

## **THE DEICTIC SYSTEM OF DIYARI**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>**

Diyari is an Australian Aboriginal language formerly spoken near Lake Eyre in the north of the state of South Australia. It currently has about a dozen fluent speakers, all of whom are over fifty years of age, and is no longer being learnt by children. Diyari is spoken in two dialect forms, Diyari proper and Dhirari; there is a detailed discussion of the phonology, morphology and syntax of both dialects in Austin (1981).

The present paper is an overview of the mechanisms by which the personal, temporal and spatial deictic aspects of Diyari speech events are signalled. Personal deixis, the identification of the participants in the speech event, is coded by a set of personal pronouns (2.1). Temporal deixis, marking temporal location and duration with respect to the time of the utterance, is specified through verb tense marking (3.2) and a set of temporal location nouns (3.1). Spatial deixis, the expression of directional orientation and the location of objects and events in space with respect to the location of the speech event and the participants in it, is signalled by spatial and directional nouns (4.1), together with a set of deictic suffixes attached to them and also to the third person pronouns (2.1). The form and functioning of these mechanisms is discussed and exemplified in the following sections; the influence of the theoretical foundations laid by Fillmore (1975) and Lyons (1977) will be apparent.

### **2. PERSONAL DEIXIS**

#### **2.1 Pronominal categories**

Identification of the participants in a speech event, namely speaker or sender (first person) and addressee or receiver (second person), and of non-participants (third person), is accomplished in Diyari by the use of personal pronouns. These pronouns mark the categories of person (1st, 2nd and 3rd)

and distinguish three numbers, singular, dual and plural. In the first person dual and plural there is a contrast between inclusive reference (including the addressee(s)) and exclusive reference (excluding the addressee(s))<sup>2</sup>. Third person singular pronouns also distinguish feminine and non-feminine gender; gender is based on natural sex distinctions and is not grammaticalized as in European languages such as French and German. Feminine is the marked term in the opposition and is applied only to distinctly female humans and other animates (women, girls, bitches, mares etc.); non-feminine is used for all others, that is, male humans and animates, non-female animates, non-sexed animates and all inanimates. In the dual and plural there is no gender contrast. Table 1 sets out the citation forms for all the pronouns.<sup>3</sup>

Table 1  
Personal pronouns — citation forms

		Singular	Dual	Plural
First person	inclusive	nganhi	ngalda	ngayani
	exclusive		ngali	ngayana
Second person		yini	yula	yurra
Third Person	feminine	nhani	pula	thana
	non-feminine	nhawu		

Third person pronouns may be followed optionally by one of a set of deictic suffixes; these are not attached to first and second person pronouns. One suffix, *-ka*, indicates that the speaker is separating out a set of intended referents (which may be the unitary set) as a subset of some group of possible referents established by the linguistic or extralinguistic context. An illustrative example is (for the various case forms see 2.2):

(1) Q: warli yinanha nanda-rna warrayi?  
 who-erg you-acc hit-participle aux  
 'Who hit you?'  
 A: nhandu-ka nganha nanda-rna warrayi  
 she-erg-subset me-acc hit-participle aux  
 'She (of a group) hit me.'

There are three other deictic suffixes indicating location of the intended referent(s) with respect to the speaker:<sup>4</sup>

- rda in the immediate vicinity, usually up to a few meters away
- ya close by and visible
- wa distant, including distant and invisible

Examples of the use of these suffixes may be found below.

Third person pronouns also have demonstrative type functions in that they can occur in noun phrases preceding a head noun indicating that it has definite reference. That is, the speaker assumes the addressee(s) can uniquely identify the intended referent(s) of the NP (Chafe 1976:39). NPs not containing such pronouns may be definite or indefinite, depending upon the context. Examples are:

(2) nhani-ya wilha thurrara-yi  
 she-nom-close woman-abs sleep-nonpast  
 'That woman is asleep.'

(3) nhawu-rda kupa munja  
 he-nom-vicin child-abs sick  
 'This (male) child (here) is sick.'

(4) juju-yali nganha matha-ya  
 snake-erg me-acc bite-past  
 'A snake bit me.'

