Felicity Meakins and Rachel Nordlinger
A Grammar of Bilinarra

Pacific Linguistics

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Felicity Meakins
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A Grammar of Bilinarra

An Australian Aboriginal Language of the Northern Territory

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Preface

This grammatical description of Bilinarra draws on a range of materials and recordings collected by different researchers and at different times between 1975 and 2008. It arose initially from Rachel Nordlinger's (1990) Honours thesis *A sketch grammar of Bilinarra* (University of Melbourne), which was based on fieldwork undertaken in June and July 1990. This initial work has been greatly supplemented, refined, expanded and improved through subsequent fieldwork on the language undertaken by Felicity Meakins between 2001 and 2008, a thorough joint reanalysis of some of the 1990 recordings, and the addition of Patrick McConvell's material from 1975. In an effort to provide as comprehensive a description as possible we have also included in places material recorded by other linguists while working for Diwurruwurru-jaru Aboriginal Corporation; namely, Erika Charola, Justin Spence, Lauren Campbell and Caroline Jones.

This grammatical description, therefore, is based on materials recorded over a 33-year time span during which the Bilinarra language underwent an enormous amount of change. The earliest recordings were made with the last generation of first-language speakers, while some of the later work was undertaken with younger generations who speak a mixed language of Bilinarra/Gurindji and Kriol, similar in most respects to Gurindji Kriol (Meakins 2011c). Wherever possible we have tried to focus this grammatical description on traditional Bilinarra, and clearly marked those places where the discussion is focused on newer varieties, but it is important for the reader to bear in mind the sometimes mixed nature of our corpus. It is also important to realise that there are no longer any 'full' (i.e. first-language) speakers left with whom we can check grammatical judgements about traditional Bilinarra and so the many gaps in the data that revealed themselves in the writing of the grammatical description have not always been able to be filled.

We counterbalance these possible gaps, however, by providing a multitude of examples and associated sound files for almost every one. This will ensure that Bilinarra continues to be heard for future generations, and will hopefully allow other researchers to explore questions and find answers that may have eluded us. If you are reading the ebook, just click on the reference at the end of the example to hear the sound file; if you are reading the hard copy, the sound files can be accessed at http://www.degruyter.com/books/9781614512684. Readers should be aware, however, that most of the voices heard on these recordings are from people who have now passed away. These sound excerpts were included at the request of the community, and are used with the permission of the families.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost we thank the community members of Pigeon Hole (Nitjpurru) for their generosity in sharing their language and culture, in particular Hector Waitbiari Jangari†, Anzac Munganyi Jangari†, Ivy Kulngari Nangari-Nambijina†, Barbara Warrmuya Nanagu, Mildred Gumingga Nanagu and Sheila Marrbingali Nanagu. Neither of us had done any primary descriptive fieldwork before working on Bilinarra and so we each approached the community (11 years apart!) with our linguistic training wheels firmly on. Nonetheless the community of Pigeon Hole welcomed us with warmth, friendship, and enormous patience, and we will be forever appreciative and grateful for all their efforts.

Rachel Nordlinger's fieldwork on Bilinarra was conducted during a six-week trip to Pigeon Hole in June and July 1990, and resulted in a sketch grammar of the language (Nordlinger 1990). During this time I was lucky enough to work with the two elder statesmen of the community – and probably the last, truly fluent traditional Bilinarra speakers – Hector Waitbiari†and Anzac Munganyi†. These two old men embraced their task of introducing the young city slicker to the delights of Bilinarra land, culture and language, and inspired my lifelong attachment to the languages and people of Indigenous Australia. Ivy Kulngari† and Mildred Gumingga were also instrumental in my language learning and general instruction in the ways of Bilinarra life, providing great linguistic teaching and insight, along with friendship, comfort, bushwalks, dancing, and plenty of humour.

Later, in 2001, **Felicity Meakins** first encountered Bilinarra language and culture while working for Diwurruwurru-jaru Aboriginal Corporation (Katherine Regional Aboriginal Language Centre, now called Mimi Ngurrdalingi Aboriginal Corporation) faciliating school programs in the community with Ivy Kulngari†, Mildred Gumingga and Barbara Warrmuya. In between school lessons, Mildred, Barbara and Ivy used my time at Pigeon Hole to visit many Dreaming sites on Bilinarra country and to document information associated with these places. The moments spent with Mildred and Barbara walking to places inaccessible by vehicle tuned my eyes to a new way of viewing the Australian landscape. Extended side trips to far-flung fishing spots were also a part of the travel package! I also spent many long trips between Katherine and Pigeon Hole with Ivy describing her country and its stories with the longing and enthusiasm of someone forced to live far from home. I returned in late 2008 after a number of years working with Gurindji people. I intended to work again with Ivy, but instead attended her funeral two weeks later. It is my great regret that I was never able to apply myself as a more skilled linguist to the task of documenting Bilinarra.

Funding for fieldwork, research assistance, production costs, and other aspects of this project was generously provided by the North Australian Research Unit, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) (*Bilinarra Dreaming lines* project 2003-2004 C.I. Meakins), DoBeS (Dokumentation Bedrohter Sprachen) (*Jaminjungan and Eastern Ngumpin documentation project* C.I. Eva Schultze-Berndt), the Australian Research Council (DP0984419 *Doing great things with small languages* C.I. Thieberger & Nordlinger) and the University of Queensland NRSF fund (*A grammar of Bilinarra, an endangered north Australian Indigenous language* C.I. Meakins).

This grammar has also benefitted from material recorded by Patrick McConvell and Diwurruwurru-jaru Aboriginal Corporation linguists: Erika Charola, Justin Spence, Lauren Campbell and Caroline Jones. We appreciate their generosity in sharing these recordings and transcriptions, some of which can be found in the examples sentences and appendix. The index was created by Nick Piper and David Osgarby. David also skillfully extracted individual sound files from larger files and linked them to example sentences. The map of the Victoria River District languages was created by Chandra Jayasuriya from the Melbourne School of Land and Environment at the University of Melbourne. This grammar has also been enhanced by comments from an anonymous reviewer and by David Nash, Caroline Jones and Mary Laughren. David's attention to fine detail greatly improved the content and argumentation found within the grammar. Feedback from Caroline, particularly on the phonology chapter, also sharpened the grammar considerably. Mary gave a great deal of feedback and insights into various morpho-syntactic structures. Finally, we would also like to thank the many colleagues who have contributed in different ways to our linguistic training and understanding of Bilinarra and other Australian languages over the years, especially Nick Evans, Mary Laughren, Eva Schultze-Berndt, Nick Thieberger, Jane Simpson, David Nash, Erika Charola, Bill McGregor, and especially Patrick McConvell for his encyclopaedic knowledge of all things Ngumpin, detailed comments on Nordlinger's sketch grammar of Bilinarra, and for many rich discussions of Gurindji, Bilinarra and Ngarinyman over the years.

Table of contents

Preface —— v
Acknowledgements —— vii
List of tables —— xviii
List of figures —— xx
List of abbreviations —— xxii
Conventions used in transcription and glossing —— xxiii
Conventions used to indicate source of data —— xxiii
Recording metadata —— xxv
Map —— xxxiii

1 The language and its speakers —— 1
1.1 Introduction —— **1**
1.2 The language —— **2**
1.2.1 Previous work, sources and methodology —— **5**
1.2.2 Bilinarra in relation to Gurindji and Ngarinyman —— **7**
1.3 The socio-political and linguistic history of the Bilinarra people —— **11**
1.3.1 Pre-contact history and the language situation —— **12**
1.3.2 The European invasion and its effect on the language ecology —— **15**
1.3.3 Life and language on the cattle stations —— **21**
1.3.4 Bilinarra life and culture today —— **25**
1.3.5 Bilinarra and its language ecology today —— **33**
1.4 Kinship —— **37**
1.5 Mother-in-law speech —— **41**

2 Phonology —— 43
2.1 Phoneme inventory —— **43**
2.1.1 Practical orthography —— **43**
2.1.2 Phonemic oppositions —— **44**
2.1.2.1 Consonants —— **45**
2.1.2.1.1 Place of articulation contrasts —— **45**
2.1.2.1.2 Manner of articulation contrasts —— **49**
2.1.2.2 Vowels —— **52**
2.1.2.2.1 Height —— **52**
2.1.2.2.2 Backness —— **52**
2.1.2.2.3 Length —— **53**

2.1.2.3 Alternation between phonemes /j, ny/; /d, n/ — **54**
2.1.3 Allophony — **56**
2.1.3.1 Stops and voicing — **56**
2.1.3.2 Vowels — **57**
2.1.3.2.1 Allophones of /a/ — **57**
2.1.3.2.2 Allophones of /i/ — **58**
2.1.3.2.3 Allophones of /u/ — **58**
2.2 Phonotactics — **58**
2.2.1 Syllable structure — **58**
2.2.2 Stem syllabicity — **59**
2.2.3 Stem-initial position — **59**
2.2.4 Stem-final position — **60**
2.2.5 Consonant clusters — **61**
2.2.5.1 Intra-morphemic consonant clusters — **61**
2.2.5.2 Inter-morphemic consonant clusters — **61**
2.2.6 Stress — **65**
2.3 Phonological rules — **67**
2.3.1 Stop-glide lenition — **67**
2.3.1.1 /g/ > /w/ — **67**
2.3.1.2 /b/ > /w/ — **68**
2.3.1.3 /j/ > /y/ — **69**
2.3.2 Glide deletion — **69**
2.3.3 Vowel assimilation — **70**
2.3.4 Nasal cluster dissimilation (NCD) deletion — **72**
2.3.5 Epenthesis — **73**
2.3.6 Reduplication — **75**

3 Parts of speech — 78
3.1 Introduction — **78**
3.2 Nominals — **78**
3.2.1 Nouns — **78**
3.2.2 Adjectives — **80**
3.2.3 Directionals — **82**
3.2.4 Temporals — **83**
3.2.5 Free pronouns — **84**
3.2.6 Demonstratives — **86**
3.2.7 Interrogatives — **87**
3.3 Bound pronouns — **87**
3.4 Inflecting verbs — **89**
3.5 Coverbs — **89**

3.6 Adverbs — **91**
3.7 Clitics — **92**
3.8 Complementizers — **94**
3.9 Particles — **95**
3.10 Interjections — **96**

4 Nominals 1: Nouns, case, adnominal and derivational morphology — 98
4.1 Word structure — **98**
4.2 NP structure — **102**
4.2.1 Properties of NPs — **105**
4.2.2 Functions of nominals within the NP — **108**
4.2.2.1 Heads — **108**
4.2.2.2 Modifiers — **110**
4.3 Case morphology — **112**
4.3.1 Nominative and accusative — **116**
4.3.2 Ergative — **116**
4.3.2.1 Form — **117**
4.3.2.2 Function — **120**
4.3.3 Locative — **122**
4.3.3.1 Form — **122**
4.3.3.2 Function — **126**
4.3.4 Dative — **130**
4.3.4.1 Form — **130**
4.3.4.2 Function — **130**
4.3.5 Allative — **134**
4.3.5.1 Form — **134**
4.3.5.2 Function — **136**
4.3.6 Ablative — **138**
4.3.7 Source — **139**
4.3.8 Perlative — **143**
4.3.9 Terminative — **143**
4.4 Other nominal morphology — **144**
4.4.1 Number — **144**
4.4.1.1 -*φ* SINGULAR/GENERAL — **144**
4.4.1.2 -*gujarra* DUal — **145**
4.4.1.3 -*jban* PLural — **145**
4.4.1.4 -*walija* PAUCal — **146**
4.4.1.5 -*burruburru* AND, ALSO, TOO — **146**
4.4.1.6 -*nganyju* GROUP — **147**

