

# 25 *Form and context in Jawoyn placenames*

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## 1. Introduction

In this paper I want to honour Ken Hale, our contemporary but nonetheless a modern pioneer of Australianist language studies, by exploring the forms of placenames and practices of their interpretation and reproduction by speakers of Jawoyn, a language of the Katherine River in the north-central Northern Territory.<sup>1</sup>

By examining a number of types of placenames, I show that a general presupposition informs all of them: that there be a non-arbitrary relationship between the name and the place it designates. Non-arbitrariness is mostly ensured through practices that support a general understanding of the name as an aspect of a place's storied significance. There are, however, varying degrees to which this non-arbitrary relationship is explicitly motivated and supported in terms of linguistic structure. Most fully, it is motivated by systematic connections between aspects of the linguistic structure of names and encoded significances, which I call 'expansions', to which the names are understood to be structurally and meaningfully related. It is in the relative structural linguistic motivation of connections among placenames and storied contexts that some of the particularities of Jawoyn placenaming come to light.

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<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations: ABL – ablative; ANA – anaphor; APP – applicative prefix; AUX – auxiliary; CAUS – causative; CON – continuative; EXCL – exclusive; IN – inclusive; LOC – locative; NA – *na*-class; NG – *ngan*-class; NSG – nonsingular; PCON – past continuous; PPUN – past punctual; PRES – present; PRIV – privative; PURP – purposive; TOP – toponymic suffix; RR – reflexive-reciprocal; SG – singular; SPEC – specifier, 'precisely'; SUB – (weak) subordinator; 1,2,3 – first, second, third person. The material in this paper was presented to the 1982 meeting of the Australian Linguistics Society at the University of Sydney.

## 2. Language and background of the study

Jawoyn belongs to a large Arnhem-area grouping of languages called Gunwinyguan (O'Grady et al. 1966). Like the other Gunwinyguan languages, Jawoyn is richly polysynthetic. Prefix slots on the verb encode in first position (in the non-past) a realis–irrealis mood contrast which is fusionaly linked with a third/nonthird person contrast; subject and object pronominal information; adverbial and quantificational information; applicative or benefactive valency; and sometimes also, incorporated body part, generic or other nominal stem. These slots are followed by the verb root (or stem, composed of preverb and conjugation class verbal root), reflexive-reciprocal marking where present, and fusional tense/mood/aspect suffixal categories. This can yield long verbal constructions which may stand alone as complete utterances, or be textually sequential with conjunctive and other possible logical relations between them, such as:

- (1) *Nyanbu-bi-born-a-ya-l-wu-m*                      *nyanbu-born-a-wo-y.*  
 3NSG/1NSG-APP-liquid-cook-AUX-PPUN    3NSG/1NSG-liquid-give-PPUN  
 'They brewed tea for us and gave it to us.'
- (2) *Nyirri-lu-warn-budiyangiyn.*  
 1EXCLNSG-ANA-still-sit.PPUN  
 'We still remained right there.'

As in a number of other Gunwinyguan languages, there is no obligatory case marking on core NPs, grammatical relations being marked in the pronominal prefix complex, and also (where it occurs) indicated by reflexive-reciprocal marking, and sometimes one or both in combination with noun incorporation. A semantically middle-distance demonstrative marker (together with forms of the 'still', 'same one' anaphor *-warn-*) does a great deal of the work of projecting the identifiability and recoverability of nominals in core clausal functions. There are three overt nominal gender/class markers, *na-* (Masculine), *ngal-* (Feminine), and *ngan-* (which marks body parts, topographic and geographic, and other part-whole terms), as well as a *0-* class. Both *na-* and *ngan-* as agreement markers extend well beyond their semantic range as noun class markers. This situation leads (as in Warray; Harvey 1997) to many instances of formally non-congruent agreement. Only the Feminine category remains equally semantically specialised as noun class and agreement marker.

Speakers of Jawoyn traditionally occupied much of the Katherine River system, well into present-day Arnhem Land, where they appear to have been in regular contact with speakers of lects they commonly refer to as 'Mayali', 'Gundjeihmi', and 'Kunwinjku'. Most Jawoyn from this area are at least bilingual in Jawoyn and one of these other languages. These speakers of northern languages were people with whom Jawoyn travelled, visited, traded and carried out regional ceremonies; they were also people with whom, at least from early in the twentieth century, they lived and worked on a number of cattle stations (e.g. Goodparla, Gimbat), which have now been incorporated into the 'Stage III' of Kakadu National Park, and around the numerous mining camps which operated in the Katherine River catchment from the end of the nineteenth century. The range of Jawoyn speakers also extended east to the Mainoru River, where they were in regular contact with speakers of Ngalkbon/Dalabon. How far to the west of the Katherine catchment the Jawoyn may have ranged has been very much obscured with the development of the mining town of Pine Creek from the 1870s. The town drew Aborigines from a wide region, and the reconstruction of anything approaching long-term territoriality around it is very uncertain. The close association of Jawoyn people with the town of Katherine developed in the pre-World War II period in various ways:

through their employment on peri-urban farms, and in their coresidence and extended interaction around the town with Aboriginal people of the Katherine township area. Post-War, the numerical strength and cultural impact of the Jawoyn in Katherine town and the nearby Aboriginal community of Bamyili (now Barunga), was such that other indigenous residents of the township, to varying degrees, re-identified as Jawoyn over decades (see Merlan 1998).

The earlier breadth of Jawoyn speakership is reflected in what was clearly a degree of dialect diversity, similar to that found in Mayali/Kunwinjku to the north. The degree of differentiation has been obscured as well as reduced through the reduction in active speakership, and the formation of communalects around larger residential concentrations at Katherine, Barunga and Pine Creek. Nevertheless, my work over some years (Merlan n.d.) revealed noticeable dialect differentiation among the last cohorts of adult and senior Jawoyn speakers, in the following areas among others: the form of the most common inflecting thematic verb, which together with several hundred preverbs forms the most common type of verb stem (e.g. among some northern Jawoyn speakers *got-me-* 'to put', like the thematic verb in Mayali, Kunwinjku etc., but among other northern Jawoyn from the immediate Gimbat area, *got-mar-*, and among speakers from the Mainoru River/Barunga area, *got-mang-*); in the specific forms of certain pronominal prefix combinations; in the tendency among speakers from the eastern area to use a proprietive and comitative *-muna*, while others used *-muyuk*; in differences between the occurrence of *e* versus *i* as stem-vowel in certain lexical forms; minor differences in the free pronoun series; and in other ways.

Most of the information on which this paper is based came from my long-term and intensive associations with older Jawoyn speakers (all bi- or trilingual in other Arnhem languages), who lived in the encampment near the entrance to the Katherine Gorge National Park (now Nitmiluk National Park) when I got to know them (from 1976). Most had lived in various camps on the Katherine River around the township for decades before that. The composition and size of the Gorge camp was variable over time, but when I got to know it, the core Jawoyn speakership included at the most some ten persons from the eastern Jawoyn catchment area (including Barunga, Beswick, Mainoru and up to Bulman and Weemol), as well as from Gimbat and Pine Creek. (Others in the camp were 'Mayali' first-language speakers, from further north, and there was a sprinkling of other people, mostly from other parts of Arnhem Land). The camp (in terms of the Jawoyn isogloss mentioned above) was composed of *-mar* and *-mang* speakers, but not *-me* speakers, who, although closely related to many residents of the Katherine Gorge camp, lived to the north, around Nourlangie, Jabiru, and also Pine Creek, but did not tend to treat Katherine as a regular port of call. Though originating from different areas of Jawoyn country, and having had somewhat varying life experiences, all these campers had known each other, or known of each other, most or all their lives. After the closing of Army internment camps in the region after World War II, most of these people had fifteen to twenty years' continuous, or semi-continuous, coresidence behind them. The practices of place-naming described here were shared. Though after 1980 our energies were strongly focused at times upon the question of the preparation of land claims on their behalf, my experience with the Gorge campers up to then showed the strength of the formulaic kinds of expansions and explanations of placenames that they tended to give. The Katherine Land Claim (which was heard over a number of years, with a final report from the Land Commissioner in 1988) was able to draw on the robustness of these practices.

### 3. Placenames: general principles

The most general principle underlying these practices is the generalisation that placenames have a non-arbitrary relation to the places that they designate, via an understanding that these names signal something about the significant characteristics of the place. In a minority of instances, the significant characteristic signalled is understood as an aspect of the physical character of the place. By contrast, in the vast majority of cases, the significant characteristic signalled is understood to have to do with the creation of the place by a creator figure, and the resulting inherence of 'dreaming' (*ngan-jarang-ngayu*) in the place. The name, in short, generally presupposes a storied context in terms of which the name is understood as self-evident, an aspect of the creative identity, movements or acts which imbue the place with meaning. There may or may not be a notion that some specific physical aspect of the place is of particular significance.