## 2.2 Case forms

Like most other Australian languages, Diyari has a complex nominal case system for expressing syntactic relationships. For the major functions of intransitive subject, transitive subject and transitive object nouns and pronouns inflect according to a split-ergative system (Silverstein 1976, Dixon 1979). Pronouns have two paradigms:

- (i) nominative-accusative, where nominative marks transitive and intransitive subject functions while accusative marks transitive object function. Non-singular first and second person pronouns inflect this way.

(ii) three way, where there are separate forms for transitive subject (ergative), intransitive subject (nominative) and transitive object (accusative). All other pronouns follow this system. Singular nouns have an ergative-absolutive paradigm where ergative marks transitive subject and accusative marks both intransitive subject and transitive object.

Non-singular (dual and plural) nouns inflect three way ((ii) above). That is, we have:

	transitive subject	intransitive subject	transitive object
1st and 2nd non-singular pronouns		nominative	accusative
all other pronouns non-singular nouns	ergative	nominative	accusative
singular nouns	ergative		absolutive

In addition to these cases, pronouns also inflect for dative (marking possessor), locative/allative (marking location at a place and direction towards a place)<sup>5</sup> and ablative (marking direction from a place). Dative pronouns optionally can be further inflected for each of these cases in agreement with a possessed noun. They then take the usual singular noun case suffixes, for example, 'in my camp' is *ngakarni ngurranhi* or *ngarkarnanhi ngurranhi*. Table 2 sets out the case paradigms for all the pronouns.

Table 2

Personal pronouns — case forms

	<i>Ergative</i>	<i>Nominative</i>	<i>Accusative</i>	<i>Dative</i>	<i>Locative/Allative</i>	<i>Ablative</i>
1sg	ngathu	nganhi	nganha	ngakarni	ngakangu	ngakangundu
1dincl		ngalda	ngaldanha	ngaldarni	ngaldangu	ngaldangundu
1dexcl		ngali	ngalinha	ngalirni	ngalingu	ngalingundu
1plincl	ngayani	ngayanhina	ngayanirni	ngayaningu	ngayaningu	ngayaningundu
1plexcl	ngayana	ngayananha	ngayanarni	ngayanangu	ngayanangu	ngayanangundu
2sg	yundu	yini	yinanha	yingkarni	yingkangu	yingkangundu
2dl	yula	yini	yulanha	yularni	yulangu	yulangundu
2pl	yurra	yurra	yurranha	yurrarni	yurrangu	yurrangundu
3sgf	nhandu	nhani	nhanha	nhangkarni	nhangkangu	nhangkangundu
3sgnonf	nhulu	nhawu	nhinha	nhungkarni	nhungkangu	nhungkangundu
3dl	pulali	pula	pulanha	pularni	pulangu	pulangundu
3pl	thanali	thana	thananha	thanarni	thanangu	thanangundu

Examples of their use are (1) - (4) above and:

(5) ngathu yinanha nhayi-rna warrayi pularni-ya  
 I-erg you-acc see-participle aux they-2-dat-close  
 ngurra-nhi  
 camp-loc  
 'I saw you in their camp nearby.'

(6) ngalda nhanha mani-lha nganayi  
 we-2-incl-nom her-acc get-future aux  
 'We will get her.'

With first person non-singular exclusive pronouns it is possible to specify the identity of the third person(s) included by using an ergative case marked noun, or pronoun, regardless of the syntactic function of the exclusive pronoun. Thus, in the following example *ngali* is an intransitive subject:

(7) ngali yatha-rna wanthiyi ngakarni-yali nhiyi-yali  
 we-2-excl-nom say-participle aux my-dat-erg brother-erg  
 'We said (it), my brother (and I) long ago.'

### 3. TEMPORAL DEIXIS

Location in time with respect to the time of the speech event is expressed in two ways in Diyari, by means of a temporal location noun (3.1) and/or verb tense marking (3.2).

#### 3.1 Temporal location nouns

Location nouns in Diyari can be distinguished from other nouns in that they only occur in locative, allative and ablative case functions and also the uninflected stem serves as the locative form. Locational nouns with deictic temporal reference are:

karrari	now, today
ngarda	later, next
warru	long ago, before
waldawirti	yesterday
thangkuparna	tomorrow

The last two can be followed by the noun *nguru* meaning 'one day beyond':

waldawirti nguru	the day before yesterday
thangkuparna nguru	the day after tomorrow

Allative case *-ya* attached to these forms indicates time 'until' and ablative *-ndu* time 'since'. Examples of the use of these deictic elements are:

(8) nhawu nhaka ngama-yi warru-ndu  
he-nom there live-nonpast long ago-ablative  
'He has lived there since long ago.'