4.4.1.7 *-warlug* FIRST — **147**
4.4.1.8 *-wurd* TIME — **148**
4.4.1.9 Reduplication — **149**
4.4.2 Adnominal suffixes — **149**
4.4.2.1 *-jawung* PROPrietive — **151**
4.4.2.2 *-murlung* PRIVative — **154**
4.4.3 Derivational Suffixes — **156**
4.4.3.1 Zero derivation — **156**
4.4.3.2 *-gari* OTHER — **157**
4.4.3.3 *-ngarna* ASSOCiative — **158**
4.4.3.4 *-gaji* NMLZ — **159**
4.4.3.5 *-marraj* LIKE — **161**
4.4.3.6 *-bari* ADJectival — **161**
4.4.3.7 *-birag* REALLY — **162**
4.4.3.8 *-biya* BIT — **162**
4.4.3.9 *-girlirlij* 'pretend' — **162**
4.4.3.10 Kinship suffixes — **163**
4.4.3.10.1 *-rlang* DYAD — **163**
4.4.3.10.2 *-rlanggurla* DYAD PLural — **165**
4.4.3.10.3 *-marnany* 2MIN.POSS — **165**
4.4.3.10.4 *-nyan* 3MIN.POSS — **166**
4.4.3.10.5 *-nyanbarra* 2MIN.POSS.PL — **167**
4.4.3.11 Other potential nominal morphology — **168**

5 Nominals 2: Demonstratives, interrogatives, directionals and possessives — 169
5.1 Demonstratives — **169**
5.1.1 Form — **169**
5.1.2 Additional morphology — **172**
5.1.2.1 *-rra* PLural — **173**
5.1.2.2 *-ny* NOMINALIZER — **173**
5.1.2.3 *-mawu* OWNER — **174**
5.1.2.4 *-nginyi* SOURCE — **175**
5.1.2.5 *-rniny* ALLative — **176**
5.1.2.6 *-bardag* ABLative — **176**
5.1.3 Distribution — **176**
5.1.4 Function — **179**
5.1.4.1 Situational use — **179**
5.1.4.2 Anaphoric use — **179**
5.1.4.3 Identifier — **181**

5.1.4.4 Quotative — **183**
5.1.4.5 Recognitional use — **183**
5.1.4.6 Comparative — **185**
5.2 Interrogatives and indefinites — **185**
5.2.1 *nyamba* 'what/something' — **187**
5.2.2 *ngana* 'who/someone' — **189**
5.2.3 *wanyji* 'which/something' — **192**
5.2.4 *nyangurla* 'when/sometime' — **194**
5.2.5 *nyadjang* 'how much/some amount' — **195**
5.3 Numerals — **195**
5.4 Directionals — **196**
5.5 Possessive phrases — **202**
5.5.1 Alienable possession — **203**
5.5.2 Inalienable possession — **204**
5.5.3 Oblique possession — **208**

6 Pronouns — 215
6.1 Free pronouns — **215**
6.1.1 Form and function — **216**
6.1.2 Other pronominal morphology — **221**
6.1.2.1 *-jawung* PROPrietive — **221**
6.1.2.2 *-murlung* PRIVative — **221**
6.1.2.3 *-warij/ny* ALONE — **221**
6.1.2.4 *-burruburru* AND — **222**
6.1.2.5 *-warlug* FIRST — **222**
6.1.2.6 Discourse clitics — **222**
6.2 Bound pronouns — **222**
6.2.1 Form and function — **226**
6.2.1.1 Subject and object/oblique pronouns — **226**
6.2.1.2 The 3rd person oblique bound pronoun *=rla* — **231**
6.2.1.3 The reflexive/reciprocal pronoun *=nyunu/=junu* — **235**
6.2.1.4 Agency, affectedness and NP cross-referencing — **238**
6.2.1.5 Inclusory constructions — **243**
6.2.2 Structure of the bound pronoun complex — **243**
6.2.2.1 Subject marking — **243**
6.2.2.2 Object/oblique marking — **245**
6.2.2.3 More than one object/oblique — **246**
6.2.2.4 3OBL and RR — **248**
6.2.2.5 Person hierarchy — **248**
6.2.2.6 Unit-augmented neutralisation — **250**

6.2.2.7 Bound pronoun clitic combinations — **252**
6.2.3 Morpho-phonological rules of attachment — **253**
6.2.3.1 Epenthetic *-ba* — **253**
6.2.3.2 Lenition *b/w, ny/j* — **254**
6.2.4 Clitic placement — **255**
6.2.4.1 Clause position and bound pronoun attraction — **256**
6.2.4.2 Parts of speech and bound pronoun attraction — **262**

7 Inflecting verbs and coverbs — 270
7.1 Inflecting verbs — **271**
7.1.1 Conjugation — **271**
7.1.1.1 Class 1 – rr — **272**
7.1.1.2 Class 2 – Ø — **273**
7.1.1.3 Class 3 – ng — **276**
7.1.1.4 Class 4 – l — **279**
7.1.1.5 Class 5 – n — **280**
7.1.1.6 Irregular verbs — **281**
7.1.1.6.1 *wanda* 'fall' — **282**
7.1.1.6.2 *garra* 'be' — **283**
7.1.2 Bilinarra verbal predicates in comparison with surrounding languages — **285**
7.1.2.1 Coverbs and their derivation — **285**
7.1.2.2 Inflecting verbs, their forms and inflectional categories — **287**
7.1.3 Underlying forms of inflections — **289**
7.1.3.1 Imperative — **290**
7.1.3.2 Past (perfective) — **291**
7.1.3.3 Potential — **291**
7.1.3.4 Present — **291**
7.1.3.5 Infinitive — **293**
7.1.4 Functions of tense, aspect and mood categories — **294**
7.1.4.1 Past (perfective) — **294**
7.1.4.2 Past imperfective — **295**
7.1.4.3 Present tense — **296**
7.1.4.4 Potential mood — **298**
7.1.4.5 Infinitive — **299**
7.1.4.6 Imperative mood — **301**
7.1.4.7 Hortative mood — **303**
7.1.4.8 Past irrealis — **304**
7.1.4.9 Admonitive mood — **305**
7.1.4.10 Interrogative mood — **305**

7.1.4.11 Dubitative mood — **306**
7.1.5 Other verbal morphology — **308**
7.1.5.1 *-rni* HITHer — **308**
7.2 Coverbs — **310**
7.2.1 Phonology — **311**
7.2.2 Syntax — **312**
7.2.2.1 Complex verbs — **312**
7.2.2.1.1 Coverb-inflecting verb order — **313**
7.2.2.1.2 Tight nexus and loose nexus coverbs — **314**
7.2.2.1.3 Different combinations of coverbs and inflecting verbs — **315**
7.2.2.2 Coverbs in reduced subordinate clauses — **318**
7.2.2.3 Coverbs in imperatives — **319**
7.2.3 Classes of coverbs — **319**
7.2.3.1 Coverbs of spatial configuration — **320**
7.2.3.2 Coverbs of transfer — **321**
7.2.3.3 Coverbs of holding — **322**
7.2.3.4 Coverbs of state — **323**
7.2.3.5 Coverbs of speech and sound emission — **324**
7.2.3.6 Coverbs of bodily functions and emotions — **325**
7.2.3.7 Coverbs of motion — **327**
7.2.3.8 Coverbs of leaving — **329**
7.2.3.9 Coverbs of cooking and burning — **329**
7.2.3.10 Coverbs of impact and intensity — **330**
7.2.3.11 Coverbs of touch and manipulation — **334**
7.2.3.12 Coverbs of induced change of location or configuration — **335**
7.2.3.13 Coverbs of intake — **336**
7.2.3.14 Coverbs of excretion — **339**
7.2.4 Morphology — **339**
7.2.4.1 *-gaji/-waji* NMLZ — **339**
7.2.4.2 *-ny* NMLZ — **340**
7.2.4.3 *-ngarna* ASSOCiative — **341**
7.2.4.4 *-bari/-wari* ADJectival — **341**
7.2.4.5 *-garra* CONTinuative — **342**
7.2.4.6 *-ab/-b* CV — **343**
7.2.4.7 *-g* FACTitive — **343**
7.2.4.8 *-murlung* PRIVative — **345**
7.2.4.9 Case-markers — **345**
7.2.4.10 Reduplication — **345**
7.2.5 Coverbs and borrowing — **347**
7.3 Adverbs — **348**

8 Syntax of simple sentences — 350
8.1 Verbless clauses — **353**
8.1.1 Ascriptive clauses — **353**
8.1.2 Local clauses — **355**
8.1.3 Having/lacking clauses — **356**
8.1.4 Possessive clauses — **357**
8.1.5 Use of *garra* 'sit, be' as copula — **358**
8.1.6 Nominal predicators — **359**
8.1.7 Secondary predication — **360**
8.2 Verbal clauses — **361**
8.2.1 Grammatical relations — **361**
8.2.2 Basic argument structure — **364**
8.2.2.1 Impersonal — **364**
8.2.2.2 Simple intransitive clause — **365**
8.2.2.3 Simple intransitive with subject complement — **368**
8.2.2.4 Simple intransitive with cognate object — **368**
8.2.2.5 Semi-transitive clauses — **370**
8.2.2.6 Simple transitive — **371**
8.2.2.7 Simple transitive with cognate object — **374**
8.2.2.8 Ditransitive clauses — **375**
8.3 Clitics and particles — **380**
8.3.1 Clitics — **380**
8.3.1.1 *=rni* ONLY — **381**
8.3.1.2 *=rningan* AGAIN — **390**
8.3.1.3 *=nga* DUBitative — **391**
8.3.1.4 *=ma* TOPic — **391**
8.3.1.5 *=barla/warla* FOCus — **397**
8.3.1.6 *=na* FOCus — **403**
8.3.1.7 *=nyiyang* PROPERly — **405**
8.3.1.8 *=gada* IMMediate — **406**
8.3.2 Particles — **408**
8.3.2.1 *jubu* JUST — **408**
8.3.2.2 *gudigada* Maybe — **409**
8.3.2.3 *wayi* Question — **410**
8.3.2.4 *marri(ga)* BUT — **410**
8.3.2.5 *gula* NEGation — **410**

9 Complex sentences — 414
9.1 Finite subordinate clauses — **414**
9.1.1 *nyamu* RELativizer — **414**

9.1.2 *bala* CONSequence — **418**
9.1.3 *ngaja* ADMONitive — **419**
9.1.4 *jumaji* beCAUSe — **420**
9.2 Conjoined clauses — **422**
9.3 Non-finite or reduced subordinate clauses — **425**

Appendix — 433
Text 1 *Language Learning Time* Clara Juduwurr — **434**
Text 2 *Childhood* Clara Juduwurr — **438**
Text 3 *Life Story* Doris Warnmal — **442**
Text 4 *Ceremony Time* Hector Waitbiari — **454**
Text 5 *The Travels of the Nangangari* Ivy Kulngari — **458**
Text 6 *Fishing around Pigeon Hole* Ivy Kulngari — **467**
Text 7 *My Cats and the Snake* Kathleen Juduwurr — **474**
Text 8 *Lardaj Dreaming* Ivy Kulngari — **477**
Text 9 *Barrjirda Dreaming* Ivy Kulngari — **479**

Word list — 482
List of suffixes — 499
List of enclitics — 500
References — 501
Index of subjects — 511
Index of suffixes and clitics by gloss — 522