Concepts of the landscape as storied have been widely explored for Aboriginal Australia (see for example, Strehlow 1947; Stanner 1965; Munn 1973; Myers 1986; Rose 1992; Povinelli 1993; among many other sources), so it comes as no surprise that placenames are an aspect of this cultural complex. But a great deal more can be said for each set of local circumstances about the linguistic practices through which this relationship of non-arbitrariness is instantiated and reproduced. The Jawoyn material offers some particular opportunities for consideration of the relation between the linguistic structure of placenames, and what is understood to be more and less explicitly encoded in the form of the name, versus implicitly presupposed, about the storied context of which the placename is an aspect. Also, both because Jawoyn speakership has rapidly declined over the past two decades, and because the practices of moving through country and of association with places have also changed quite dramatically, ultimately something can also be said about the forms of placenaming which emerge on occasion today when attempts are made to revive placenames, or designate places anew.

The creative acts of place-creating beings are usually rendered by the verbal construction *bolk-mak-wo-*, where *-bolk-* is a generic incorporating nominal stem meaning 'place, country, land', and *mak-wo-* is the preverb plus thematic stem complex 'make' (which can also be used in the everyday sense 'make something, an object' etc.). As with other Australian peoples, in Jawoyn conceptualisation of the landscape a certain salience is attributed to the creation of waters and watered locales; and like other Arnhem peoples, Jawoyn attribute special significance to the spectacular, often steep-sided rock holes and plunge-pools that are common in the Arnhem uplands. Spirits of those who emanated from these water sources are said to return to them after death, emitting a light (*na-morrorto* 'comet') as they shoot through the air, and making a booming noise as they plunge back in. To refer to the creation of waters, Jawoyn use the verbal construction *borna-ya-ma-*, literally 'spear water', where *-borna-* is the generic incorporating form 'liquid, water', and *ya-ma-* 'spear'. (Compare the north-east Arnhem creator Djang'kawu sisters, who are usually described as moving through the landscape piercing the ground with their yamsticks as they walk along, and causing waters to spring forth; see Warner 1958). The most general term for the manifestation of dreaming activity as landform, or manifestation in the landscape, is *ngan-jarang-ngayu*. The ending *-ngayu* is the third person singular possessive pronominal which here, as in many other instances, is the sign of the part-whole relationship. Note its usage in an ordinary narrative about the creation of the places Wetji Namurrgaymi and Gorowarr on the Mainoru River by *durrk* 'emu', the major creator there:

- (3) *Niyarnbay yutyut-may nyirranggurlung-luk dordor-may gun'-ba*  
 there scuttled-PCON 1EXCLNSG-LOC ran-PCON there-ABL  
*Garri-wa jarang got juy.*<sup>2</sup>  
 east-ABL dreaming put do.PPUN  
 'It scuttled to us, it ran from there in the east, and left a dreaming.'

Just as commonly, narratives of creation are constructed with a reflexive-reciprocal form of 'put', e.g. *guk-got-mi-yi-yn* 'it put its body' (as landscape), where *guk-* is a generic incorporating nominal stem 'body',<sup>3</sup> followed by *got-ma-* 'put' in which, when followed by reflexive-reciprocal marker *-yi-*, the *a*-vowel becomes *i*, and PPUN verbal suffix. The term *buwurr* means 'dream' (as in *ngan-bi-dirn'-may buwurr* 'it came to me in a dream'), and also 'Dreaming', in the sense of patrilineally or otherwise relevant dreaming figure, or 'totem'. Since patrilineally recruited land-holding groupings, *mowurrwurr*, were (and to some extent, still are) salient, the creation of places may also be encoded in terms of a creator figure's having made a place, or landform, as that of a particular grouping of this kind, e.g. *bolk-bagala'-ma-yn* 'it "Bagala-ed" the place', or, 'made a Bagala place', where Bagala is the name of a *mowurrwurr*.

## 4. Placenames: types and examples

### 4.1 Physical descriptor placenames

Some placenames are taken to be purely descriptive of some feature or aspect of the designated place, of some activity or function associated with human use of the place, or some product available there. The linguistic structure of such names may be quite variable. One has to be told, or learn, that this is the character of the relationship between name and the designated place; names of similar linguistic structure may elsewhere be understood to relate to a dreaming manifestation. Examples are:

- (4) *ga-wutjwutj-mar* ('it boils, bubbles')  
 3-bubble-AUXPRES

This designates the Low Level Crossing of the Katherine River just south of the township. There is a bridge crossing and weir at this point, and the water can be quite turbulent, especially in flood; but older people say the water always 'boiled' there, even before the weir installation, as the river rushes through a narrowing of its banks and over stones. An interesting feature of this name is the fact that, for most speakers most of the time, it is rendered with the (Gimbat-area) *-mar* ending. Speakers of the *-mang* dialect form to whom I commented on this did not seem to see the observation as significant, and often merely rendered the name in their own dialect form: *ga-wutjwutj-mang*.

<sup>2</sup> The verb 'to put' in this dialect is *got-ma-*, but here the speaker uses a thematised form, created by stripping the preverb of its normal thematiser, and constructing the verbal phrase with the independent verb, *ju-* 'do, say'. For 'thematised' or stripped-down forms of verbs in consecutive narrative, see Merlan (1989).