(9) thangkuparna-ya nhandu wilha-li jukudu  
tomorrow-all she-erg woman-erg kangaroo-abs  
wayi-yi  
cook-nonpast  
'The woman will be cooking a kangaroo until tomorrow (morning).'

(10) karrari ngayani wapa-yi  
now-loc we-all-incl-nom go-nonpast  
'We are going now.'

### 3.2 Verb tenses

Diyari has two systems of temporal deictic specification by tense marking, a simple tense system marked by direct suffixation to the verb stem and a compound tense system involving auxiliary verbs. The simple tense system has a two term contrast, *-ya* 'past' (and 'perfective aspect') for events occurring prior to the event of speaking (and completed by that time) versus *-yi* 'nonpast' for events occurring during or after the speech event — see examples (2), (4) and (8)-(10). Generic statements, which are interpreted as temporal (or timeless (Lyons 1977:680)), take *-yi* as the verb suffix, as in:

(11) paya parrjarna thada-yi  
bird all-abs fly-nonpast  
'All birds fly.'

In order to indicate that some event is occurring at the very moment of speaking the post-inflectional clitic *-lha* 'new information' is added after *-yi*:

(12) nganhi wapa-yi-lha  
I-nom go-nonpast-new information  
'I'm going right now.'

*-lha* can be suffixed to nouns to mark the addition of a new participant to the discourse:

(13) nganhi thurrara-rna warrayi ngarda nhawu-lha  
I-nom sleep-participle aux then he-nom-new  
information

wapa-yi  
come-nonpast  
'I was asleep and then he came along.'

The compound tense system consists of a set of six auxiliary verbs, one future and five past (with imperfective aspect marking also).<sup>6</sup> These auxiliaries follow the main verb which takes a non-finite inflection, *-rna* 'participle' or *-lha* 'future'. The auxiliaries historically derive from full lexical verbs and end in what appear to be simple tense suffixes. Their forms and functions are set out in Table 3 ( $t_0$  indicates the moment of speaking or the temporal anchor for tense deixis) — for examples of their use see (1), (5), (6), (7) and (13).

Table 3

## Auxiliary verbs

<i>Non-finite inflection</i>	<i>Auxiliary</i>	<i>Function</i>
-lha	nganayi	future, any time after $t_0$
-rna	wanthyiyi	distant past
-rna	wapaya	intermediate past <sup>7</sup> , up to one or two months prior to $t_0$
-rna	padaya	recent past, up to some weeks prior to $t_0$
-lha	widiyi	yesterday past, up to one day prior to $t_0$
-rna	warrayi	immediate past, events immediately prior to $t_0$

Diyari also has a set of non-finite subordinate clause suffixes and these mark relative tense (relating the temporal reference of the subordinate clause as future or non-future with respect to the temporal anchor specified by the tense of the main clause). Two examples are (for further discussion see Austin 1981, Chapter 5):<sup>8</sup>

(14) nhani-wa wapa-lha widiyi, diji durnka-rnanthu  
 she-nom-dist go-future aux sun-abs rise-relative future<sub>ds</sub>  
 'She went away before the sun rose.'

(15) nhawu pali-rna padaya, nganthy thayi-rna  
 he-nom die-participle aux meat-abs eat-relative nonfuture<sub>ss</sub>  
 'He died while/after eating some meat.'

#### 4. SPATIAL LOCATION DEIXIS

In contrast to temporal deixis, the spatial deictic system of Diyari is quite simple. There are two deictic directionals which indicate direction of motion, or induced motion, with respect to the speaker or sender in the speech event, namely:<sup>9</sup>

yarra	this way, towards the speaker
yada	that way, away from the speaker

These two forms do not take case inflections. Examples of their use are:

(16) ngathu nhinha nganthy yada dama-yi nguda muku-ndu  
 I-erg him-acc meat-abs that way cut-nonpast shin bone-abl  
 'I cut the meat that way off the shin bone.'

(17) yarra wapa-mayi  
 this way come-imperative  
 'Come here!'