List of tables

Table 1 Present tense inflections in Bilinarra, Ngarinyman and Gurindji — **9**
Table 2 Past imperfective inflections in Bilinarra, Ngarinyman and Gurindji — **9**
Table 3 Bilinarra (and Ngarinyman) conjugation for '*yana*' (go) — **10**
Table 4 Gurindji and Wanyjirra conjugation for '*yanana*' (go) — **10**
Table 5 Bilinarra consonants — **43**
Table 6 Bilinarra vowels — **43**
Table 7 Intra-morphemic consonant clusters — **62**
Table 8 Inter-morphemic consonant clusters — **63**
Table 9 Tri-consonantal clusters — **66**
Table 10 Vowel assimilation in the suppletive demonstrative stems — **71**
Table 11 Bilinarra tripartite case system — **113**
Table 12 Bilinarra grammatical case allomorphy — **114**
Table 13 Bilinarra local case morphology — **114**
Table 14 Potential nominal morphology for Bilinarra — **168**
Table 15 Demonstrative declension in Bilinarra — **170**
Table 16 'Upstream' paradigm *gan.ga-* — **198**
Table 17 'Downstream' paradigm *ganimba-* — **198**
Table 18 'Up' paradigm *gan.gu-* — **198**
Table 19 'Down' paradigm *ganyju-* — **198**
Table 20 Cardinal declension — **199**
Table 21 List of directional morphology — **200**
Table 22 Free pronouns (unmarked) — **217**
Table 23 Case forms of free pronouns — **218**
Table 24 Bound pronouns — **227**
Table 25 Form of bound pronouns (final) — **229**
Table 26 First person object clitics and free pronouns — **230**
Table 27 Grammatical relations and pronominal cross-referencing — **242**
Table 28 Non-minimal subject and non-minimal object/oblique: — **250**
Table 29 Minimal object/oblique — **252**
Table 30 Singular subject — **253**
Table 31 Non-minimal subject and non-minimal object/oblique: — **253**
Table 32 Bilinarra conjugation classes — **272**
Table 33 Class 1 conjugations — **273**
Table 34 Class 2 conjugations — **273**
Table 35 Class 3 conjugations — **277**
Table 36 Class 4 conjugations — **279**

Table 37 Class 5 conjugations — **280**
Table 38 Bilinarra irregular verbs — **281**
Table 39 Present tense inflections in Bilinarra, Ngarinyman and Gurindji — **287**
Table 40 Past imperfective inflections in Bilinarra, Ngarinyman and Gurindji — **287**
Table 41 Bilinarra (and Ngarinyman) conjugation for '*yana*' (go) — **288**
Table 42 Gurindji and Wanyjirra conjugation for '*yanana*' (go) — **288**
Table 43 Jaru conjugation for '*yanana*' (go) — **288**
Table 44 Jaminjung conjugation for '*-ngga*' (go) — **289**
Table 45 Bilinarra conjugation classes — **290**
Table 46 Functions of case suffixes in reduced subordinate clauses — **319**
Table 47 Argument structure of verbal clauses — **365**
Table 48 Information structure categories — **393**
Table 49 Functions of case suffixes in reduced subordinate clauses — **426**

List of figures

Figure 1 Location of Australian languages of the Victoria River District —— **xxxiii**

Figure 2 Hector Waitbiari Jangari† and Anzac Munganyi Jangari† (Photo: Rachel Nordlinger 1990) —— **4**

Figure 3 Mildred Milmarriya Gummingga Hector Nanagu stands at Jurrjurrarralarni near Gurdurdularni. The Nangangari women danced here before leaving their children at Gurdurdularni. The parallel lines in the riverbed show where the Nangangari danced on the Victoria River Crossing rocks. (Photo: Felicity Meakins 2003) —— **14**

Figure 4 Early painting of a gardiya with a hat and a gun on his belt. This painting is located in a rock shelter used by Hector and his family during 'holiday time' when they worked on the stations. (Photo: Felicity Meakins 2003) —— **18**

Figure 5 Barbara Warrmuya Bobby and Mildred Milmarriya Gumingga Hector at Hector Waitbiari†'s 'holiday camp'. Barbara and Mildred used to come here as little girls with their father, Hector. Paintings on the rock overhang can be seen in this photo. (Photo: Felicity Meakins 2003) —— **24**

Figure 6 Ivy Kulngari stands next to one of the bardigi trees which still stands at Nitjpurru today (Photo: Felicity Meakins 2003) —— **26**

Figure 7 Winingili (Photo: Lauren Campbell 2005) —— **29**

Figure 8 Barbara Bobby and Eunice Hector (with Lloyd Raymond) stand at Wuna where the spider dragged its web (Photo: Felicity Meakins 2003) —— **30**

Figure 9 Mildred Milmarriya Gumingga Hector sits at Marrgandu. Mildred visited the site in 2003 with Barbara Bobby and Felicity Meakins as a part of an AIATSIS project. The women had not been here before but followed directions about how to get there from Ivy Kulngari (Photo: Felicity Meakins 2003) —— **31**

Figure 10 Barbara Bobby treats Delina Barry with *mardumardu* 'termite mound'. Mishai Algy and others watch on (Photo: Felicity Meakins 2003) —— **33**

Figure 11 Language ecology of Pigeon Hole —— **34**

Figure 12 Subsections —— **38**

Figure 13 Skin groups (subsections) in Bilinarra —— **38**

Figure 14 A basic Bilinarra family tree for any woman called Nangari —— **40**

Figure 15 A basic Bilinarra family tree for any man called Jangari —— **40**

Figure 16 The left periphery (adapted from Simpson (2007)) —— **258**

Figure 17 Hierarchy of pronominal clitic attraction — **268**
Figure 18 Map of the Nangangari travels produced by the Aboriginal Area Protection Agency (AAPA), with coordinates from Felicity Meakins, Mildred Hector and Barbara Bobby — **466**
Figure 19 Map of the Lardaj travels produced by the Aboriginal Area Protection Agency (AAPA), with coordinates from Felicity Meakins, Mildred Hector and Barbara Bobby — **478**
Figure 20 Map of the Barrjirda travels produced by the Aboriginal Area Protection Agency (AAPA), with coordinates from Felicity Meakins, Mildred Hector and Barbara Bobby — **481**

List of abbreviations

A	agent
ABL	ablative
ADMON	admonitive
ADJ	adjectival
ALL	allative
ALONE	alone
ASSOC	associative
AUG	augmented
BIT	a little bit
BUT	but
CAT	catalyst
CAUS	because
CONT	continuative
CONS	consequence
CV	coverbaliser
DAT	dative
DU	dual
DUB	dubitative
DYAD	kinship pairing
EP	epenthetic
ERG	ergative
EXC	exclusive
FACT	factitive
FIRST	initiator
FOC	focus
GROUP	group
HITH	hither
HORT	hortative
IMM	immediate
IMP	imperative
IMPF	imperfective
INC	inclusive
INF	infinitive
IO	indirect object
LIKE	comparative
LOC	locative
MIN	minimal
NEG	negative
NMLZ	nominalizer
O	object
OBL	oblique
ONLY	restrictive
OTHER	an/other
PAUC	paucal
PERF	perfect
PERL	perlative
PL	plural
POT	potential
PRIV	privative
PROP	proprietive
PROPER	properly
PRS	present
PST	past
Q	question particle
REALLY	intensifier
REDUP	reduplication
REL	relativizer
RR	reflexive/reciprocal
S	subject
SEQ	sequential
SG	singular
SOURCE	source
SUBSECT	skin name
TERM	terminative
TIME	time period
TOP	topic
TR	transitive
UA	unit augmented
1	first person
2	second person
3	third person

Conventions used in transcription and glossing

–	morpheme break	>	acting on
=	clitic boundary	…	follow-on utterance
.	separates categories encoded by a portmanteau morpheme		

Conventions used to indicate source of data

All Bilinarra examples are accompanied by a reference containing certain information shown schematically below:

(AN:	RN:	90-006a:	10:11 min)
↓	↓	↓	↓
Speaker ID	Linguist ID	Recording ID	Start time

Often the recording ID contains information about the year the recording was made e.g. RN90-006a was recorded in 1990. Where this information is not present in the original recording ID, it is added in addition.

Speaker ID (see §1.2.1):

AN	Anzac Mungayari Mungganyi Jangari
BB	Barbara Bobby Warrmuya Nanagu
CJ	Clara Juduwurr Namija
DW	Doris Warnmalngali Namija
HW	Hector Waitbiari Wanayari Jangari
IH	Ivy Hector Kulngari Pumpat Nangari-Nambijina
KJ	Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala
MH	Mildred Hector Gumingga Nanagu
MW	Molly Nyarruwangali Nambijina
RJ	Rook Julkiyarri Jurlama
SH	Sheila Hector Marrbingali Nanagu

Linguist ID (see §1.2.1):

CJ	Caroline Jones
EC	Erika Charola

FM	Felicity Meakins
JS	Justin Spence
LC	Lauren Campbell
PM	Patrick McConvell
RH	Russell Hancock
RN	Rachel Nordlinger

Recording metadata

The examples in this grammar come from a number of sources which are described below. Metadata is not given for individual recordings which have been lodged with the DoBeS archive as this information is available online and is public. Metadata is given for recordings archived with AIATSIS and those held at Mimi Ngurrdalingi Aboriginal Corporation (previously Diwurruwurru-jaru Aboriginal Corporation) in Katherine, Northern Territory, because this metadata is less readily available. Some examples were not recorded; for instance, they were overheard or constructed based on Gurindji and tested with speakers. These are labelled 'Analogical Construct'.

MCCONVELL_P08 recordings

These recordings were made at Daguragu in May 1975 by Patrick McConvell with Clara Juduwurr Namija†, Doris Warnmal Namija† and Rook Julkiyarri Jurlama†.

Excerpts of the recordings MCCONVELL_P08-014876 and MCCONVELL_P08-014877 are provided throughout the grammar as sentence examples and in Texts 1–3 in the appendix. The full audio recordings and partial transcripts (from McConvell) are archived with AIATSIS. Metadata associated with these files is publicly available and recordings can be accessed with permission.

MCCONVELL_P08-014874

This was originally tape no. CB1.1. It was partly transcribed by McConvell in 1975. The transcript is archived as MS1000. The recording mostly consists of body parts elicitation and verb elicitation with Rook Julkiyarri. 51:31 min.

MCCONVELL_P08-014876

This recording was originally tape no. CB2.1. It was partly transcribed by McConvell in 1975. The transcript is archived as MS2746. The recording was further transcribed by Meakins, and excerpts have been included in this grammar. The recording begins with Clara Juduwurr discussing McConvell's learning of Bilinarra and some of her life story (see Text 1 and 2 in the appendix). There is also a lot of discussion about bush foods. Doris Warnmal is prompting in the background. The tape is switched off about two-thirds of the way through and then Doris Warnmal tells her life story (see Text 3 in the appendix). 47:37 min.

MCCONVELL_P08-014877

This was originally tape no. CB2.2 (though the metadata on the recording says CB2.1). It was partly transcribed by McConvell in 1975. The transcript is archived as MS1000. The recording is about Warnmal and Juduwurr's early life (see Text 2 in the appendix). Some discussions of Juduwurr's family travelling downstream along the Victoria River from Longreach to Pigeon Hole are also present. A good discussion of mother-in-law speech can be found at the end. 20:13 min.

MCCONVELL_P08-014878

This was originally tape no. CB3.1. It was partly transcribed by McConvell in 1975. The transcript is archived as MS2746. The recording mostly consists of a word list and short sentence elicitation with Rook Julkiyarri Jurlama. The language of some of the words is unclear. He provides words which are very different from known Bilinarra words. These might represent an older more conservative form of Bilinarra; however, it is difficult to tell. 47:55 min.

RN90-001 to RN90-017b recordings

These recordings were made at Pigeon Hole in June and July 1990 over a six-week period by Rachel Nordlinger with the brothers Hector Waitbiari Jangari† and Anzac Munganyi Jangari†, Hector's second wife Ivy Kulngari Nangari-Nambijina†, and a number of Hector Waitbiari†'s daughters from his first wife Molly Nyarruwangali†, including Barbara Warrmuya Nanagu and Mildred Gumingga Nanagu.

The recordings mostly consist of sentence elicitation, with some extended discourse and one narrative told by Hector Waitbiari Jangari† (provided in the appendix as Text 4). Excerpts of the recordings are provided throughout the grammar. The full audio recordings and transcripts (CLAN formatted; that is, Computerized Language Analysis, a media-linking and transcript annotation program) are archived with the DoBeS Jaminjungan and Eastern Ngumpin project. Metadata associated with these files is publicly available and recordings can be accessed with permission.

http://corpus1.mpi.nl/ds/imdi_browser/?openpath=MPI319354%23

JONES_C04 recordings

This series of Ngarinyman and Bilinarra recordings was made in Yarralin by Caroline Jones with Nina Humbert Nawurla, Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala (confusingly Clara Juduwurr's sister), Jessie Kinyayi Nangari, Joy Campbell Nangari, and Dora Nambin. Of relevance to this grammar are the Bilinarra recordings made with Kathleen Juduwurr in 1995 and 1998. One narrative is provided in the appendix as Text 7.

