulty with this suggestion is that it is the formally unmarked category — the absolutive, S and O — that is functionally marked (in that S and O are associated with the information category new), and the formally marked category, the ergative, is associated with the functionally unmarked category of given.

Before we begin, however, it is worth drawing attention to another set of statistics: the frequency of marking vs. non-marking of the Agent role in the narratives. Table 5 tabulates comparative figures for ergatively marked vs. unmarked Agents across the clause types.

TABLE 5: *Morphologically marked and unmarked Agents*

| Clause type | Number of ergatively marked Agents | Number of unmarked Agents |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Transitive | 46 | 6 |
| Middle | 5 | 7 |
| Reflexive/Reciprocal | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 52 | 13 |

What is interesting - and demands explanation - is the discrepancy between transitive and middle clauses, whereby the vast majority (88%) of Agents in the former are ergatively marked, whereas only about half are marked in the latter.

4. 1 Ergativity in narrative monologues

4. 1. 1 Organisation of narratives in Gooniyandi

It is necessary to begin by briefly describing some aspects of the organisation of Gooniyandi narrative texts, as these are crucial to the development of my thesis. As I have argued elsewhere (e.g. McGregor 1987a, 1987b), Gooniyandi narratives are highly organised structures, satisfying certain strict constraints. They are structured into one or more *episodes* or minimal stories (Prince 1973),¹² each of which consists of at least three constituents:

Initial state or condition, or movement from an initial state or condition;

(Event)

Final state or condition, or movement into a final state or condition;

where the initial state and the final state are related as inverses of one another (see Prince 1973:31, and McGregor 1987a:25). These are the inherent constituents of an episode, and occur in strict sequence. In addition, there may be an optional Setting, which provides a location (usually spatial) for the episode. As indicated, there is typically only one of the first and third elements, but there may be a number of intervening Events between the Initial state and the Final state.

As might be expected, this episodal structure has grammatical correlates: the initial and final elements are typically realised by one or more intransitive stative clauses, whereas the middle element frequently contains at least one transitive clause, and optionally one or more intransitive stative clauses. However, this correlation is by no means perfect, and it is not impossible (as we will see) for the initial and final states to be realised by a transitive clause. For this reason I have employed the term “condition” as an alternative, perhaps better, designation.

As an example consider the text included in the appendix. This consists of three such episodes as follows (cf. Hodge & McGregor in press, for a slightly different analysis):

¹² There is formal evidence for the existence of episodes. The most important is that their boundaries are usually formally marked by prosodic phenomena and lexis. Especially important is the occurrence of a circumstantial element or a nominal phrase referring to a narrative character, on its own intonation contour, preceded and followed by a pause. This normally marks the beginning of an episode. On the other hand, the interjection *wila* ‘finish, OK’ marks the end of an episode when it occurs on its own intonation contour.

| TEXTUAL ROLE: | LINE NUMBER: | GLOSS |
|---------------|--------------|---|
| Setting | 1 | People sitting down |
| Episode 1: | | |
| Initial state | 2 - 5 | Rain comes to the people who are sitting around |
| Event | 6 | Rain saturates everyone |
| Final state | 6 | Rain makes them cold |
| Episode 2: | | |
| Initial state | 7, 8 | Jilngirndi goes up to the people, who are shivering with cold |
| Event | 9 | Jilngirndi takes (their <i>fire</i>) |
| Event | 10 | Jilngirndi runs away with (their fire) |
| Final state | 11 | Jilngirndi enters cave |
| Episode 3: | | |
| Initial state | 12, 13 | People in state of consternation |
| Event | 14 | They follow Jilngirndi |
| Event | 15, 16 | They spear Jilngirndi |
| Final state | 17 | Jilngirndi remains in cave forever |

4.1.2 Characters in narrative texts

Another important aspect of the organisation of episodes concerns the characters, the major participant entities involved in the narrative. An episode typically has one or two (at most three) main characters, which recur throughout that episode, being represented in all, or the majority of the clauses within the episode.¹³ For instance, the first episode of the sample text has a single character, the people; they fulfill participant roles in nearly every clause of the episode. The second and third episodes have two characters, the people and Jilngirndi; and again, almost every clause in these episodes has each of these characters in a participant role. In addition to these characters, there are minor (non-human) entities, the rain in the first episode, and the fire in the second and third.

Typically, a character is referred to just once by a full nominal expression (in the first, or nearly the first clause of the episode), and is ellipsed in subsequent clauses. Furthermore, in the majority of instances, in its first mention in the episode this participant is introduced either in a separate verbless existential or naming clause (see McGregor 1988c), or is introduced on its own intonation contour, typically (but not always) preceding the remainder of the clause. The first possibility is exemplified in the appendix text, where Jilngirndi is introduced in line 7; the second, in example (6):

- (6) *niyaji thiddoo / boowooddoonggoo wardji /*
 this kangaroo from:the:north he:went
 'This kangaroo came down from the north.'

Less frequently, it will be referred to by a nominal expression contained within the same intonation unit as the remainder of the verbless clause introducing that participant - which is normally speaking an intransitive clause. Line 1 of the text is an example. An even less frequent pattern is for the participant to be ellipsed entirely, even though new - cf. Du Bois

¹³ Clearly characters have high topical value in the West Coast functionalist sense. However, I have avoided this term in order to avoid confusion with the many other senses of this term.