<sup>3</sup> There is an important contrast in Jawoyn between the incorporating form *-guk-*, which may often be translated 'body', and sometimes refers explicitly to 'dead body' or 'corpse', and the incorporating form *-yuk-* which signals generically a 'live' body, especially of adult humans and other higher animate beings. Thus, the contrast: *ga-guk* 'there is a corpse' (or other body); *ga-yuk* 'he/she/it is alive'; *nga-guk-nanay* 'I saw a body/corpse'; *nga-yuk-nanay* 'I saw him/her'.

I explain the standard *-mar* form of the name to myself in terms of local history as I have come to understand it. After the Second World War, the CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation) established a crop experimentation station just upstream of this place. The person who quickly came to be its chief Aboriginal spokesman and headman was not a person from near Katherine, but a man who originated from Gimbat (and many of whose close relatives also, then or subsequently, came to settle around Katherine). People who resided in the camp describe how, on weekends, he would often lead a two-day hunting and foraging outing from the camp, and they would usually take off downstream on foot, through the Low Level. If he were prominent in leading the group and directing its movements, as all stories about the period indicate, then it is understandable that the form by which he designated this locale would come to be accepted by others, and made standard. This presupposes that the designation is relatively recent in origin, at least in this form. The objectively obvious difference between the *-mang* and *-mar* speech forms was not commented upon, in my experience, by any speakers: it was not picked out as a signal difference, although speakers were otherwise aware of general differences, and would often comment upon some other usages, mainly lexical ones, where these differed from their own.<sup>4</sup>

- (5) *ni-wak-barrarn* ('at the rockhole')  
LOC-water-cavity

This name designates a place where water could always be accessed in limestone tors.

- (6) *ni-borna-marr* ('at the poison water')  
LOC-liquid-poison

This name designates a small, almost isolated or billabong-like place on a river, where leaves of appropriate small trees in the vicinity were used to stun fish, making it possible to collect them easily. Note that while no dreaming activity is overtly associated with the above two places, at another location designated by a name of formally similar structure, there is a mythic association:

- (7) *ni-wak-betja*  
LOC-water-tea.tree [*Melaleuca dealbata*]

This designates a place where water could be obtained from tea-tree root, and Crocodile is said to have placed the *betj* trees here on his travels. (The name of the tree is *betj*; the final vowel is unexplained).

- (8) *gumbitj-bay*  
lancewood-TOP

This name designates a place where there is a thick stand of lancewood, making the area difficult to penetrate. The toponymic suffix *-bay* is recognised by Jawoyn speakers as being

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<sup>4</sup> I first learned what seemed to be the *-mang* dialect, in terms of this isogloss, from living at Barunga with a man who originated from Gimbat and his family. As I came to know the wider family (who lived around Katherine and Pine Creek), I observed with interest that his brother and his father (FB) used *-mar* forms, and furthermore had a number of other distinctively northern speech features characteristic of people from the upper Katherine River and Gimbat Station. I gradually realised that my host had adapted to speech of the eastern area, having lived around and in Barunga much of the time since its founding in the early 1950s, where most other Jawoyn speakers originated from the Mainoru River and other parts of this eastern area. None of these men ever commented on this particular isogloss, although they did have ideas about regional speech characteristics.

especially common in and around the Katherine township area. (Other names of this sort around the township are Bartjanyjanybay, Ngarratjbay (*ngarratj* 'white cockatoo'); further east, towards Maranboy, one encounters Marnangbay (see further this paper for interpretation), Gorrnggorngbay.

## 4.2 Dreaming placenames

By far the majority of placenames are understood to relate through some aspect of linguistic structure to creative acts or creator beings integrally associated with places. The linguistically most complete expressions of this kind are equivalent to full clauses, with or without free nominals in core functions in relation to the verbal expression.

One common type of complete clausal placename is formally intransitive; in terms of semantic content, it is quite common for such clauses to designate the motion or kind of movement attributed to the creator being in its association with the place. Such placenames also, without any exception that I know of, do not consist only of the verbal construction, but have the creator being in association with it represented by a free nominal in intransitive subject function. Examples are:

- (9) *bemang yarl'yarl-may* ('Blanket Lizard scurried')  
 blanket.lizard scurry-AUXPCON

This name designates a place near the Katherine Gorge, where the jagged top of a portion of a range of hills is associated with the creator Blanket Lizard, which is associated with another place in the vicinity, and with distant places to the north-west, near Pine Creek. Thus the name is an aspect of the presupposed storied context in terms of which Blanket Lizard is understood as having moved quite widely over this landscape. The directionality and sequence of his movements among places are not firmly fixed, and are open to quite wide-ranging interpretation, in a manner quite compatible with the open-ended designation of his movement in the placename.