Excerpts of the recordings with Kathleen Juduwurr are provided throughout the grammar. The full Ngarinyman and Bilinarra audio recordings and transcripts (text formatted) of 6hr 56 min are archived with AIATSIS as Jones_C04 (AILEC item 0661). Listening copies are not yet archived. Access is mostly open, though one field recording contains gender-specific material.

Tape 04: Track 2. *Sydney trip.*
Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala, Yarralin, 12/7/98.

Tape 05: Track 3. *Young couples and Rain Place.*
Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala, Yarralin, 13/7/98.

Tape 06: Track 1. *Wari, Nanguba (Snake and Cat story).*
Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala, Yarralin, 14/7/98.

Tape 07: Track 2. *Fish .*
Track 4. *Goannas etc.*
Nina Humbert Nawurla & Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala, Yarralin, 15/7/98.

Tape 08: Track 1. *Sky words.*
Track 3. *Words for place etc.*
Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala, Yarralin, 21/7/98.

Tape 10: Track 1. *Gurrwa (flat, sharp stone axe).*
Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala, Yarralin, 23/7/98.

Tape 11: Track 2. *Sister etc.*
Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala, Yarralin, 24/7/98.

Tape 12: Track 1. *Strike stories.*
Nina Humbert Nawurla & Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala, Yarralin, 25/7/98.

Tape 13: Track 3. *Guwarlambarla (Turtle story).*
Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala, Yarralin, 29/7/98.

Tape 14: Track 1. *Own birth story.*
Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala, Yarralin, 30/7/98.

Tape 15: Track 2. *Kinship story.*
Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala, Yarralin, 31/7/98.

Tape 16: Track 1. *Bambilyi (vine bush tucker)*
Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala, Yarralin, 1/8/98.

Tape 20: Track 3. *Father, walking*.
Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala, Yarralin, 3/6/95.
Track 4. *Washing.*
Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala, Yarralin, 3/6/95.

Tape 22: Track 1. *Yawarda (horses)*.
Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala, Yarralin, 5/6/95.

Tape 27: Track 2. *Ngarlu trip (sugarbag hunting trip)*.
Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala, Yarralin, 21/6/95.

Tape 28: Track 1. *Ngarlu trip.*
Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala, Yarralin, 21/6/95.

Tape 30: Track 2. *Mangarri (about damper-making)*.
Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala, Yarralin, 23/6/95.

Tape 31: Track 1. *Mangarri (about damper-making)*.
Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala, Yarralin, 25/6/95.

Tape 33: Track 1. *Nasal cluster dissimilation elicitation (partial)*.
Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala, Yarralin, 26/6/95.

Tape 34: Track 1. *Goodbye*.
Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala, Yarralin, 26/6/95.

BIL01-BIL05 recordings

This series of recordings was made in Katherine and Pigeon Hole by Felicity Meakins with Ivy Kulngari Nangari-Nambijina† from August 2003 to March 2004. The recordings were funded by an AIATSIS project.

Excerpts of the recordings are provided throughout the grammar. The full audio recordings and transcripts (text files) are archived with AIATSIS. The Nangangari story is provided in the appendix as Text 5. The Barrjirda and Lardaj stories are provided in the appendix as Text 8.

More information about individual recordings is given below.

BIL01.track02.01aud
Lardaj 'Little Lizard' Dreaming. Eng/Kriol/Bil
Interview with Ivy Hector about the route the Lardaj took.
3:56 min

BIL01.track02.02aud
Marlimarli 'Butterfly' Dreaming. Eng/Kriol/Bil
Interview with Ivy Hector about the route the Marlimarli took.
2:41 min

BIL01.track02.03aud
Sickness Country. Eng/Kriol/Bil
Interview with Ivy Hector about the story and behaviour required for this place.
6:32 min

BIL01.track02.04aud
Illness. Eng/Kriol/Bil
Interview with Ivy Hector about Bilinarra expressions for different illnesses.
10:31 min

BIL01.track02.05aud
Children's Bush Medicine. Eng/Kriol/Bil
Interview with Ivy Hector about traditional methods of looking after children.
4:36 min

BIL02.track01.01aud
Nangangari Dreaming. Eng/Kriol/Bil
Interview with Ivy Hector about the travels of the Nangangari. 15:21 min

BIL02.track01.02aud
Nangangari Dreaming. Bilinarra
Interview with Ivy Hector about the travels of the Nangangari. 20:31 min

BIL02.track02.01aud
Various Dreaming sites. Kriol
Audio based on black and white photos BIL01/02.BW. 5:53 min

BIL02.track02.02aud
Bardigi Dreaming trees. Kriol
A post-contact story told by Ivy Hector about *bardigi* trees. 2:19 min

BIL03aud
Bush activities Bilinarra

The stimulus for this recording comes from raw video data taken for the Bilinarra project. Topics covered include making ashes, clearing up an area, getting sugarbag and yam, collecting termite mound and *mirndiwirri* for cooking (i.e. treating with heated termite mound) babies, collecting yams and treating babies with heated termite mound. 27:07 min

BIL04.track01.01aud 24:27 min
Nangangari Dreaming. Bilinarra
Mungamunga. Bil/Kriol

BIL04.track01.02aud 9:45 min
Lardaj 'Little Lizard' Dreaming. Bilinarra
Marlimarli 'Butterfly' Dreaming. Bilinarra
Barrjirda 'Quoll' Dreaming. Bilinarra

BIL05aud 30:49 min
Bush activities. Bilinarra

The stimulus for this recording comes from raw video data taken for the Bilinarra project. Topics covered include making ashes, collecting *mirndiwirri*, antbed and lemon grass for treating babies with heated termite mound and collecting yams.

BIL05.track06aud 10:59 min
Bush activities. Bilinarra

The stimulus for this recording comes from raw video data taken for the Bilinarra project. Topics covered include collecting bush gum, and the stories attached to Wanbangi and Garrari.

FM08_a062 to a066; FM08_a086 to FM08_a097 recordings

This series of recordings was made in Katherine, Yarralin and Pigeon Hole by Felicity Meakins with Ivy Kulngari Nangari-Nambijina†, Kathleen Juduwurr Nangala, Barbara Bobby Warrmuya Nanagu, Mildred Hector Gumingga Nanagu and Sheila Hector Marrbingali Nanagu in January and June 2008. The recordings

were funded by the Jaminjungan and Eastern Ngumpin DoBeS project. The recordings mostly consist of sentence elicitation. FM08_a086 is a re-transcribed story told by Ivy Kulngari originally told in 2001. This story is provided in the appendix as Text 6.

Excerpts of the recordings are provided throughout the grammar. The full audio recordings and transcripts (CLAN formatted) are archived with the DoBeS Jaminjungan and Eastern Ngumpin project. Metadata associated with these files is publicly available and recordings can be accessed with permission.

http://corpus1.mpi.nl/ds/imdi_browser/?openpath=MPI319354%23

Mimi Ngurrdalingi Aboriginal Corporation (previously Diwurruwurru-jaru Aboriginal Corporation) recordings. All materials are held with the organisation in Katherine, Northern Territory.

Dugu 'Mussels' Story was recorded in 2002 by Erika Charola with Ivy Kulngari Nangari-Nambijina† at Pigeon Hole. It exists on a video.

Girrawa 'Goanna' Story was recorded in 2005 by Justin Spence with Ivy Kulngari Nangari-Nambijina† at Pigeon Hole. It exists as an unpublished booklet.

Jungguwurru 'Echidna' Story was recorded in 2005 by Justin Spence with Ivy Kulngari Nangari-Nambijina† at Pigeon Hole. It was transcribed by Justin Spence and Lauren Campbell and exists as an unpublished booklet. 5:40 min.

Ngayiny Jaru Jarragab was recorded in 2005 by Justin Spence with Ivy Kulngari Nangari-Nambijina† at Pigeon Hole. The story is told in Bilinarra and Kriol. It exists as an unpublished booklet. This story won the contemporary story category of the 2005 Northern Territory Indigenous Languages Story Writing competition.

Wuyurrun.garra 'Fishing' Story was recorded and transcribed in 2002 by Felicity Meakins with Ivy Kulngari Nangari-Nambijina† in Katherine and exists as a video and an unpublished booklet held at Mimi Ngurrdalingi Aboriginal Corporation (previously Diwurruwurru-jaru Aboriginal Corporation) in Katherine, Northern Territory.

Jangga-gu Gambala Wubgarra Mangarri was recorded and transcribed in 2002 by Felicity Meakins with Ivy Kulngari Nangari-Nambijina† in Katherine and exists as an unpublished booklet held at Mimi Ngurrdalingi Aboriginal Corporation in Katherine, Northern Territory. It is also available through the AIATSIS library as V7095.

Untitled tape was recorded on 25 May 1999 by Russell Hancock (Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Teritary Education, formerly Batchelor College) with Ivy Kulngari Nangari-Nambijina† in Katherine and transcribed by Felicity Meakins in 2010. It contains snippets of oral histories. Little of the material on this tape has been used in the grammar. 19:27 min.

Note that many other small recordings of Bilinarra exist at Mimi Ngurrdalingi Aboriginal Corporation in Katherine, Northern Territory. These recordings were made in conjunction with the Pigeon Hole School Bilinarra language program. Most recordings consist of word list elicitations and short phrases.

Figure 1: Location of Australian languages of the Victoria River District

Chapter 1

The language and its speakers

1.1 Introduction

Bilinarra is a Pama-Nyungan language of the Victoria River District (VRD) of the Northern Territory (Australia). It is a member of the Ngumpin subgroup which forms a part of the Ngumpin-Yapa family (McConvell and Laughren 2004), which also includes Warlpiri (Hale 1981, 1982, 1983; Hale, Laughren, and Simpson, 1995; Laughren 1988, 1989, 2002; Laughren and Hoogenraad 1996; Nash 1986; Simpson 1991, 2007; Simpson and Mushin 2008) and Warlmanpa (Nash 1981). The Ngumpin subgroup also includes the Victoria River languages Gurindji (McConvell 1982, 1983, 1988b, 1996a, 1996b, 2009a, 2009b, 2010; McConvell and Hagen 1981; McConvell and Laughren 2004), Ngarinyman (Jones 1994), Malngin (Ise 1998) and Wanyjirra (Senge 2008); the Far Eastern Ngumpin languages Mudburra and Karrangpurru (also known as Karranga); and the Western Ngumpin languages Jaru (Tsunoda 1981), Nyininy, Ngardi (Cataldi n.d.) and Walmajarri (Hudson 1978; Hudson and Richards 1978).

Bilinarra is now a highly endangered language. The materials on which this grammatical description is based were collected from the last first-language speakers, most of whom have since passed away. The nature of the corpus is described in detail in the 'Recording metadata' section. In 2013, Bilinarra has only one first-language speaker and is not being learned by children. Nonetheless, many aspects of Bilinarra are being maintained in language mixing. The most common language practice of middle-aged Bilinarra people is code-switching between Bilinarra and Kriol. This code-switching has fossilised into a mixed language which resembles the Gurindji Kriol spoken at Kalkaringi (McConvell 2008; McConvell and Meakins 2005; Meakins 2008a, 2011c, 2012). This is the main language spoken by Bilinarra people under the age of 35. Although the primary focus of this book is traditional Bilinarra, the position of Bilinarra within community linguistic practices is discussed further in §1.3.5.

Bilinarra country is located between Gurindji country in the south-west of the VRD and Ngarinyman country in the north-west (see Figure 1), and Bilinarra is mutually intelligible with these languages. To the east is Mudburra, another member of the Ngumpin subgroup. Most Bilinarra people now live on their traditional lands at Pigeon Hole, a remote Aboriginal community situated on the Victoria River near Pigeon Hole Station (an outstation of Victoria River Downs Station).