1987a:839. Presumably this can be accounted for by reference to some sort of assumed salience and givenness of the character (see also Wigglesworth 1988:174). Two of the texts in the database show this means of referring to their major character.

These four means of introducing major episodal characters constitute the full range of means of introducing new participant entities into narratives according to present data. For convenience, they are listed below:

- 1) verbless relational clause;
- 2) separate intonation contour,
- 3) part of intonation contour containing remainder of clause; here the newly introduced entity is typically either thematic or focal in its intonation unit;
- 4) ellipsis.

This may be regarded as a hierarchy of means of introducing entities into a narrative: the more important an entity, the more character-like it is, the more likely it is to be introduced by one of the higher means; the less important the entity, the more likely it is to be introduced by one of the lower means. (Within these four categories, I should note, there are further possible subdivisions - e.g. under (3) we must distinguish between items introduced by discontinuous nominal expressions, and those introduced by continuous expressions, the former being associated with more textually important entities.) This hierarchy also reflects a natural dine from most newsworthy, constituting a full item of new information (1-2); to focal and new (3); and finally to given (4).

We are now in a position to revise some of Du Bois' suggestions to account for the Gooniyandi facts. (i) Firstly, it will be noted that there are a variety of formal means of introducing new entities into narratives (i.e. (1) to (4) above), and that these are independent of the clausal role borne by that entity (aside from the obvious qualification that an entity introduced by (1) must fill a role of Existent, or Named). This is not to say that there are not correlations between new entities and participant role. However, these are context sensitive, and may be accounted for as follows: (ii) The major characters of an episode, if they have not been mentioned before, are introduced early in the episode, normally in the first clause, and thus they tend to occur either in a relational clause (existential or naming) or in an intransitive clause. However, entities which are not characters are not necessarily introduced in the first constituent of an episode, and consequently they may occur in either a transitive, intransitive or middle clause (less likely a relational clause, or reflexive/reciprocal clause - for reasons which are not clear at present). It is this observation that seems to me to account for the vast majority - but certainly not all - instances of new Agents, in contradiction to Du Bois' Given A Constraint. Thus, if we restrict attention to characters, the Given A Constraint does hold water in Gooniyandi. However, it must be regarded as a consequence of properties of narrative organisation, rather than an independent constraint operating on narratives.

4. 1.3 Ergatively marked Agents

Let us reconsider the major episode characters. It turns out that one of these tends to be the most frequent and unmarked Actor participant throughout the episode. It tends to be the Actor of most of the clauses, and generally seems to be the unmarked choice of Actor. For convenience I will refer to this character as *protagonist* or *main protagonist*. In the second episode of the sample text, for instance, the main character Jilngirndi is Actor in four out of five verbal clauses; in the third episode, the people are Actors in four out of six verbal clauses

(ignoring the direct quotes since they are projections from the narrated events, involving shifts of deictic reference points).¹⁴

Perturbations or discontinuities do occur, but they tend to be local, and short-lived. This major character, the protagonist, is the expected Actor throughout the episode. Thus, in this respect Gooniyandi narratives would seem to resemble narratives in other languages; this is a clear example of the putative universal nominative/accusative orientation of narrative Du Bois (1987a) and many others comment on (see section 3.3 for references).

All entities other than the protagonist are - as an almost invariant rule - unexpected as Actors, and hence unexpected as Agents.¹⁵ When the Agent of a particular clause within an episode is different from the major episodal participant, that Agent - if it is represented by an overt phrase - is invariably denoted by an ERG PP. irrespective of the information status of that Agent. Consider, for instance the first clause of line (6) of the sample text, repeated here for convenience as (7):

- (7) *gamba-ga yiljbina / garndiwa /*
water-ERG it:rained:on:them many
'It rained on everyone.'

At this point, the main episodal participants, the people, become Goals of the situation of raining, and hence the Agent of the referring clause is denoted by the ergative PP *gamba-ngga* 'water-ERG'.

names (for which the accepted white name differs from the traditional Gooniyandi name). This was characterised by a transitive clause of naming usually involving the verb *goowaj* 'name, call by name' and having the Agent denoted by an ERG postposition - see example (5) above. The presence of the ERG postposition in these circumstances, which could not be accounted for in terms of the foregrounding/backgrounding hypothesis, is readily accounted for in terms of unexpected Agency - since these clauses involve discontinuities in Agency. The Agent is not the expected one - the Actor of the previous clause.

As a final example, consider the following clause from a text about Pigeon, an Aboriginal "rebel":

- (8) *limba-ga looddoobjiwidda garndiwangooddoo-ngga /*
policeman-ERG they:chased:him many-ERG
'Lots of policemen chased after him.'

Here the police are introduced for the first time into the text, the previous clauses having Pigeon as Actor and Agent.

This particular expectation (that the Agent of a clause will be identical with the main protagonist of the episode in which the clause occurs) accounts for a good number - but not

¹⁴ This does not hold for the first episode, as the reader will note, where the people are Actors in three of the six verbal clauses, the rain in the other three. However, there are ways of accounting for this by refining the hypothesis. Observe, for instance, that the people are only represented by a nominal phrase on one occasion, despite the fact that it is cross-referenced and hence an argument of all six clauses, whereas the water is referred to twice, even though it is only an argument of three clauses. (One might also wonder whether the clause is the appropriate level to be working on: perhaps it would be better to consider the sentence.)