There are also two deictic locationals which are spatially anchored with respect to the speaker or sender. Like other locationals (3.1), they only occur in locative, allative and ablative case functions and the locative form is the uninflected stem. The two roots are proximate *nhingki*- 'here' and distal *nhaka* 'there'; the former must be followed by one of the set of three locational deictic suffixes mentioned in 2.1.<sup>10</sup> If an allative (-*nh*i) or ablative (-*nd*u) case suffix is required it must follow the deictic suffix. Distal *nhaka* does not cooccur with these suffixes; the full paradigm is set out in Table 4.

Table 4

## Spatial location deictics

<i>Reference</i>	<i>Locative</i>	<i>Allative</i>	<i>Ablative</i>
Proximate - vicinity	nhingkirda	nhingkirdanhi	nhingkirdandu
	nhingkiya	nhingkiyanhi	nhingkiyandu
	nhingkiwa	nhingkiwanhi	nhingkiwandu
Distal	nhaka	nhakanhi	nhakandu

Examples of the use of some of these forms are:

(18) nhingki-rda ngama-mayi  
here-vicin-loc sit-imperative  
'Sit here!'

(19) nhaka-ndu nhawu wapa-ya nhingki-ya-nhi  
there-abl he-nom go-past here-close-all  
'From there he went to here.'

Non-deictic locational or directional specification is marked with common nouns inflected for locative, allative or ablative cases, for example *ngurranhi* 'in the camp', *ngurraya* 'to the camp', *ngurrandu* 'from the camp'. There is an instance of a locative in example (5) above. These case marked nouns can cooccur with deictic nouns, as in:

(20) yini nhingki-rda pirrki-yamayi warli-nhi  
you-nom here-vicin-loc play-imperative house-loc  
'You play here in the house!'

## 5. CONCLUSION

Deixis in Diyari is signalled through the use of pronominal and noun stems together with sets of suffixes. Person deixis is marked by personal pronouns which distinguish the categories of person, number and, in the third person, gender. The third person pronouns can take suffixes specifying relative distance from the speaker. Temporal deixis is marked by temporal location nouns and/or by verb tenses. Spatial deixis involves the use of spatial location nouns, some forms of which obligatorily take suffixes indicating distance

from the speaker. These same suffixes are optionally attached to the third person pronouns.

## NOTES

- 1) I am indebted to Ben Murray, Rosa Warren and the late Frieda Merrick for their assistance in teaching me Diyari and Dhirari. Fieldwork was carried out in 1974-77 and was supported by the Australian National University.
- 2) Roughly half of the languages of Australia make the distinction between inclusive and exclusive reference in the first person non-singular (Dixon 1980:276). Most also distinguish three numbers and a few in the north have trial or paucal numbers in addition.
- 3) The transcription system for Diyari is as follows: *th*, *nh* and *lh* represent lamino-dental stop, nasal and lateral respectively; *j*, *ny* and *ly* are lamino-palatais; *rt*, *rd*, *rn* and *rl* are apico-domals (retroflexes); *r* is a post-alveolar continuant; *rr* an apico-alveolar tap and *ng* a dorso-velar nasal. Intervocally *d* represents an apico-alveolar trill, following *n* and *l* it is realized as a voiced apico-alveolar stop with trill release [dr]. In homorganic consonant clusters the digraph indicating place of articulation is written once only, thus *nth* equals *nhth* and *rnt* equals *rnrt*. There are three vowels *i*, *u* and *a* without distinctive length.
- 4) There is a fourth suffix *-pada* whose exact function remains unclear.
- 5) Locative and allative cases are distinguished for singular nouns (suffixed *-nhi* and *-ya* respectively) but syncretised for pronouns.
- 6) The Diyari compound tense system is highly unusual for an Australian language; most have only simple suffixed tense markers. For further discussion see Austin 1981, Dixon 1980.
- 7) There is another auxiliary *wapayi*; however it indicates habitual mood and does not have a temporal deictic function.
- 8) The subordinate clauses also mark whether or not their subject is coreferential with the subject of the main clause (ss — 'same subject', ds — 'different subject') — see Austin 1981.
- 9) Most languages of central and western Australia have directional deictics showing speaker orientation. Warlpiri (Laughren 1978:2), for instance, has suffixes *-rni* 'towards speaker' and *-rra* 'away from speaker' and also *-mpa* 'past speaker, across the speaker's line of sight'.
- 10) There is a form *nhingkipada* but its reference and deictic function is unclear (cf. footnote 4).

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