Bilinarra has been described as a dialect of Ngarinyman (McConvell and Laughren 2004) but this does not fully characterise the resemblances between languages in the Eastern Ngumpin 'dialect chain' (which includes Gurindji, Malngin, Bilinarra and Ngarinyman). Lexically, Bilinarra shares more vocabulary with Gurindji than with Ngarinyman; however, many aspects of Bilinarra grammar – including the inflecting verb paradigm (§7.1), the position of pronominal clitics (§6.2.4) and the presence of a hither suffix (§7.1.5.1) – bear a closer resemblance to Ngarinyman grammar. These similarities and differences with Ngarinyman and Gurindji will be pointed to throughout this grammar and are introduced in §1.2.2. There are no structural features that are unique to Bilinarra that distinguish it from the other languages. It is unclear at this stage in the life of the language whether the similarity of Bilinarra to Gurindji and Ngarinyman represents the pre-contact state of affairs or whether a certain amount of grammatical and lexical levelling has occurred as a result of contact processes (e.g. massive population loss and groups living in closer proximity than traditionally found). These issues are discussed further in §1.3.

There is very little prior work specifically on Bilinarra itself, apart from Nordlinger (1990), the unpublished sketch grammar on which this grammatical description is partly based, and Meakins' (2013a) *Bilinarra to English Dictionary*. Nonetheless, aspects of Bilinarra morphosyntax have been referred to in the literature on Gurindji and other Ngumpin languages (McConvell 1980, 1988b, 1996a, 2006, 2009b). The name of the language itself perhaps refers to the surrounding country, deriving from *bili* 'rock' or 'hill', and an unknown suffix (McConvell 2010). A number of spellings of the language name have been used in previous work: Pilinara (McConvell in Menning and Nash 1981), Bilinara (McConvell, 1980, 1988b; Nordlinger, 1990), Birlinarra (McConvell, 1980, 1988b, 2006), Biḷinara (Tsunoda, 1981) and Biliŋara (Tindale, 1974). Phonetically, the language name is pronounced [ˈbɪlɪˌnɐɾɐ].

1.2 The language

In many respects, Bilinarra is a fairly typical Pama-Nyungan language. The phoneme inventory contains five places of articulation for stops which all have corresponding nasals (bilabial, apico-alveolar, retroflex (apico–post-alveolar), (alveo)palatal and velar); three laterals (apico-alveolar, retroflex and palatal); two rhotics (a trill/flap and a retroflex continuant), two glides ([w], [j]) and three vowels ([ɐ], [ɪ] and [ʊ]). Among the stops, voicing is not phonemically distinctive, neither are features such as stress or pitch. Most words are disyllabic or longer (although there are some monosyllabic coverbs, see §7.2.1). Words begin

with a consonant or a glide (there are no words with initial [l], [ɳ], [r] or [ʎ] (§2.2.3), and can end with any phoneme except for a glide (§2.2.4). Clusters of two consonants are found medially and, in some coverbs, word-finally (§2.2.5.1). Clusters of three consonants are found only across morpheme boundaries (§2.2.5.2).

Bilinarra is morphologically agglutinative and suffixing. Eight parts of speech are recognized: nominals (including nouns, demonstratives, free pronouns and directionals), bound pronouns (cross-referencing clitics which agree with argument, oblique and adjunct noun phrases (NPs) in person, number and case), inflecting verbs, coverbs, adverbs, clitics, particles and interjections.

Nouns generally do not distinguish number; for argument NPs this is expressed instead by the cross-referencing bound pronoun (§6.2). If it is desired to explicitly express number in the overt NP, free-form numerals (1–4) or a dual or paucal marker can be used (§4.4.1). There is no noun class or classifier system in Bilinarra, nor are there any examples of 'generic-specific' constructions found in some Australian languages (e.g. Blake 1987). NPs in Bilinarra do not specify definiteness (although sometimes the demonstrative *nyila* 'that' is used for this purpose). Argument nouns are marked for case (ergative, nominative (unmarked), accusative (unmarked) and dative) and oblique arguments and adjuncts can be found marked with spatial case markers (locative, allative, ablative, source, perlative and terminative) (§4.3).

Bilinarra is a morphologically ergative language (Dixon 1972, 1994; Van Valin, 1981) with a split case marking system which follows a commonly observed division along free versus bound nominals (Dixon 1994). Following Goddard's (1982) distinction between case form and case marking, Bilinarra can be analysed as having a tripartite case system which distinguishes the three core case categories – ergative, nominative and accusative – which map onto the A, S and O arguments respectively (§4.3). Morphologically, however, there is a three-way marking split between nouns, bound pronouns and free pronouns. An accusative marking pattern in the bound pronoun paradigm is the result of syncretism between the ergative and nominative case forms (i.e. the forms are homophonous), and an ergative pattern in the noun system arises from syncretism between the nominative and accusative case forms. The case forms in the free pronouns are completely syncretised, providing no marking distinction between the ergative, nominative and accusative categories. Free pronouns only have a separate form for the dative (§6.1).

Free and bound pronouns distinguish person (1st, 2nd and 3rd), 1st person non-singular also makes an inclusive/exclusive distinction, and three numbers (minimal, unit augmented and augmented) (§6.1 and §5.2). There is no gender distinction made among 3rd person pronouns. Bound pronouns in Bilinarra are

not attached to a catalyst as they are in the other Ngumpin languages; rather, there are a number of complex, discourse-related principles which determine their position within the sentence. The unmarked situation is to attach bound pronouns to the initial constituent of the clause. The possible bases for bound pronouns are discussed in §6.2.4.

Like many languages of northern Australia (e.g. McGregor 2002; Schultze-Berndt 2000), the Bilinarra verb complex consists of two elements: the inflecting verb (§7.1) and the coverb (§7.2). Inflecting verbs belong to a closed class of verbs which are grammatically obligatory in the verb complex. Twenty-three verbs have been documented for Bilinarra, though it is possible that around 30 existed given that 31 exist in Gurindji, which is a healthier and better documented language (McConvell 1996b). Inflecting verbs encode basic meanings such as motion and transfer ('go', 'fall', 'take', 'give', 'get'), manipulation ('put', 'throw'), impact ('hit', 'strike', 'bite', 'pierce'), perception ('hear', 'see'), as well as other general meanings; for example, 'cook', 'talk', and a copular, 'be'. Inflecting verbs can occur as the sole verbal predicate or can combine with a coverb to form a verb complex. In the latter case, the main contribution of the inflecting verb to the verb complex is in providing tense, aspect and mood information. There are five conjugation classes for Bilinarra inflecting verbs, with only two exceptions found in the corpus (*garra* 'to be, sit' and *wanda* 'fall'). Conjugation class membership is not associated with transitivity (see §7.1.1).

Coverbs, on the other hand, are an open class and are uninflected (except for continuative marking). They carry the semantic weight of the complex verb, expressing information about posture, direction of gaze, manner of motion, speech, cooking, change of state, and so forth. Unlike the inflecting verbs, coverbs are an optional element of the verb complex. Although they are like verbs semantically, denoting actions, events and/or processes, syntactically they function more like nominals and adverbs. Phonologically, they demonstrate some rather exceptional (for Bilinarra) phonotactics (§7.2.1).

Word order in Bilinarra is grammatically free and largely determined by information structure, with discourse-prominent constituents presented in first position (see Simpson 2007; Simpson and Mushin 2008; Swartz 1988 for a discussion of this for Warlpiri). Bilinarra is also typical of many non-configurational languages in Australia, such as Warlpiri and Wambaya (Jelinek 1984; Nordlinger 1998; Simpson 1991) in that nominals are commonly omitted and arguments are cross-referenced by pronominal clitics. There are no conjunctive particles in Bilinarra and so, consequently, simple sentences are often just strung together in apposition (see Chapter 8). There are also a number of possibilities for subordinate clauses, both finite and non-finite; these are discussed in Chapter 9.

1.2.1 Previous work, sources and methodology

This grammar began its life as Rachel Nordlinger's (1990) Honours thesis. Prior to Nordlinger's work, recordings of Bilinarra had been made by Patrick McConvell in May 1975 at Daguragu (see Figure 1). McConvell worked with Clara Juduwurr Namija-Nangala†, Doris Warnmal Namija† and Rook Julkiyarri Jurlama†.[1] He recorded word lists and elicited short phrases with Rook Julkiyarri, and recorded a number of more extended texts with Clara Juduwurr and Doris Warnmal (see 'Recording metadata').

Nordlinger worked at Pigeon Hole for six weeks in June and July 1990 with the brothers Hector Waitbiari Jangari† and Anzac Munganyi Jangari†, Hector's second wife Ivy Kulngari Nangari-Nambijina†, and a number of Hector Waitbiari†'s daughters from his first wife, Molly Nyarruwangali†, including Barbara Warrmuya Nanagu and Mildred Milmarriya Gumingga Nanagu. Hector Waitbiari† and Anzac Munganyi† were brothers whose descendants now make up the population of Pigeon Hole, the primary Bilinarra community. Nordlinger's work focused on grammatical and lexical elicitation and women's songs.

Figure 2: Hector Waitbiari Jangari† and Anzac Munganyi Jangari† (Photo: Rachel Nordlinger 1990)

1 In fact the first recorded words of Bilinarra can be found in a word list of Victoria River languages in Constable W. H. Willshire's book *The land of the dawning* (1896) (see §1.3.2).

During the 1990s, Diwurruwurru-jaru Aboriginal Corporation (DAC, the Katherine Regional Aboriginal Language Centre, now Mimi Ngurrdalingi Aboriginal Corporation) began to expand its language maintenance and revitalisation work west of Katherine. In 1994 Caroline Jones wrote a sketch grammar of Ngarinyman, based on work at Yarralin. She also worked with Kathleen Juduwurr Namija-Nangala there, recording a number of Bilinarra texts. In the late 1990s, DAC set up a small weekly Bilinarra language program in Pigeon Hole school through the NT Education Department's Indigenous Language and Culture (ILC) framework. This language program was run by a language team consisting of a speaker (until 2008 this was Ivy Kulngari) and a number of language workers (including Mildred Hector, Barbara Bobby, Jenny Algy and Sheila Hector) who were supported by a DAC linguist (Erika Charola, Felicity Meakins, Jenny Denton, Justin Spence and Lauren Campbell, at different points in time).

While running the language program, DAC linguists and the community took the opportunity to document aspects of Bilinarra language and culture. In 2003–04 Felicity Meakins held an AIATSIS grant to work with Ivy Kulngari, Barbara Warrmuya and Mildred Milmarriya Gumingga and recorded stories and site information about four Dreaming lines (*Nangangari* 'Nangari Women', *Lardaj* 'Little Lizard or Rough-Tailed Lizard', *Barrjirda* 'Quoll' and *Marlimarli* 'Butterflies') and the travels of the *Mungamunga* 'Bush Spirit Women'. They also documented information about bush foods and medicine, in particular treatments of children using termite mound. Justin Spence began compiling the Bilinarra dictionary in 2005. He worked with Ivy Kulngari, Barbara Warrmuya and Mildred Milmarriya Gumingga, consolidating and adding to existing material. This work was continued by Lauren Campbell and Felicity Meakins through DAC and a DoBeS grant administered through the University of Manchester (P.I. Eva Schultze-Berndt). Lauren Campbell also worked with an ethnobiologist, Glenn Wightman, to document Bilinarra knowledge about local plants and animals. She recorded some Dreaming stories with Ivy Kulngari before Ivy passed away in 2008. Some of the stories recorded over this period are included in the appendix.

This grammar draws, where possible, on all of this previous work, with a particular focus on the traditional Bilinarra spoken by the first-language Bilinarra speakers. We have endeavoured to include everything we can about the grammar of the traditional language, but inevitably there are gaps in our description, given the limited nature of the data available to us. The nature of the corpus is described in detail in the 'Recording metadata' section.

All recordings and photos of people, deceased and alive, are used at the request of the families and with their permission.