¹⁵ As we will see, there are occasional exceptions where the discourse context engenders expectations that the Actor will change.

all - of the uses of the ergative postposition on human Agents. There are two other important circumstances in which an Agent may be unexpected which are represented in the corpus.

an episode is split, one or more subsets of it becoming Agent of the new clause(s). This Agent is normally denoted by an ERG PP. An example is:

- (9) *walwaddangga gilbayingi maddiyali-ngga /*
crocodile he:found:it mother-in-law-ERG
'One of the mother-in-laws found a crocodile.'

In the textual episode from which this is extracted, there had been a single character consisting of two mother-in-laws, which had been the Actor of each of the preceding clauses. In a similar way, consider the following, from a first person narrative text (not included in the corpus):

- (10) *maningga bagiyiddi: / moongaya / milawawinmi bidi-yooddoo-ngga /*
night we:lay morning they:were:looking they-DU-ERG
'We camped the night, and in the morning they looked.'

Up to this point in the narrative, the first person group referred to in the first clause had been treated as a single character, which was the protagonist.

Quite frequently when a character set is split in this way each new entity set becomes an episodal character, and each enacts contrasting events. Thus consider the following example:

- (11) *yaanya-ngga nanggidmi / yaanya-ngga / gardbini dagi-nyali moorloo /*
other-ERG he:missed:him other-ERG he:hit:him right:place-REP eye
'One of them missed; the other hit him in the right place, in the eye.'

Up to this point, the two men had acted collectively as the major protagonist set of the episode.

The two types of expectation we have discussed show that what is expected is that the Agent of a clause be identical with the main protagonist of the episode - that the former be neither an absolutely different entity, nor a subset of the latter. However, as we will shortly see (section 4.1.5), if an Agent contains the major Actor character as a subset, it is not normally treated as an unexpected Agent.

The remaining circumstance in which an Agent is unexpected is when the Agent occurs in the initial clause of an episode, or at least in the first verbal clause of the episode - the first clause referring to a situation (i.e. some sort of going-on - see McGregor in press:293). (However, see below for some qualifications.) The unexpectedness in this context relates to unlikeliness of an Agent initially in an episode, where the first episodal constituent refers to a state or change of state. Of the seventeen texts which constitute the corpus for this study, three narratives, and the one expository piece contain an ERG PP in the sentence realising the Initial state of the first episode. They are reproduced below, with one exception, which will be discussed in the next subsection:

- (12) *ligayiddi / booddoongoo jooggoowawinmi I*
we:waited north they:were:hunting:kangaroos
yoowooloo garndiwangooddoo-ngga /
man many-ERG
'We waited while lots of people hunted kangaroos in the north.'

(13) *well* / *ngirndaji* / *niyaji-nhingi* / *yoowoolo* *gamba-ngga*
 well this this -ABL man water-ERG

ngabgilawina / *galooro-ngga* /
 he:ate:them Rainbow: snake-ERG

‘Well, then, the people were eaten by the Rainbow Snake.’

(14) *maddiyali-ngga* *lambadi-ngga* *yoodbidinhi*
 mother:in:law-ERG father:in:law-ERG they:put:her:on:him

ngirndaji-yoo *yoowooloo-yoo* /
 this-DAT man-DAT

‘The mother-in-law and father-in-law put her (i.e. match-make) for this man.’

(It will be observed that these three examples illustrate the point made above that transitive clauses may occur initially in episodes: an initial state (or entry to a state) may involve effective activity on the part of an entity. Thus, in (12) the ‘state’ or condition of the third person group is one of hunting, and one of waiting for the first person group; in (13), as the remainder of the text clearly demonstrates, the state of the people is that of being inside *galooro*’s stomach; and in the case of (14) this match-making is a necessary precondition for the subsequent events of marriage. It would seem then that such transitive clauses may be states only if they represent situations which are either durative, or are generic (as in (14) or habitual.)

Finally, consider line 8 of the text given in the Appendix, which presents an interesting case, since Jilngirndi is first introduced (line 7) in an existential clause, and then he is immediately referred to by an ergative PP. The existential clause, however, does not fall into the initial state of this episode: it does not in fact refer to a state at all, as it is just the narrator’s imputation of the existence of Jilngirndi.

Summarising, we have in this section invoked three circumstances in which a particular entity is unexpected as Agent. They may be characterised as follows:

- a) An entity or character will be unexpected as Agent if it is different from the protagonist of the episode, the character which fulfils the role of Actor in the majority of clauses, and is the unmarked Actor of each clause in the episode.
- b) An entity or character will be unexpected as Agent if its members are contained in the member set of the protagonist.
- c) An entity or character will be unexpected as Agent if it occurs as Agent right at the beginning of an episode.

This is not of course to say that these are the only conditions in which an Agent would be unexpected; they do, however, seem to exhaustively account for unexpected Agents in the present corpus.