There are some complete clausal constructions of existential or locational type, where what is predicated is the being or location in place of a creator being. As with movement clauses, the creator being is overtly designated by a free nominal:

- (10) *gundurk ga-bolk-jap-jiyi*  
 female.kangaroo 3-country-stand-AUX.PRES  
 'Female Kangaroo stands as country'

This name is used to designate striking twin peaks which can be seen in the distance to the west of Katherine. It may be that the formation is thought to resemble a kangaroo, but this was not strongly averred by informants. Rather, a plurality of kangaroos was understood to have moved towards Katherine from the west, and this placename was understood in relation to this background.

Other complete clauses predicate a mythic event which is neither simply motion nor location in place, but a story element or episode:

- (11) *burrirt mangal nga-wu-yiyn*  
 flying.fox woomera lose-AUX-RR.PPUN  
 'Flying Fox's woomera was lost'

This grammatically quite complex placename is understood to designate a mythic episode associated with a large waterhole in the King River, but details of the presupposed

background were not elaborated by the two informants with whom I visited this place. The first two apposed words are in possessive relationship: 'the woomera of Flying Fox'; but there is a possibility here, suggested by my informants, that 'woomera', as often is the case, is to be taken to mean the 'birthplace' of Flying Fox. (A male's birthplace is commonly referred to as his 'woomera'.)

There are clausal placenames intended to be understood in relation to features of place whose character is explained through the background story, i.e. these names are icons in which the linguistic sign recapitulates and provides an account of salient elements of the locale as produced through the mythic event. It is noticeable that where these clausal constructions are understood to be transitive, or even of middle voice (where the creator is both agent and medium of the creative outcome), the agent is characteristically NOT designated by a free nominal in construction with the verb form, but its identity is implicit, part of what is presupposed in people's understanding of the name. Some examples will clarify these points.

- (12) *dak-birle-got-mi-yi-nay*  
 anus-crack-put-AUX-RR-PCON  
 'it put itself arse-crack'

This name designates a place on the Katherine River, where the form of the locale is understood in relation to a story that the creator placed itself in country in such a way that its arse-crack is the cleft between two hills. Everyone who knows this place and the name understands the agent of this event, and the medium of the creative outcome, to be *goymarr* 'crocodile'. Though the free nominal does not occur in ordinary uses of the placename, it will be supplied in expanded versions such as resulted from my requests for elucidation: *goymarr dak-birle-gotmiyinay* (or opposite word order). The concept of 'expansion' seems to me important with respect to placenames like this one that are understood, in their compact structure, to presuppose a good deal of information. I came to understand certain kinds of 'expansion' as common Aboriginal practice, involving quasi-formulaic encodings of significance and further explanation, as I describe further below.

- (13) *bat wirrinay* ('rock turned')  
 rock ?turn.PCON

This name is used to designate a prominent and important hill formation in Gimbat Station. Its structure as given above is somewhat puzzling. It appears to be an intransitive clause structure, but I cannot identify it confidently with any verb. When, however, on various occasions I asked for further information about this place, the following expansion was often produced:

- (14) *matj bat wirriny-bu-nay*  
 wind rock turn-AUX-PCON  
 'the wind turned the rock'

The request, in other words, produced another similar clause, but one in which 'rock' emerges as the object of action by wind, the latter not occurring as a free nominal in ordinary uses of the name. These and other similar examples lead me to conclude that in most cases free nominals in clausal placenames are functionally intransitive subjects, or transitive objects; and that there is a tendency for transitive agents to be not overtly represented. I suggest this is probably best understood as deriving from the intersection of linguistic coding with a construction of presupposition graduated according to predictability, or the closeness



of connection between free nominals and the verbs with which they occur in construction. In general, of all core grammatical relations, transitive subject function will tend to involve the least predictable and least widely presupposable nominal, an agent. This, however, leaves uncertain the grammatical interpretation of some placenames such as the following:

- (15) *jambala warl'-may* ('Long-Necked Turtle dug')  
 long.necked.turtle dig-AUXPCON

This name is that of a large, wind-swept open billabong ('Leech Lagoon'), where in fact turtles are plentiful and were regularly hunted by foraging women with yamsticks out of the lairs into which the turtles had dug themselves in the mud. This place was the focal one of a patrilineally recruited group whose name, Jambalawa, also signals its association with this place. But how should the grammatical relations in this name be understood? Was Turtle digging? Or was it dug by something else? The verb *warl'-ma-*, which in the placenames has grammatically singular (zero) subject, was glossed for me as follows:

- (16) *Ni-garatj nginy-gan-way na-wak-miyn nginy-welang-warl'-mang*  
 LOC-sand 2SG-go.PRES-SUB NA-water-PRIV 2SG-CON-dig-AUX.PRES  
*nginy-le'-mang wak-u.*  
 2SG-search.for.PRES water-PURP  
 'When you go in a dry place, without water, you dig, you search for water.'