1.2.2 Bilinarra in relation to Gurindji and Ngarinyman

Bilinarra is very closely related to Gurindji and Ngarinyman. From the perspective of linguists, these three would certainly be considered dialects of a single language. However, they are considered different languages by the respective communities (see Dixon (1980: 33) on the different uses of 'language' reflected here), and so we will refer to them as such throughout this discussion. Despite their similarities, there are nonetheless a number of grammatical differences that separate the languages. This section will focus primarily on differences between Bilinarra and Gurindji, because Gurindji is the best-documented Eastern Ngumpin language thus far. References will also be made to Ngarinyman, however, wherever possible.

The main grammatical differences between Bilinarra and Gurindji[2,3] are: (i) pronominal clitic placement and catalysts; (ii) the existence of a hither suffix in Bilinarra and not in Gurindji; (iii) TAM categories and forms; (iv) the presence of a consequence particle *bala* in Bilinarra; and (v) some morphological and functional differences in the directionals paradigm.

The first of these differences, pronominal clitic placement in Bilinarra, is driven by complex discourse-related principles (discussed in §6.2.4).[4] Pronominal clitics can potentially attach to any part of speech but they are mostly found attached to constituents which are inherently prominent, such as imperative forms of inflecting verbs, negative particles, complementizers and interrogative pronouns. In this respect, Bilinarra is similar to Gurindji. Where the languages differ is in clauses where inherently prominent constituents are not found. In these clauses, the pronominal clitic in Bilinarra is generally found in second position attached directly to the first constituent, as shown in (1).

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2 Gurindji orthography uses voiceless stops /p, t, k/ where Bilinarra uses voiced stops /b, d, g/. Bilinarra orthography is used here for both languages for ease of comparison.

3 Note also some minor phonological differences. While coverbs in both Gurindji and Bilinarra can be one syllable (§7.2.1), impressionistically Bilinarra tends to have more of these forms, perhaps due to the closer proximity of Bilinarra to Jaminjung, where many of these coverbs were borrowed from historically. For example, Gurindji has a tendency towards non-productive reduplication and fused suffixes such as *-garra* 'continuative' or *-ab* 'activity'. Some examples are *jab* (Bilinarra) versus *jabgarra* (Gurindji) 'trim, skin', *daj* (Bilinarra) vs *dajgarra* (Gurindji) 'pound'.

4 Note also some minor differences in complex pronominal forms between Gurindji and Bilinarra; for example, differences in the linking element of complex pronouns *=rnayinangulu* (Bilinarra) vs *=rnayinanggulu* (Gurindji) '1AUG.EXC.S>3AUG.O' and one completely different form *=rlaangulu* (Bilinarra) vs *=rlaayinanggulu* (Gurindji) '1AUG.INC.S>3AUG.O'. See §6.2.2.7 for a discussion of complex pronoun forms.

(1) [Ga-nggu=**wula**=nga,] [munuwu-nggurra daj-ba=**wula**=nga ba-rru
BIL take-POT=3UA.S=DUB camp-ALL smash-EP=3UA.S=DUB hit-POT
marndaj].
OK
Those two might take it back to camp, and pound them, OK.
(IH: FM: BIL05aud: 2003: 06:38 min)

In Gurindji, on the other hand, such pronominal clitics are mostly found attached to a catalyst *ngu*, as shown in (2). They are only rarely found attached to a first position constituent, and only when it is marked with a discourse clitic such as *=ma* (which we analyse as a prominent topic marker, see §8.3.1.4), as in (3).

(2) Mangarri-waji-la **ngu=wula** wanyja-na-na na gambarra-la
GUR veg.food-NMLZ-LOC CAT=3UA.S leave-IMPF-PRS FOC front-LOC
warrgawarrgab wamala-gujarra-lu.
dance.REDUP girl-DU-ERG
The two girls are dancing in front of the shop.
(BH: FM07_a043: 21:23 min)

(3) Nyila=ma=**wula** ma-na-ni warrguwarrguj.
GUR that=TOP=3UA.S do-IMPF-PST pick.up.REDUP
They would gather them up.
(VD: FM11a_161: 01:01 min)

A second point of difference between Bilinarra and Gurindji is the presence of a hither suffix in Bilinarra which attaches to inflecting verbs of motion such as 'go' or 'take', or action directed towards the deictic centre such as 'look towards the speaker'. This suffix is discussed in §7.1.5.1.

(4) Ga-nya-rra-**rni**=rnalu lurrbu na jiwirri na, yala-ngga=rni.
BIL take-PST-IMPF-HITH=1AUG.EXC.S return FOC cooked FOC that-LOC=ONLY
Then we would return there bringing the cooked (meat).
(IH: FM08_a086: 2003: 05:25 min)[5]

5 This audio excerpt was taken from a stretched recording, hence the poor sound quality.

This ability to encode deixis in the inflecting verb distinguishes Bilinarra from Gurindji (McConvell 1983: 30). Allative and ablative marked demonstratives are required to make this distinction in Gurindji:

(5) Wurlbun-jirri ya-n.gu-rra=yi **murla-nggurra**, garu=ma nyila=ma.
GUR lap-ALL go-POT-HORT=1MIN.O this-ALL child=TOP that=TOP
Let the child come here to my lap.
(TD: FM10a_166: 14:05 min)

(6) **Murla-ngurlu**, na ngu=rlaa yurra ma-ni gurrarndal nyamu=nga
GUR this-ABL FOC CAT=1AUG.INC startle do-PST brolga REL=DUB
ya-ni.
go-PST
We hunted the brolga away from here, which might have gone then.
(VD: FM07_a058: 04:13 min)

Further differences in the inflecting verbs can also be observed between Bilinarra and Gurindji (and Ngarinyman). Although the roots are largely similar, the inflectional forms differ in the present tense and past imperfective forms across the five classes of verbs, as shown in the following tables.

Table 1: Present tense inflections in Bilinarra, Ngarinyman and Gurindji

	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Class 5
Bilinarra	*-rra*	*-la*	*-nga*	*-la*	*-na*
Ngarinyman	*-rra(ny)*	*-la(ny)*	*-nga(ny)*	*-la(ny)*	*-na(ny)*
Gurindji	*-nana*	*-rnana*	*-ngana*	*-rnana*	*-nana*

Table 2: Past imperfective inflections in Bilinarra, Ngarinyman and Gurindji

	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Class 5
Bilinarra [-PST-IMPF]	*-ni-rra*	*-rni-rra*	*-nya-rra*	*-rni-rra*	*-ni-rra*
Ngarinyman [-PST-IMPF]	*-ni-rra*	*-rni-rra*	*-nya-rra*	*-rni-rra*	*-ni-rra*
Gurindji [-IMPF-PST]	*-na-ni*	*-rna-ni*	*-nga-ni*	*-rna-ni*	*-na-ni*

The TAM categories marked by the inflecting verbs are the third point of difference between Bilinarra (and Ngarinyman) and Gurindji, as shown in the following tables. Bilinarra only makes an aspectual (imperfective/perfective) distinction in the past tense, whereas this distinction is demonstrated across past and present tense and potential mood in Gurindji.

Table 3: Bilinarra (and Ngarinyman) conjugation for *yana* 'go'

	Finite				
Infinitive	**Imperative**	**Past**		**Present**	**Potential**
		Perf	**Imperf**		
yanu	*yanda*	*yani*	*yanirra*	*yana*	*yan.gu*

Table 4: Gurindji and Wanyjirra conjugation for *yanana* 'go' (McConvell 1996b: 65)

		Finite			
	Infinitive	**Imperative**	**Past**	**Present**	**Potential**
Perfective	*yanu*	*yanda*	*yani*		*yan.gu*
Imperfective	*yananu*	*yananda*	*yanani*	*yanana*	*yananggu*

A detailed comparison of Bilinarra inflecting verbs with other Ngumpin languages can be found in §7.1.2.2.

A fourth difference between Bilinarra and Gurindji can be found in the complementizer inventory. Bilinarra contains a particle *bala* which is used to introduce subordinate clauses that express a purpose or consequence of the event described by the main clause. This complementizer is not found in Gurindji (McConvell 2006: 118). This particle is discussed further in §9.1.2.

(7) Birrga ma-nda=ngali, nyambayirla[6], jawi, **bala**=rli
make do-IMP=1UA.EXC.O what's-it-called fire CONS=1UA.EXC.S
gamba-wu girrawa.
cook-POT goanna
Make a fire for you and me so we can cook a goanna.
(HW: RN90-006a: 03:19 min)

6 This word may also conceivably be *nyamba na* 'something FOC'.

A fifth difference between Bilinarra and Gurindji can be seen in the directional paradigms, which include river drainage terms and cardinals. Both languages contain both sets of terms; however, Bilinarra speakers impressionistically use the river drainage terms more frequently than Gurindji speakers do, which is probably due to the dominance of the Victoria River in Bilinarra country. The same river is only found in the northern part of Gurindji country. Bilinarra also contains some cardinal forms which do not exist in Gurindji, which relate to rivers. A couple of Bilinarra examples are given below. The directional system is discussed in more detail in §5.4.

(8) Ngayi=ma=rna ya-n.gu **gaa-rnug**, magirliwan-gu.
1MIN=TOP=1MIN.S go-POT east-cross.river kangaroo-DAT
I swam east across the river to (get) a kangaroo.
(IH: RN90-014a: 28:42 min)

(9) Yala-ngurlu=ma=lu **gayi-niyi-nyu=rni** na wanyja-rni[7], birndigarni
that-ABL=TOP=3AUG.S north-XX-XX=ONLY FOC leave-PST sideways
Warlguna-nggurra
placename-ALL
Then they left and went along the north side of the river to Warlguna.
(IH: FM: BIL04.track01:2004: 06:28)

1.3 The socio-political and linguistic history of the Bilinarra people

The endangered status of Bilinarra is closely tied to the current social circumstances and recent history of Bilinarra people. In the last 100 years Bilinarra numbers have decreased dramatically due to massacres by early colonists and by their poor treatment on the cattle stations where they were eventually brought to work. The situation on the cattle stations further exacerbated the decline of the Bilinarra language as different cultural groups were made to live in much closer proximity than was traditionally the case. Bilinarra was dwarfed by the more dominant language groups, particularly Gurindji and Mudburra. The result was a certain amount of language homogenisation. Cattle station pidgin was also introduced into this mix during this period, further endangering

7 This verb is unclear in the recording but was corrected to *wanyjarni* when checked with the speaker.

the use of Bilinarra. This section provides a socio-political backdrop to the current status of Bilinarra. In §1.3.5 we discuss the present-day situation for the Bilinarra language.

1.3.1 Pre-contact history and the language situation

As with other Australian Aboriginal groups, Bilinarra history begins with the Dreaming, a period of time in the indefinable past where Dreaming creatures traversed the as-yet-unformed landscape laying down its features. These Dreaming creatures took on many forms: they were animals, humans or natural phenomena such as rain or lightning, and were responsible for the creation of hills, rocks, waterholes and clusters of trees. A number of Dreaming tracks criss-cross Bilinarra country, including the Nangangari women 'a group of women of the Nangari subsection', Lardaj 'rough-tailed goanna' (known locally as 'little lizard'), Marlimarli 'butterfly' and Barrjirda 'quoll' (which is now extinct in this area). The result is a landscape characterized by black-soil plains, small limestone gorges, sandstone outcrops, and a large river now called the Victoria River and its associated tributaries.

The Bilinarra were semi-nomadic before Europeans arrived, travelling mostly within their traditional lands and subsisting on seasonally available animal and plant food. Some of the more prized meats were *jiya* 'kangaroo (generic)', *jamud* 'bush turkey', *girrawa* 'goanna' and *yinarrwa* 'barramundi'. After the wet season many varieties of berry were in abundance, including *muying* 'black plums', *ngamanburru* 'conkerberries' and *garrajgarraj* 'curry orange'. Local plants were also valued for their medicinal qualities. The Bilinarra used these plants to treat the symptoms of illnesses, in particular congestion, diarrhoea, skin sores, itchy skin, dry eyes and sore muscles. For example, *manyanyi* 'various species of an aromatic plant', *gubuwubu* 'lemon grass' and *yirrijgaji* '*Dodonaea polyzyga*' were made into medicinal drinks and washes to treat congestion. A common way of preparing these medicines was to mix them into wet slurries of *mardumardu* 'termite mound', which were then slathered on the skin or drunk. The causes of illness, often attributed to sorcery, were dealt with by 'traditional healers' called *mabarn* or *gurrwararn* who were either men or women called to this role by a *garrgany* 'chickenhawk or brown hawk'. Bilinarra women continue to use these bush medicines and treatment performed by traditional doctors is also still common.