4.1.4 “Ergative hopping”

In this section I briefly discuss a highly unusual and unexpected context of occurrence of the ergative postposition, albeit one with parallels in other Australian Aboriginal languages. This is the use of the ergative on a phrase functioning as Actor/Medium (=S) of an intransitive clause. This appears to occur only in the strictly limited context that the following clause is transitive, and hence the designation “ergative hopping” (a term first used, I believe, by Haviland 1979 for a similar phenomenon in Gugu Yimidhirr). My entire textual corpus contains no more than four or five instances of “ergative hopping”; however this is enough to

counter charges that it is a mere “performance error” - as is the fact that an explanation seems to be possible. There is one in the smaller corpus used in this study:

- (15) *yoowarni-ngga* / *yoowarni-ngga* *gardiya* / *Cherrabun Bore* /
 one-ERG one-ERG white:person
warangji / *gamba* / *bambimngawiddangi* *boorloomaniyoo* / *yingjin* /
 he:sat water he:pumped:it:for:them cattle engine
yingi: ... *e:* ... *Lockbore* /
 name um
 ‘A white man was living at Cherrabun Bore. He was pumping water for cattle with an engine called a um Lockbore.’

I propose the following explanation. The Initial state of the episode from which this example comes (note that it occurs right at the beginning of the text) is the person engaged in the activity of pumping water (rather than just being at Cherrabun Bore). (There is text internal evidence supporting this claim, relating to the distribution of connective elements.) In other words, the Initial state is realised not by a single clause, but by a pair of clauses. Furthermore, the character, the white person, is an Agent in the Initial state of pumping water, and thus his agency is unexpected.

In order to argue a strong case for this proposal it would be necessary to find other comparable examples which are amenable to the same explanation, which I have not so far succeeded in doing. However, it is worth citing the following instance:

- (16) *limba -ga* / *giddayi::* *milanga* / *ngoorndoornoo*
 policeman-ERG he:ran he:saw:it what:cha:ma:call:it
marni-ngaddaya / *marni-ngaddaya* *jista* /
 sister-INCL sister-INCL sister
 ‘The policeman drove over and looked with the (nursing) sister.’

This follows a clause saying that someone had gone and informed the police of a murder (of an Aborigine). It is not clear whether this clause represents the Initial state of an episode; if so, the explanation invoked for (15) would probably also account for (16). And note also that a perhaps stronger case could be made in respect of (16) that the initial state is an active, transitive one. For the two verbs are conjoined in a single tone unit, with the additional use of vowel length to indicate their conjunction. That is, in other words, they form a single sentential unit.

4.1.5 Unmarked Agents

So far we have dealt with the hypothesis that the ergative postposition in Gooniyandi narratives indicates unexpected or unpredicted agency by examining instances of use of this morpheme. This is only side of the problem, however. What we have to also show is that when nominal phrases referring to Agents are not ergatively marked, their agency is not unexpected, or is at least not foregrounded.

As we have seen, in the vast majority of transitive clauses in Gooniyandi narratives which have an overt Agent, this Agent is marked with the ergative postposition. Indeed over seven times as many Agent phrases are ergatively marked as are unmarked. It seems natural to interpret this as correlated with the fact that an entity is likely to be mentioned only when it contains new (i.e. unpredictable or not recoverable - Halliday 1985:277) information; otherwise it would be ellipsed. But if it is new and unpredictable, then surely so too should be its status as an Agent. This then accounts for the predominance of ergatively marked Agents.

There is however one circumstance where this seemingly natural prediction does not obtain, and this seems to account for all of the exceptional instances in which an Agent in a transitive clause is not marked. In this circumstance, certain cues in the clause indicate the status of this unpredicted entity as Agent - that is, they indicate that the status of the entity as Agent is expected. This circumstance can be characterised as follows. To begin with, there will be no competitor for the Agent role; in other words, there may not be at this point an expected Agent - a protagonist. This puts us at the beginning of an episode, where such a character has not as yet been established. But note the problem here: in the Initial state, transitive clauses - and thus their Agents - are not expected (as discussed above). There is a conflict of expectations: the identity of the protagonist is unpredictable, but the fact that it is an Agent is predictable, given the clause and surrounding circumstances.

Examination of the corpora reveals an interesting pattern. It is typically the case that such new Agents are ergatively marked in the Initial state of the first episode of a text, whereas for subsequent episodes, the new Agents are more often than not unmarked. Compare, for instance examples (12-14) above with the following two clauses:

- (17) *yoowooloo garndiwa birlarlajbinminhi /*
 man many they:followed:him
 'The many people followed him.'
- (18) *ngidi garndiwangooddoo / garndiwiddi ngidi*
 we many two we
yoowooloo-yooddoo / barajjiddayi / thinga /
 man-DU we:two:followed:him foot
 'We all ... we two followed his tracks.'

In regard to (17), the end of the previous episode had the kangaroo who was being followed going into a cave. Similarly, in regard to (18), the previous episode had ended with the lost person (the person being followed) lying down to die. In both circumstances, the agentivity of the new protagonist is predictable, given that the clause is transitive. (Interestingly, a few clauses after (18), the substance of this clause is repeated again with the Agent denoted by an unmarked NP.)

Why should this difference exist? One reason would seem to be the following. Transitive clauses in the Initial states of non-initial episodes outnumber transitive clauses Initial states of initial episodes. Thus the expectation that the entity will not be an Agent is somewhat less in non initial episodes than in initial ones. Another reason is that if the protagonist is the unmarked and expected Actor of each clause in an episode, there is certainly no such universal expectation across episodal boundaries. It depends on the semantics of the particular text whether a protagonist is continuous from one episode to the next. In particular, it depends on the Final state of the preceding episode - e.g. the protagonist may have died - among other things.

Middle clauses, in contrast to transitive clauses, seem to favour occurrence and non occurrence of the ERG postposition equally. It is striking that there are as many unmarked Agents in middle clauses as there are in transitive clauses, despite the vast disparity in frequency of the clause types (the latter being over four times as numerous as the former). This fact demands explanation.