With reference to the placename, this person went on:

- (17) *Nawarnbay jambala narnbay buwurr,*  
 that longnecked.turtle that dreaming  
*buwurr gok mak-wo-nay narnbay warl'-mangay,*  
 dreaming SPEC make-AUX-PCON that dig-AUX.PCON  
*jambala warl'-mangay, bu-warl'-may na-bolo-waywo.*  
 I-n.turtle dig-AUX.PCON 3NSG-dig-AUX.PCON NA-old.person-all  
 'That turtle, that's a dreaming, what it made was a dreaming, that one dug,  
 the turtle dug, they dug (it), all the old people.'

This explanation contains the notion of Turtle digging, and making the dreaming (place), but also moves on to explain that old people dug turtle there. Formally, then, the placename may be an exception to the generalisation that the (transitive) agent of an action tends not to occur. Note that the activity attributed to turtle is precisely the activity known to be undertaken by people at this locality, in order to obtain turtles.

There are other examples of grammatically complete clause structures as placenames, where the interpretation of the name relates to a mythic episode, but the typically produced explanatory 'expansion' relates to another aspect of the presupposed story, and not to that encoded in the placename. For instance, a billabong on Gimbat Station is known as

- (18) *jey-wu-nay* ('he refused it')  
 refuse-AUX-PCON

When I asked various informants what this meant, they produced the following expansion, which after a number of occasions, I realised was formulaic, a standard way of conveying further information about this place:

- (19) *bon-guk-jeyn*  
 3/3NSG-body-eat.PPUN  
 '(it) ate them'

Requests for further elucidation would sometimes produce the free nominal *bolung* 'Rainbow Serpent' in construction with the verb form: 'Rainbow Serpent ate them'. What relates the name and the expansion is the content of a fuller story, which was eventually told to me on various occasions and, with some variations, may be paraphrased approximately as follows:

He was crying. People killed and cooked goanna and offered him the tail, but he kept refusing it (*jeywunay*): 'Something else, something else'. A little boy, he was crying for a woman. He kept on, the rain was drizzling down. A small turtle with stripes on his head looked, 'Yes, he's still crying here'. He went back and got Rainbow Serpent, and brought two diver ducks along. He listened, 'It's still a long way'. He brought in the diver ducks from the east. Rainbow Serpent encircled the people, ate them up (*bon-guk-jeyn*), and carried them along in his stomach. He vomited them up at Jeywunay. That's all. There where the billabong is, he put himself forever, there where the white rock is, this side of the billabong, that's where he vomited them. We call that place 'Jeywunay'. That's all.

It becomes apparent from this story that it was the boy who 'refused it' (even food delicacies like goanna's tail), because he was crying for something else. A further insight is sometimes offered by narrators who refer to the boy as *na-gomdutj*, a youth prior to initiation, to whom women are not allowed: he was crying for something illicit. And further, it becomes clear that the one who 'ate them up' was Rainbow Serpent, who had become angry. Rainbow swallowed people in his anger, and vomited them out, creating a white rock landform which, together with the nearby billabong, are the main physical features of this place that are always mentioned from afar, and visited on site. As it happened, a few of the senior men I knew well had been sequestered here as initiates, and had learned this story during their seclusion (perhaps with other elements that were not for general repetition).

The above story nicely illustrates the general character of exegetical 'expansions', which sometimes (as here) are not very different in character from the original, condensed clausal sort of placename itself. To 'he refused it', the expansion 'he ate them' adds another key episode in (what one eventually learns to be) a presupposed story context. Neither placename nor its expansion tends to occur with the appropriate free nominal forms; the first one that is produced upon questioning, in my experience, is 'rainbow serpent'.