The Bilinarra kept simple toolkits made from stone and wood. For the women an important tool was the *giyarri* 'digging stick', which was used for digging up various types of tubers such as *wayida* '*Vigna lanceolata*' and

gamara '*Ipomoea aquatica*', and bulbs such as the *ginyuwurra* 'bush onion'. *Yurrabi* 'grindstones' were also used to turn *mangurlu* 'seeds of *Portulaca oleracea*' and *bumbarda* 'lily seeds' into bread. They carried these fruit, seeds and tubers in *gawarla* 'coolamons'. *Gawarla* were made from the wood of *ngimbija* or *gulunjurru* trees '*Gyrocarpus americanus*', which was light and therefore easy to shape and carry. The wood for *gawarla* and other wooden implements was cut by both men and women and these artefacts were also made using *gurrwa* 'axes' and *ngarlaardgu* 'chisels'. *Gawarla* were also used for carrying babies and for boiling water and cooking berries and bush medicines using hot, flat rocks. The men used other tools, including different types of spears such as *nguni* 'shovel-nosed spears', often thrown using *warlmayi* 'woomeras'. Men attached the heads of spears, chisels and axes using *jigala* 'spinifex wax' and *gumbun* 'animal tendons'. Spears were used to catch big game and fish. *Wirrgala* 'hair string' was used to make nets to catch flocks of small birds such as *gulyulyurra* 'budgerigars'. Men also built hides from stone where they lit fires and lured large carnivorous birds such as *garrgany* 'chickenhawks' and *warlawurru* 'eagles'.

Food-producing activities only formed a small part of the Bilinarra day. Spiritual life was also important. In particular, the maintenance of Dreaming lines and their associated sacred sites was essential for the physical and spiritual wellbeing of the Bilinarra people. Even today, the destruction of sacred sites is considered detrimental to the health of Bilinarra people. Some sites are imbued with procreative powers, such as Gurdurdularni (literally 'the place of women's children'). This sacred site consists of a set of rocks on the Victoria River where the Nangangari women left their Jangala and Nangala children. The rocks at Gurdurdularni continue to provide the Bilinarra with their children. The spirits of the children remain in the rocks and call out for new mothers in the night, and Bilinarra women go there in order to get pregnant. Rocks from this place have also been brought to the community. Other sites were important for the annual production of food in pre-contact times. Nawurndarni, a billabong on the Victoria River, is a Mindaarraj Dreaming. Leaves were traditionally brushed over a hole in the rocks here to help *mindaarraj* 'water lilies' grow.

The Bilinarra, particularly women, also spent a great deal of time caring for children within a traditional framework of belief about life and its creation. Many of these beliefs are still current. Bilinarra people exist before their birth, according to Bilinarra belief. They exist as the spirits of children in the rocks at Gurdurdularni waiting to be born. *Yimarrug*, or spirits of the deceased, also wait for a pregnant women to enter the unborn child and be reincarnated. In the old days, once a woman was pregnant the actions of the parents before the baby was born were important for its wellbeing. A number of foods were taboo for

Figure 3: Mildred Milmarriya Gumingga Hector Nanagu stands at Jurrjurrarralarni near Gurdurdularni. The Nangangari women danced here before leaving their children at Gurdurdularni. The parallel lines in the riverbed show where the Nangangari danced on the Victoria River Crossing rocks. (Photo: Felicity Meakins 2003)

pregnant women in order to protect the unborn child. These foods included *yibarrardu* 'emu', *yinarrwa* 'barramundi', *girliny* 'goannas with eggs', *jamud* 'bush turkey', *jungguwurru* 'echidna' and *guwarlambarla* 'turtle'. Some of these meats, such as emu meat, could cause the unborn baby to become sick. Others caused problems after birth. For example, *girliny* were not good for pregnant women because they may have caused their babies to be born with sores. Eating *jamud* may have resulted in the child's throat 'dropping' and swelling up in a manner that resembles dancing or fighting bush bustards. Pregnant women also did not eat *guwarlambarla* for fear that their babies might end up waddling instead of walking properly. Pregnant women could also not be present around cooking meat out of concern that the smell might cause the foetus to abort. The father was also responsible for the unborn child's wellbeing. Marks on children were often attributed to the father's hunting practices before their birth. For example, harelips were caused by fathers ripping the lips of barramundi, and dimples were the result of spearing kangaroos. Once a child was born they were 'cooked' or treated with heated *mardumardu* 'antbed' (see §1.3.4) and laid in coolamons. Both of these practices ensured that children grew up with strong backs and hips to prepare them for crawling and walking, and ultimately their adult life ahead. These beliefs about the children and their health remain strong for the Bilinarra, although the food taboos for pregnant women are no longer practised.

Little is known about language practices of the Bilinarra before European settlement; however, McConvell (1988a) suggests that Aboriginal groups in the VRD have probably always been highly multilingual, with language mixing an unmarked form of communication. It is possible that the level of mixing between Bilinarra and Kriol, which will be discussed in §1.3.5, is associated with the severe language shift to Kriol and English seen in many parts of Australia. However, code-switching between traditional languages suggests that mixing was a common practice before European contact, and that these contact languages were merely added to the repertoire.

In general, Bilinarra people characterize the time before European invasion as an unchanging but cyclical period of social and natural order, and predictability. This description of pre-contact times is used to contrast it with the dramatic changes that occurred with the coming of European settlers.

1.3.2 The European invasion and its effect on the language ecology

European colonisation of the VRD was marked by three waves of devastation: disease, massacres, and then enforced labour on cattle stations. This had a

harsh and lasting effect on the language and culture of the Bilinarra, and indeed other groups in the region including the Gurindji, Ngarinyman and Mudburra. This period is quite well documented compared with other regions in Australia. Oral history accounts of massacres are confirmed by Constable W.H. Willshire in his book *The land of the dawning* (1896). Willshire was the first policeman to be stationed at Gordon Creek (located just north of Pigeon Hole on Bilinarra country) and kept a police journal (which, interestingly enough, does not describe the massacres as they occurred (Lewis 2012: 105)). The first word list of Victoria River languages is recorded in Willshire's book (1896: 92–98). Most words can be traced to Bilinarra and Ngaliwurru.[8]

In the 1940s the living and working conditions of Aboriginal groups on cattle stations in the VRD came under the scrutiny of anthropologists Catherine and Ronald Berndt. The Berndts were employed by the Australian Investment Agency to write a report on the health of the Aboriginal populations working on a number of cattle stations in the region (C. Berndt & R. Berndt 1948, R. Berndt & C. Berndt 1948, 1987). At this time, Catherine Berndt (1950) also documented the ceremonies of Bilinarra women and the effects of colonization on their practice. A number of cattle station histories, written from the perspective of the station owners, came from Lyn Riddett (1990), Jock Makin (1999), Alexa Simmons (Lewis and Simmons 2005) and Pearl Ogden (2005). Deborah Bird Rose and Darrel Lewis' (Rose 1991, 2000; Lewis 1997, 2002, 2012; Lewis and Bird-Rose 1995) anthropological, historical and archaeological work in the 1980s provides the Bilinarra and Ngarinyman perspective on the history of cattle stations, particularly Victoria River Downs and Pigeon Hole, as well as accounts of traditional Bilinarra and Ngarinyman life. This section provides an overview of this work.

John Lort Stokes was the first *gardiya* 'non-Aboriginal person' to enter the VRD in 1839; however, the first major expedition was undertaken by the Gregory brothers, Francis and Henry, between 1855 and 1856. What they found were grassy plains and a large river system considered suitable for pastoralism (Lewis 2012: 11–12, 21 onwards). In 1883 Victoria River Downs Station was established on Bilinarra and Karrangpurru (also known as the Karranga) country by Fisher and Lyons (Makin 1999: 43 onwards). The land was stocked with cattle brought from Queensland. Further to the south, Gurindji country became the site for a large cattle station called Wave Hill (Lewis 2012: 60–62). For the Bilinarra, this was a brutal period. The introduction of cattle changed the ecology of the VRD with cattle competing with native animals, and indeed Aboriginal people, for

8 Ngaliwurru words were identified by Eva Schultze-Berndt (per. comm.) and Bilinarra words by Meakins.

waterholes (Lewis 2012: 73–76). Moreover, many lives had already been lost through a wave of disease, particularly smallpox, that had preceded the first settlers (Rose 1991: 75 onwards; Lewis 2012: 18).

The population was further weakened by a series of killing sprees carried out by the *gardiya* wanting to secure the land for cattle. These massacres were often justified by settlers as acts of retribution against Aboriginal people for killing their cattle (Lewis 2012: 104 onwards). Popular ideologies of the time, such as those that represented Aboriginal people as 'cannibals who ate babies' and 'stone age people destined to die out', salved the consciences of those carrying out the massacres. The Karrangpurru, who lived to the north of the Bilinarra, were virtually wiped out by disease and massacres. Now only a handful of people from one family claim some Karrangpurru heritage. Nothing remains of the Karrangpurru language (Rose 1991: 7578; Lewis 2012: 8990). The Bilinarra fared only a little better.

With the establishment of a police station, in 1894, massacres became an officially sanctioned method of population control. The site of the police station was on Bilinarra country at Balarrgi (Police Hole) on Gordon Creek, a tributary of the Victoria River. Constable Willshire was the first police officer posted there; he was later replaced by Sergeant O'Keefe who was stationed there until 1898, before the police station was moved to its current location at Timber Creek (Rose 1991: 29). Constable Willshire kept diaries and in 1896 published an account of his time spent in the area. Although Willshire was condemned by pastoralists for interfering with their bloody attempts to secure land, he himself freely admitted to instigating and participating in numerous massacres. He had previously been acquitted of charges of murdering Aboriginal people in the Alice Springs area and brought this style of policing with him to the VRD (Lewis 2012: 104–107).

One massacre, which is still discussed by the Bilinarra, occurred at Balarrgi itself. In an oral history account of this period, Anzac Munganyi† recalls the time when his father worked at the Gordon Creek police station. A group of Bilinarra people were rounded up and brought to the police station, perhaps in response to killing cattle. They were tied up and shot and their bodies burned and dumped at the rubbish dump along with the bones of cattle (Rose 1991: 39). This story is confirmed by Mick Yinyuwinma (1991) in another published oral history account of this massacre.

Poisoning was also a common method of killing Aboriginal people. As a child Jack Jangari remembers a Bilinarra family group who were camped along a creek now know as Poison Creek. They were killed by a cook who laced a stew he had made for them with strychnine, an event immortalised in the name of the creek (Rose 1991: 45). Rose (1991: 117) reports that the Bilinarra people

Figure 4: Early painting of a *gardiya* with a hat and a gun on his belt. This painting is located in a rock shelter used by Hector and his family during 'holiday time' when they worked on the stations. (Photo: Felicity Meakins 2003)

who survived were driven out of their country and north-west into Ngarinyman country. There, they sought refuge at a place called Layit but were killed by Ngarinyman people. The lives of a few Bilinarra women were spared and they were taken as wives by Ngarinyman men and only returned to their country when their husbands died.

Aboriginal people in the VRD did not remain passive during this time as they conducted their own counter-attacks. Lewis (2012: 92–114) reports that in 1886 there was a spike in the report of attacks on *gardiya* travellers and stockman by Aboriginal people. The Jasper Gorge area was particularly notorious for skirmishes by Aboriginal people hiding in the rock cliffs. He speculates that the attacks were a part of a coordinated campaign by different tribes to purge the area of the *gardiya*. Nonetheless, by 1902 the number of attacks had diminished, which Lewis (2012: 115) suggests may have been related to the decreasing numbers of Aboriginal people, who had suffered great losses, and the establishment of 'blacks camps' on the cattle stations.