Inspection of the texts reveals that about half of the instances of unmarked Agents in middle clauses occur at episodal boundaries, and so are amenable to the hypothesis discussed

previously in relation to unmarked Agents of transitive clauses.¹⁶ As for the other instances, I am unable to offer any convincing hypotheses (the number of examples is too small, in any case). However, one hypothesis which suggests itself is that the lack of marking can be attributed to inherent semantic properties of middle clauses. That is, it can be attributed to the inherently lesser agentivity of the Agent of such clauses - they are not goal-effective - and so it is less likely that any given entity will be a surprising Agent of a middle clause. For instance, it may be that it is more likely in general for an entity to be an Agent in a clause of speech, than in a clause of killing.

4.2 The ergative postposition in quoted speech

The figures already cited in section 3 suggest that there are differences between narrative clauses and clauses framed by verbs of speech.¹⁷ In particular, in quoted transitive clauses in the corpus all non-ellipsed Agents are ergatively marked (see, for instance, lines 13 and 14 of the sample text). Clearly we will not be able to account for the presence of the ergative postposition in quoted clauses by reference to the same sets of expectations as we have employed in the process of accounting for the presence of the ergative in narrative clauses. For instance, expectations based on the episodal protagonist clearly cannot apply. I now attempt to account for these facts.

To begin with, a comment is in order on some characteristics of quoted speech. Quoted utterances in the Gooniyandi narratives, as one might expect, are overwhelmingly relevant to the narrated events - the well known phenomenon of “displacement”, whereby what is spoken about need not be relevant to the non-linguistic activity that is going on at the time, which is argued to be a crucial property of human language, seems not to characterise quoted speech. As a consequence the quoted utterances strongly tend to be interactive in nature. That is, what is quoted does not tend to be in the nature of information presented by the speaker (of the quote) merely or primarily for the sake of informing the hearer, and not modifying his/her actions, speech or otherwise. In fact, the following three types of interactive function to be strongly associated with quoted speech:

- i) commands and offers - requests for or offers of action;
- ii) questions - requests for information;
- iii) exclamations - either in the form of particles such as *yoowoo* ‘yes’, *mangaddi* ‘no’, or exclamatory clauses indicating the presence of something unusual in the environment.

Transitive clauses are restricted to types i) and ii). These facts then seem to provide an explanation for the consistent use of the ergative postposition. For, in particular, in commands to effect a transitive action the notion of agency is of course crucial, and foregrounded. The following two examples are illustrative:

¹⁶ Note, incidentally, that this suggests that middle clauses — in particular clauses of saying — occur more frequently in the Initial state of an episode than do transitives. This observation is borne out by investigation of the relative frequency of middle and transitive clauses as a whole.

¹⁷ It should perhaps be pointed out here that Gooniyandi does not distinguish between direct and indirect speech.

- (19) *niyi-ngga / migaminhi / nginyji-ga / nyiddaji /*
 he-ERG he:told:him you-ERG bull
thangarndi gardboowoo /
 mouth you:will:hit:it
 ‘He told him, “You, hit the bull in the mouth!”’
- (20) *nyamani girli / ngabbidda garndiwiddi-ngga /*
 big same we:will:eat:it two-ERG
 ‘It’s too big (for me); lets both eat it’ (he said).’

Lines 13 and 14 of the sample text illustrate a question-answer sequence, with the identity of the Agent the point at issue. Thus it is not surprising that the ergative postposition is employed to foreground the Agent. Indeed, the same pattern has been observed in real interactive discourse. The following exchange occurred between myself (A) and a native speaker of Gooniyandi:

- (21) A *gardlooni* B: *ngoorndoo-ga* A *nganyi-ngga*
 I:hit:him who-ERG I-ERG
 ‘I hit him. ‘Who did?’ ‘I did.’

However, it is not only when the identity of the Agent that is in question that the Agent is foregrounded in questions. Consider for instance, the question of:

- (22) *jajiwami ngabbiddayi ginharndi-yiddi-ngga /*
 what they:two:ate you:know-DU-ERG
 ‘‘What have those two eaten?’’ (they said).’

In this instance the Agent is foregrounded not because its identity is in question - note the use of the determiner *ginharndi* ‘that thing the identity of which you are aware’ - but because the two boys in question are known to be trouble makers, eating taboo food, with disastrous effects on themselves and the community.

One further example may be instructive. Although the quoted utterance is not of one of the above three types, it is clearly an instance of interactive language use, and equally clear is the foregroundedness of the Agent.

- (23) *igi maddiyali ngirnda nyamani girli kand*
 no mother-in-law his big same can’t
nganyi-ngga yoowarni-ngga ngabbila
 I-ERG one-ERG I:will:eat:it
 ‘‘Ah, mother-in-law this is too much, I can’t eat it myself’ (he said).’

In sum, in the context of this discussion of quoted speech - it is important to notice - the Agent is foregrounded not because it is unexpected (as we saw obtained in the plot itself, in section 4.1), but because of its crucial importance to the event, or because of the crucial importance of its identity, or for some other reason. (It is impossible in the present study to undertake a thorough investigation of the range of possibilities involved.)