This example might be taken as illustrative of a typical relationship between widely known and frequently repeated cultural texts and contexts. The placename is widely known, its significance understood as part of a non-arbitrary relation to a place, with its particular physical features. It is the coming to see and know these physical features that often appears to mediate the further unfolding of any discourse, and is one of the signals that produces the expansion 'he ate them'. In general Jawoyn, like other Aboriginal people, show a disposition to think that one cannot really understand places unless one goes there. The expansion is nevertheless formulaic and fairly readily available even at distance from the location, but is mediated by its relationship to the placename, and to a story which underlies it. For anyone who has learned enough to be able to relate them, the set of linked elements—placename, expansion, story, place—stantiate and realise culturally particular expectations: that a placename be meaningful via its non-arbitrary relation to physical place, and possibly also via conventional narrative and other forms. We might call these connections 'intertextual' except that they transcend speech, and bind knowledge of place, speech and other elements

together in a systematic constellation of place-related practices. This supports the sense of places and placenames as vehicles for encoding wider orders of knowledge understood to exist but not to be readily accessible, and reinforces an understanding of linguistic encoding as cryptic and multidimensional, a disposition which extends beyond placenaming, to song (Merlan 1987), and other multiply integrated Aboriginal dimensions of experience and knowledge (see e.g. Keen 1977). It is partly because each dimension of understanding is bound up with and condenses others that Aboriginal people often point to particular places as the 'truth' of their understanding, which 'prove' what they have been saying about the creation of places, and provide the basis for others to 'believe' as well. (All these terms are Kriol or English-based; the connotations of approximately comparable Aboriginal language terms would require further discussion). For the enculturated Aboriginal subject, the 'truth' seems to inhere in the place itself. But sociologically, it is formed by this nexus of interrelationships and its constitutive practices of understanding, reception and transmission.

Several other distinguishable types of placenames remain to be discussed. Though different from each other in some ways, two of these have in common that they tend to be associated with quite conventional and regular expansions, and in both there is a phonologically non-arbitrary relationship between the linguistic form of the name, and the form and content of the expansion. The relation between the placename and the expansion in each case has therefore something of the character of linguistic play, involving sound similarity.

The first set of placenames include 'delocutive' and onomatopoeic ones. I use the term 'delocutives' (following Benveniste 1971), for placenames understood to replicate the sound or utterance made by a creator figure. (However, the placename is usually more complex, or is like a cranberry compound in that it has 'left over' elements). Onomatopoeic placenames are imitative, not of speech or utterance, but some other kind of sound made by the figure. One learns that these names have this character only by asking, for example, who 'made' the place, and being answered by an explanatory expansion. Some of these are suffixed with the locative ending *-luk*, while others are not.]

(20) *derlerrmi-luk*

Expansion: *Lay got-may ngan-mo-ngayu, derlerr jungay.*  
Kang. put-AUX.PCON NG-bone-its *derlerr* said.PCON  
'Kangaroo put its bones (there), *derlerr*, it said.'

The form *derlerr* does not have an independent lexical meaning, but in this context it is intoned like a groan, or a sound of fatigue.

(21) *gurngurnbam*

Expansion: *Ngan-jorr-ngayu bolk-nekayn-wayn gurngurn jungay.*  
NG-foot-its place-tread.PPUN-SUB thudthud did.PCON  
'When it trod the ground with its foot, it went "thud thud".'

This placename designates a place associated with a mythic travelling kangaroo, and the name is taken to recapitulate the thudding sound made by the animal as it travelled. In this context, *-bam* is taken not to be independently meaningful; it is the leftover 'cran-' element. (There is a *ngan*-class noun *-bam* 'head').

(22) *womayn*

Expansion: *Garndalpurru guk-jap-garlanay wooo juy.*  
 Female.kang. body-stand-CAUS.PCON *wooo* said.PPUN  
 'Female Kangaroo stood her body up, *Woooo!* she said.'

Here too, *Wooo!* is a sound made by kangaroo, suggestive of the effort of her travel and/or transfiguration into country.

The above kinds of placenames grade into another large subset. These are 'cranberry' type names, but where some syllable or longer element is understood to be related to some ordinary language lexeme on the basis of strong sound resemblance, but usually not complete identity, between the two; and this element is understood to be an aspect of the significance of place. I could usually elicit these underlying non-arbitrary relations by asking what made the place. The answer usually amounted to an expansion which made apparent the relationship between the cran- element and a lexeme which, as part of the explanation, revealed the element of word play. Examples are:

(23) *barraway*

The name designates part of the second gorge in the Katherine River, and is explained as related to the word *barraya* 'Kookaburra', who is understood to have made this part of the river channel.

(24) *burkba*

Expansion: *dak-murk-murk-may gupu* ('Kangaroo constricted his anus')  
 anus-constrict-PCON kangaroo

This name designates a place in Eva Valley Station on a small river channel, and is understood in terms of the expansion given, on the basis of similarity of the (not independently meaningful) syllable *burk* with the syllable *murk*. No elaborate story could be elicited.

(25) *gunbokmo*

Expansion: *bok-got-mi-yi-na gupu* ('Kangaroo put his backside')  
 rump-put-AUX-RR-PCON kangaroo

The name is understood to relate to the *ngan*-class nominal *bok* 'backside, rump', which invariably occurs in the explanatory expansion, as above. The *ngan*-class nominal *mo* means 'bone', but this is not explicitly recapitulated in the usual expansion.