Indeed cattle station owners realised that Aboriginal people could provide a source of cheap labour. By this time in Australia's colonisation, convict labour was no longer available. Rose (2000: 14) suggests that Aboriginal people in the VRD, including the Bilinarra, came to work on cattle stations as a means of survival. People who chose to hold out in the bush remained constant targets for attacks by *gardiya*. On the other hand, Aboriginal people on the stations were afforded some level of peace, with their labour given in exchange for their lives. Rose estimates that, by the 1930s, a majority of Aboriginal people in the VRD were living on cattle stations. Bilinarra people could be found at Victoria River Downs Station, which included Pigeon Hole Station at the time. They also came to work on Wave Hill Station (see also discussion in Lewis 2012: 115–122).

The effect of colonisation on the language and culture of Bilinarra people is unrecorded but was undoubtedly devastating. Their ability to practice ceremony freely and continue to make use of the resources of their land became limited. Travel within their traditional lands was severely curtailed, as was access to waterholes. All of this no doubt affected the ability of the Bilinarra to pass on traditional knowledge about hunting practices and sacred sites. The massive reduction in numbers through disease and massacres would have had a lasting impact on the sustainability of the language. The Bilinarra were eventually outnumbered by other people in the area, including the Ngarinyman, Mudburra and Gurindji. It is likely that these languages had a lasting effect on the language which is documented in this grammar as Bilinarra.[9]

9 It is also likely that English would have had an effect on Bilinarra from very early on. The first reports of the use of English (most probably pidgin) by Aboriginal people can be found during this time. James Wilson, who was a member of the 1855 Gregory expedition, was surprised to

In terms of its core grammar Bilinarra is closer to Ngarinyman. Additionally, a large proportion of vocabulary is shared, both with Ngarinyman but particularly with Gurindji. Only a few words, such as *mardumardu* 'termite mound', *yinburrug* 'long way', *lurrbu* 'return' and *barnnga* 'bark', are singled out as specifically Bilinarra words by speakers, although at least *mardumardu* is found in Mudburra and Ngarinyman, and the others only in Ngarinyman.

Interestingly, Rook Julkiyarri, who worked with Patrick McConvell in 1975, gave a number of words which he claimed to be Bilinarra and are certainly not found in Gurindji, Mudburra or Ngarinyman (based on the current draft dictionaries available): *bijiwa* 'ear',[10] *nalungga* 'knee', *gurdga* 'water', *ngajidi* 'father', *gujadi* 'mother', *nyanawuwi* 'sister', *ngabadi* 'brother',[11] *bada* 'ground'[12], *gungunjul* 'fire', *yurang* 'bushfire' and *wulu* 'no, nothing'. It is difficult to determine the origin of these words. Given that he is the oldest Bilinarra speaker a linguist has worked with, these words may represent an older variety of Bilinarra than the rest of our corpus. In other places in the word elicitation sessions with McConvell, Julkiyarri provides Bilinarra words which are found also found in Mudburra and Ngarinyman: *munyjuna* 'elbow', *ngalyjida* 'fingernail', *jawarrga* 'liver' (also in Mudburra); and *garrmalarn* 'fat' and *liwi* 'husband' (also in Ngarinyman). The reason for the identification of these words as specifically Bilinarra seems to be related to the need to distinguish Bilinarra from Gurindji, which was McConvell's purpose for the elicitation sessions. For example, Julkiyarri gives *dimana* as the Bilinarra word for 'horse' and *yawarda* as the Gurindji word, despite both being imported words used by speakers in both languages in our corpus.[13] In this respect the other (unrecognized) words are

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hear Aboriginal people in the Timber Creek area (probably Ngaliwurru) using a number of words of English. He believed that they must have learnt the words from Aboriginal people at the short-lived Port Essington settlement (1838–49), which was located east of where Darwin is now found. The expedition surgeon and zoologist Joseph Elsey also made reports of English words he had overheard used by Timber Creek people (reported in Lewis 2012: 27–34). Thirty years later, in 1885, Donald Swan and Bob Button, who took the first cattle to Ord River, reported hearing Aboriginal people using words of English in the Jasper Gorge area. These were most likely Ngarinyman or Bilinarra people (reported in Lewis 2012: 129).

10 This word is found in Jingulu (Bowern per. comm.).

11 These kinship words could be from Jaru or Nyininy which are similar to the Eastern Ngumpin languages (impressionistically – no dictionaries are available unfortunately), although Jaru and Nyininy words contain an additional *–di* ending. The suffix *-rti* has been observed on kinship terms in neighbouring languages including Warlpiri, Warlmanpa, Jaru, Mudburra and Walmajarri (Nash 1992). The word for 'sister' is more curious as it is close to the recognitional demonstrative *nyanawu*.

12 Note that *bardardi* is recorded as meaning 'ring place' in the Bilinarra, Ngarinyman and Gurindji dictionaries.

13 See Walsh (1991) for a discussion on Australian words for 'horse' and their distribution across the continent.

unlikely to represent an older form of Bilinarra but rather words which have not yet been documented in Mudburra and Ngarinyman (as yet relatively under-described languages).

In general, it is impossible to know whether the description of the language provided in this grammar reflects that of a language which has undergone significant change post-contact or whether the Ngumpin languages were so closely related that they were mutually intelligible even before European invasion.

1.3.3 Life and language on the cattle stations

When Catherine and Ronald Berndt began a survey in the 1940s of the health of Aboriginal people, including the Bilinarra, on cattle stations, they found them living and working in subhuman conditions. Their survey was commissioned by the Australian Investment Agency, which was owned by the Vestey family. They commissioned the report because they were concerned about the low birth rates and high infant mortality rates of their Aboriginal workers. The population was top heavy with adults, which did not ensure a continuing workforce. Although the Vesteys lived in England they had leased a large tract of land in VRD. Their cattle stations included Wave Hill, which became well known when the Gurindji people walked off the station in 1966 and went on strike for nine years to protest against the poor conditions of their employment. The Berndts visited a number of cattle stations owned by the Vesteys, including Wave Hill. Although they did not visit Victoria River Downs Station, which was then owned by Bovril, it is unlikely that the working and living conditions of Aboriginal people were much different to what the Berndts reported elsewhere.

Catherine and Ronald Berndt found that it was unsurprising that Aboriginal people were not thriving on the cattle stations. The details of the individual stations – Wave Hill, Limbunya, Waterloo and Birrundudu – are provided in *The end of an era* (1987); however, they observed similar conditions on all of these cattle stations. The Aboriginal workers and their families lived in humpies built from tin, hessian and tree limbs in cleared areas with few trees and therefore little shade. These clusters of humpies had no running water. Women carted water from nearby creeks or bores, or horse troughs when other sources ran dry. The camps also had no sanitation facilities so people were forced to make use of dry creek beds. Given the permanency of the camps, this had serious consequences for the health of the inhabitants. The diet of the Aboriginal workers and their families was little better. Three times a day workers were given a slice of dry bread, a piece of meat (most often bone or gristle) and a cup of tea. Where they could, workers would scrounge leftovers from the meals of the white

stockmen and the station manager's family. Dependents of the employees received only dry rations. Once a week they were given flour, sugar, tea, tobacco and occasionally jam or treacle. They were also provided with blankets on occasion and clothes, which were often made from flour sacks. Because the camps were permanent there was little bush food to be found in the immediate area; therefore, Aboriginal people were reliant on the stations for sustenance.

In exchange for these living conditions, Aboriginal people provided the bulk of labour for the station. Men mustered and branded cattle, built stockyards and bores, and drove cattle to the port in Wyndham (Western Australia), the Vestey meatworks in Darwin and Mt Isa (Queensland). Women were also involved in mustering but were mostly employed in the station houses as cleaners. They also prepared meals for the men, looked after the station manager's children, maintained the gardens, and carted water using yokes and buckets. The Berndts found children as young as 12 being trained as stockmen and being employed in the kitchens.

Women were often forced into sexual relationships with *gardiya*, particularly stockmen. The result of these liaisons was a large number of children of mixed descent. These children were often taken by the police and given to *gardiya* families in Katherine, Darwin and further afield to raise; they were a part of what became known as the Stolen Generation. In general, few children were born into the Aboriginal community itself, and few of those reached adulthood. The population was top heavy with adults who were not being replaced by a new generation. The Berndts wrote at the time that they saw the people of the VRD as a people in danger of disappearing completely.

By the mid 1960s discontent was running high amongst the Aboriginal workers. Although many seemed resigned to their predicament, one Gurindji stockman who worked at Wave Hill Station (where many Bilinarra also worked), Sandy Moray Tipujurn, started agitating amongst the Aboriginal workers. He had spent time travelling to other cattle stations in Queensland and Western Australia and had seen better examples of race relations and employment conditions. Together with other Gurindji leaders, including Vincent Lingiari, and with the support of NAWU (the North Australian Workers Union) and in particular Frank Hardy, a union activist from Sydney, Aboriginal people walked off Wave Hill Station in August 1966 and set up a protest camp at Daguragu. Eventually they were offered wages equal to those of white stockmen; however, the Gurindji stood their ground. Although their protest had taken the form of a workers' strike they had not stopped talking about reclaiming their traditional lands, which had been taken over by the Vesteys (Hardy 1968; Hokari 2000, 2002; Kijngayarri 1986 (1974); Rangiari 1998; Riddett 1997).

The Bilinarra left the protest camp between 1971 and 1972 and returned to work for VRD at Pigeon Hole. In 1981 they made a formal request to be granted an excision from Pigeon Hole Station, which is still a part of the larger VRD Station. The aim was to form a separate Bilinarra community. At the time VRD was owned by the Hooker company, who were supportive of the idea; however, VRD was bought by Sherwin Pastoral Company in 1984, which was not willing to discuss an excision (Rose 1991: 246). The Bilinarra then went through a different avenue, using the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory) 1976* to claim a stock route in Bilinarra country which was classified as crown land (Bilinara (Coolibah-Wave Hill stock routes) land claim 1991). Sherwin Pastoral Company made many attempts to hinder the claim by barring Northern Land Council personnel from travelling on Pigeon Hole Station. Eventually, in 1989, Sherwin Pastoral Company was bought by Robert Holmes à Court (Heytesbury Beef) and the claim for the stock route went through unopposed (Rose 1991: 254–258). The Bilinarra had managed to regain ownership of just a small part of their traditional lands recognised under *gardiya* law, but at least it afforded them some freedom from *gardiya* control. The area includes the land the Aboriginal community was built on and the Coolibah-Wave Hill stock route.

Despite the poor conditions of life on the cattle stations, Bilinarra people maintained many aspects of their cultural life. They had this opportunity during the wet season when they were sent back to the bush with the barest of provisions. This time of the year was referred to as 'holiday time' (and is known colloquially in Australian English now as 'walkabout', although this term is not used in the VRD). During this period, the Bilinarra relied on their traditional bush foods to survive, and as a result this type of bush knowledge was maintained. It also gave the Bilinarra a chance to freely walk around their country without fear of attack from *gardiya*. They were able to visit and maintain sacred sites and discuss the stories associated with them. Brothers Hector Waitbiari† and Anzac Munganyi† took their families to their holiday camps near Wuna, a Spider Dreaming site. Paintings and broken pieces of spearhead can still be found in the rock shelters where they camped.

This annual break from station life was also the time when Bandimi ceremony was performed. This ceremony is the first stage of initiating boys into manhood, and all members of the community participated in it. During the rest of the year the Bilinarra also maintained some of their ceremonial life. Catherine Berndt (1950) observed that women continued to perform Jarrarda and Yawulyu ceremonies on the stations in the evenings when they were no longer required by their *gardiya* employers. In particular, Bilinarra women were credited with passing on Jarrarda ceremony to other women in the region, such as the Gurindji. Berndt reports that at this time Bilinarra women were still receiving new Jarrarda