5. Accounting for other uses of the Ergative Postposition

In this paper I have so far been concerned with the issue of what motivates the presence vs. absence of the ergative postposition on the nominal phrase denoting human Agents. This is not, however, the only context of occurrence for the ergative postposition. In this section we identify these other contexts, and address the question as to whether the hypothesis I have advanced can be extended to account for them. I will be proposing that such an extension is

possible which will account for all of these other uses. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to demonstrate this in detail. I can do no more than comment briefly on one or two relevant issues which lend further credence to my claims.

Let us begin with the observation that the ergative postposition seems to be obligatory on inanimate Agents. I say this on the evidence mainly of formally elicited utterances since there are no inanimate Agents in the textual corpus used for this study (compare: in elicited utterances human Agents are not frequently ergatively marked). A typical example is:

- (24) *middi-ngga ngabngina*
 sun-ERG it:ate:me
 ‘The sun burnt me.’

(Note here that the verbal morphology, the cross-referencing pronominal prefixes in the verb, clearly indicate that the two participants of the clause are third person Agent, first person Goal; hence, the presence of the ergative postposition does not function to disambiguate role fillers.) It seems reasonable to account for the consistent use of the ergative postposition in this context as due to a dominant ideology or world-view, independent of specific texts, according to which humans (and animates at a stretch) are prototypical Agents. Other Agents would then be unexpected; when agentive, this fact would naturally be foregrounded.¹⁸

Aside from marking the Agent of a clause of directed action, the ergative postposition - *ngga* -*ga* has the following functions (among a number of other minor ones) - see McGregor in press for further details):

a) It marks the Instrument (McGregor in press:337) in all clause types, including intransitive clauses. Examples are (25), a reflexive/reciprocal clause, and (26), an intransitive clause.

- (25) *marla-ngga widdijngarni*
 hand-ERG I:scratched:myself
 ‘I scratched myself with my hand.’

- (26) *gimani-ngga warangngiri*
 knee-ERG I:sit
 ‘I’m crouching on my haunches.’¹⁹

b) Both body part and non-body part Instruments are marked by the ergative postposition, although non-body parts are rarely denoted by Instrumental NPs. Instead, the latter are usually treated as Means, and involve the comitative postposition followed by the ergative, thus: *-ngaddi-ngga*. The difference between Instrument and Means is difficult to explain, but briefly it seems to correlate with the difference between hand held (perhaps body held) and not-hand held at the time of accomplishing the action (see McGregor in press:343-344).

- (27) *wooboowinayi garooroo-ngaddi-ngga*
 he:cooked:them:two hot:coals-COMIT-ERG
 ‘He cooked the two men in coals.’ (MEANS)

¹⁸ Compare Silverstein’s discussion of the hierarchy for split ergativity (Silverstein 1976). On the other hand, there is a possible discourse correlate, at least in narrative texts: characters and protagonists are prototypically animate, even human, and thus would be unexpected as agents. (There are of course certain exceptions, such as heavenly bodies which may be characters e.g. in myths; but such instances could be treated as involving personification.)

¹⁹ The gloss given here is the English prompt given by myself. It might be, as Kate Burridge has suggested to me (pers.comm.), that this clause really means ‘I am kneeling’.

In elicitation both Means and Instrument are invariably marked ergatively; however, in narrative texts they are occasionally not marked. Consider, for example, the final part of example (15). The engine is presumably either a Means or Instrument, and most likely the former.²⁰ Yet it appears without the ergative postposition - which we would expect to occur at least on the first mention. This does raise an interesting possibility for the analysis proposed here: a machine such as a pump need not be tended continuously, and will perform its function, once started, with minimal interference by a human. Could machines then constitute a class of inanimates which are natural or expected Agents? If so, the absence of the ergative postposition in (15) is consistent with my hypothesis: the agency of the machine is not foregrounded as it is expected.

- c) The ergative postposition marks nominal expressions realising certain circumstantial roles in clauses of directed action - cf. Austin 198 1:108. These include: Manner (manner in which action is performed - see McGregor in press:344-346), Cause (McGregor in press:348-350) and some Accompaniment roles (entity which accompanies another entity, normally the Actor - see McGregor in press:346-348). Examples (27) to (29) below illustrate these roles, respectively. It will be seen that the ERG postposition follows another postposition, except in the case of Manner (cf. Dench & Evans 1988). For instance, *-ngaddi*, the COM1T postposition precedes the ERG in marking Accompaniment (and Means - see b)); and *-nhingi* ABL precedes the ERG when marking Cause.

(28) *gardlooni wangmadda-ngga*
I:hit:him mad-ERG
'I hit him crazily.' (MANNER)

(29) *thithi-ngga roodjibiddarniddi gamba-nhingi-ngga*
going-ERG they:argued:together water-ABL-ERG
'Going along they fought together from grog.' (CAUSE)

(30) *shanghai-ngaddi-ngga marimaringa*
shanghai-COM1T-ERG he:snuck:up:on:it
'He snuck up on it with a shanghai.' (ACCOMPANIMENT)

- d) As in a number of other Australian languages (e.g. Walmajarri (Richards 1979:97)), the ergative postposition marks nominal expressions functioning as Attributes of ERG PPs:

(31) *ngoolyoongoolyoo-ngga gajlimi*
circumciser-ERG I:cut:him V
'As a circumciser I cut him.'

This sense is also, in elicitation, invariably realised by an ERG PP. There is, however, one textual example available in which it is not marked:

(32) *gardbini maroowa /*
he:hit:him killer
'He killed him the murderer.'

The NP *maroowa* 'killer' is the first mention of the protagonist of the text, and occurs in the second verbal clause. It is not mentioned in the previous clause, the first verbal clause, in accordance with type 4 in section 4.1.2; that is, *maroowa* 'killer' is indeed ascribing a quality

²⁰²⁰ This is because Instruments are typically hand-held. On the other hand, Means are (in elicited examples at least) always marked by the comitative postposition *-ngaddi*, which would seem to militate against this interpretation.

to a previously identified entity. In fact, the previous clause indicated that the protagonist had killed a policeman. The Agent of (32) is thus identical with the protagonist of the episode, and is accordingly not unexpected as an Agent. This, presumably, accounts for the lack of ergative marking on the Agent. (Note that the argument that I invoked earlier to the effect that the overt realisation of an Agent by a phrase predisposes its agentivity to be unexpected, is crucially premised on the assumption that mention of the phrase conveys as new information the identity of an entity. In (33), of course, mention of *maroowa* is not for purposes of identification but for purposes of attribution.

(e) Non-finite VPs in any of the above circumstantial or attributive roles are also marked by the ergative postposition. To give but one example:

(33) *birdi* *bandaddang-gadda-ngga* *thoolngliminhi*
 leg stiff-MNR-ERG I:kicked:him
 ‘I kicked him stiff-legged.’

e) seems to be the only circumstance in which examples are not available of omission of the ergative postposition in contexts in which it is permissible - its omission would leave a bound verb root stranded. (If, however, there is an intervening morpheme, this morphological constraint would not prevent omission of the ergative postposition.) The suggestions of this sections remain tentative and incomplete. What I have tried to do is merely to show that my hypothesis does suggest reasonable explanations for other phenomena to do with the distribution of the ergative postposition.

6. Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to identify the factors which motivate the presence vs. absence of *-ngga* — *-ga*, the ERG postposition on human agents in Gooniyandi. An examination of the literature failed to turn up valid hypotheses, although certain intriguing facts about Gooniyandi emerged from the attempt to test available hypotheses and universal claims.

What I have suggested is that it is primarily to do with whether or not the agentivity of an Agent is important: use of the ERG postposition has the effect of foregrounding this agentivity, bringing it into prominence; non-use simply indicates that the agentivity is not of sufficient importance to be foregrounded. I have attempted to explain the notion of foregrounding, by investigating the specific effects or correlates of foregrounding in different contexts. In particular, we have seen that agentivity may be foregrounded for a number of reasons, which fall under two main headings: (a) the issue of whether the Agent is unexpected; and (b) the matter of whether the identity of the agent is at issue. At the same time I have argued that agentivity is not foregrounded when the ergative postposition is not used, and I have attempted to demonstrate that in this circumstance the Agent (a') is expected, or (b') its identity is not at issue.

The bulk of the paper has been an attempt to come to grips with the notion of expected vs. unexpected. We have examined this in narrative sequences and quoted speech. In quoted speech, unexpectedness seems to centre around issues of identity. In narrative sequences, a number of different issues are involved, including expectations based on the organisation of narratives as texts. However, in places I was forced to suggest expectations based on referential-semantic properties of the verbs (e.g. discussion of middle clauses, section 4.1.5), and of the Agent itself (section 5). All of this then must be considered as the falling under the rubric “discourse basis” of the use of the ergative postposition in Gooniyandi. It is important to be aware, however, that in saying this, is meant that the use of the ergative postposition relates to the discourse notion of foregrounding; what is actually involved in leading the

speaker to decide to foreground agentivity need not be based on discursal phenomena, it is important to bear in mind.

We have made some suggestions for the wider applicability of these ideas, to other contexts of language use. To these we could add the comment that the absence of the ergative postposition in elicited utterances may reflect the fact that in the context of their occurrence, agentivity lies in the background.

To conclude, I would like to make a reappraisal of what is, or could be, meant by the rubric “discourse motivation’ of a grammatical category. It is my feeling that far too much significance has recently been placed on discourse by some functional theories of language - it being invoked to account for far too many phenomena. In the process, it has become so general that it has lost meaningful content - virtually any linguistic phenomenon could be traced back to it. Discourse becomes equated with use, and the claim to discourse basis amounts to no more than a claim that a particular grammatical category or item is functional, or is based on some function of language. It seems to me that we need to cast a narrower net, and strongly constrain the set of phenomena which are regarded as discourse based. In my opinion these phenomena should be those which systemic theory sees as pertaining to the *textual* metafunction - that set of functions of language which is concerned with the organisation of a linguistic item (e.g. a clause) as a message (Halliday 1985).

In addition to this general objection, I have a more specific objection. It is as follows. Du Bois (1987a) seems to be arguing that the ergative as a distinct category arises through grammaticalisation of a universal tendency in language, or in a particular language, which is embodied in the Given A Constraint. However, even if there is a strong association between a grammatical category such as Agent and a discourse category such as given, this remains an association and nothing more. Indeed, it seems to me likely that this association follows as a consequence of narrative organisation (in particular) - for instance, from episodal structure. There is no evidence that these associations exist in other genres. As Heath (1980:885) aptly says, a grammatical category like S/A and S/O “can’t possibly be equated with a true discourse category like theme or focus”.²¹ And indeed, Du Bois does not in the end make this equation; on the other hand, we are left in the dark as to precisely how he sees the meaning of the category A.

How does the present study situate itself with respect to these issues? What I have been arguing is not the association between the grammatical category Agent and any textual phenomenon, but rather I have been arguing that textual considerations motivate the presence vs. absence of one morphological marker of this category. These two claims are vastly different in nature, and I believe only the second has any validity. Systemic theory distinguishes rigorously between experiential meaning (i.e. roughly what is referred to as “semantics” by mainstream linguistics), which is associated with the category of Agent, and textual meaning, regarding them as independent of one another, as orthogonal axes. This does not mean that there may not be unmarked correlations between ideational and textual choices- that the two are not associated in some way. The claim is that they are independent,

²¹ 21 Compare Tsunoda’s claims:

case-marking systems...have no bearing on the relative topicality of the agent and the patient, suggesting that morphosyntax and pragmatics are independent on one another (Tsunoda 1986:173); and again,

these morphosyntactic properties [including case marking] have no relevance for the relative topicality of the agent and patient (Tsunoda 1986:244).

If ‘experiential meaning’ is substituted for ‘morphosyntactic properties’ (they in fact correlate in Tsunoda’s usage of the term), this becomes identical with the systemic claim (see below).

but associated in such a way that certain choices predispose certain other choices. It is only by first separating the two that it is possible to put them together again, and identify how they are related. Halliday (e.g. 1985) has forged a link between the narrow sense of function - that is, the function or role of a linguistic item in its mother constituent - and the broad sense of function - the functions or uses to which language is put - with his concept of metafunctions (which include the above mentioned textual and experiential). This connection is not discernible in the tradition I have been criticising, partly due to its failure to keep the distinct metafunctions separate.

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**APPENDIX
A GOONIYANDI TEXT**

**A MYTH ABOUT FIRE
Dave Lamey 1982**

- 1 / *yoowooloo garndiwa girnaj -bididi boolga -woolga* /
man many sit:together (3pl)N+I old:man old:man
'Lots of old men were sitting around together.'
- 2 *warang -bididi / maadi -ya nyamani -ya gamba*
sit (3pl)N+I cold LOC big LOC water
bij -ngarni -widdangi /
emerge (3sg)N/ARNI (3p1)OBL
'They were sitting there. In the very cold time rain came to them.'
- 3 *maadi / bilanggidi marlami / majooddoo marlami / galigoo marlami /*
cold blanket without matches without calico without
'It was cold. They had no blankets, no matches, no tents.'
- 4 *winhi warang -bididi yoowooloo / ngamoo ngaddanggarni /*
only sit (3pl)N+I man before dreamtime
'People just had nothing, before, in the dreamtime.'
- 5 *niyaji -ya warang -bididi / balngarna /*
this LOC sit (3pl)N+I outside
'At that time they sat out in the open.'
- 6 *gamba -ga yilij -bina / garndiwa / maadi dif -ji -wina /*
water ERG rain:on (3p1)A+A many cold snap IT (3p1)A+A
'Rain fell on them all, and made them cold.'
- 7 *niyaji -ya / yoowarni lambardi yoowooloo / yingi jilngirndi /*
this LOC one little man name [name]
'At that time, there was a little man named Jilngirndi.'
- 8 *niyaji -ngga ward -ji -widdangi / doodoo -ji -widdani / maadi /*
this ERG go (3sg)N/I (3p1)OBL shiver IT (3p1)N+ANI cold
yoowooloo -yarndi -ga / boolga -woolga -ngga barndanyi -barndanyi -ngga /
man PL ERG old:man old:man ERG old:woman old:woman ERG
'He went up to them, who were shivering from the cold, all the people, the old men and the old women.'
- 9 *niyi -ngga do o w -ngarni -widdangi I*
that ERG get (3sg)N+A (3pl)O
'He took it from them.'
- 10 *gindiwa yalawa -nyali giddari -nga / doowoo -ya dirib -bindi /*
upstream close REP run (3sg)N/A cave LOC enter BINDI
'He ran a little way upstream, and went into a cave.'
- 11 *miga -winmi baljoowa / ngirndi -ya wayandi*
say (3pl)N+MI behind this LOC fire
ngoorndoo -ga giddari -nga /
someone ERG run (3sg)N/A
'Behind they said "Who's run off with the fire?"'

- 12 *booga -ngga ginharndi -ga -waami / gindiwa*
 baby ERG you:know ERG IND upstream
giddari -nga niyaji -yidda /
 run (3sg)N/A this ALL
 ‘It was the little one, you know, he ran off upstream to this place.’
- 13 *baljoowa birlaj -binmi -nhi / niyaji -ya doowoo -ya gindiwa /*
 behind follow (3p1)N+MI (3sg)O this LOC cave LOC upstream
nhin -nhin -bidda girili -ngaddi -ngga / goorlarda -ngaddi -ngga /
 poke poke (3p1)N+A stick COMIT ERG spear COMIT ERG
 ‘They tracked him behind and poked up into the cave with their sticks, their spears.’
- 14 *gindiwa niyaji nyag -bi -widda / wayandi gindiwa -nyali warang -nga /*
 upstream this pierce IT (3p1)N+A fire upstream REP sit (3sg)N+A
 ‘They pricked him again and again, but he still held the fire up in the cave.’
- 15 *yilba niyaji warang -ji baabiddi / wila /*
 for:good this sit (3sg)N+I inside finish
 ‘He stayed there inside for good. That’s all.’