(26) *gornjatjirriyn*

Expansion: *ngan-gorn-ngayu got-mi-yi-nay garndalpurru*  
 NG-crotch-its put-AUX-RR-PCON female.kangaroo  
 'Female kangaroo put her crotch/vagina'

There are three potentially meaningful lexemes which make up this placename, which refers to a hill near upstream of Katherine town. The *ngan*-class nominal *gorn* 'crotch', however, is the only one which regularly figured in the usual expansion, above. The *ngan*-class nominal *jarr* 'leg' has the preconsonantal compounding form *jat* (as in *ngan-jat-bok* 'waist, upper part of pelvis below waist'); and *jirriyn* is the nominal 'one'. Yet neither of these elements typically received expanded explanation.

(27) *jenbirri*Expansion: *ngan-jen-ngayu* *got-mi-yi-nay* *gupu* ('Kangaroo put its tongue')  
NG-tongue-its put-AUX-RR-PCON kangaroo

This name designates a place in an area north of Katherine, near the Edith River, where there is understood to be a profusion of creator kangaroo trails. The syllable *jen-* is understood as the word 'tongue' (*ngan-jen-ngayu*), and this is the trace of Kangaroo understood as the core of transmissible significance concerning this place. To my knowledge, however, no particular landform is said to be the tongue.

(28) *lirrkworlk*Expansion: *mirrk-got-mi-yinay* *lay* ('Kangaroo put its chest')  
chest-put-AUX-RR.PCON kangaroo

The syllable *lirrk* of the name is understood through its expansion by the *ngan*-class nominal *mirrk* 'chest'. At least two senior speakers commonly varied in their designations of this place between *Mirrkworlk* and *Lirrkworlk*, illustrating that the framework of relationship between name and expansion is a source of creativity and potential change. The second syllable is potentially relatable to a *ngan*-class noun *worlk* 'fat, grease', but this was not the subject of explicit expansion. There did not appear to be an elaborated story connected with this place, beyond the notion of Kangaroo having travelled through it.

(29) *marnangbay*Expansion: *barna* *marnak* *got-mi-yi-nay*  
spotted.nightjar arm put-AUX-RR-PCON  
'Spotted Nightjar put its arm/wing.

There appears to be layered sound play here: the element *marnang-* is understood to be associated with *barna* 'spotted nightjar', and with the *ngan*-class nominal *marnak* 'arm', understood as the body part of the bird, and the whole as that which was transfigured as landscape.

(30) *mayawar*Expansion: *ngan-meya-ngayu* *got-may* *gupu* ('Kangaroo put his firestick')  
NG-firestick-its put-AUX.PCON kangaroo

Designating a place with a rockhole in the Katherine escarpment upland, the bisyllable *maya* is understood in relation to the nominal *meya* 'firestick' (a *Banksia dentata*, used to make a firestick, or a kind of candle).

(31) *nimondurrngdurrng*Expansion: *mon* *got-mi-yi-nay* *gupu* ('Kangaroo put his penis')  
penis put-AUX-RR-PCON kangaroo

This name designates a place understood to have been the site of a mythic kangaroo's circumcision, and also a place where boys were circumcised. Following *ni-*, the (*ngan*-class) locative prefix *mon* is understood as the *ngan*-class noun *ngan-mon-ngayu* 'penis'; the reduplicative final bisyllabic is not the subject of explicit expansion.

(32) *welwurrng*Expansion: *gupu* *ganay*, *welkmo* *garungay*  
kangaroo go-PCON firedrill twirl-PCON  
'Kangaroo went (travelled), he worked his firedrill (*welkmo*)'

The sound similarity here is that between (otherwise meaningless) *wele* and the noun *welkmo* 'firedrill' (made from *Premna acuminata*).

(33) *wer'miyam*

Expansion: *bemangwer'-may* ('Blanket Lizard vomited')  
blanket.lizard vomit-PCON

The name designates a place in the Katherine Gorge area where a stream rushes over rocks, producing a boiling whitewater. The name is understood as containing a nominalised element related to the verb *wer'-ma-* 'to vomit'.

(34) *galkjongoy*

Expansion: *gupu galk got-may* ('Kangaroo put wax')  
kangaroo wax put-PCON

This name designates Mount Shepherd, a striking hill with small tabletop near the entrance to Nitmiluk National Park. The name is understood to contain the element *galk* 'wax', the last bisyllable not explicitly explained.

(35) *gemoya*

Expansion: *gemo got-mi-yi-nay durrk ngan-gemo-ngayu*  
nose put-AUX-RR-PCON emu NG-nose-its  
'Emu (*durrk*) put its nose'

The name is understood as the noun stem *gemo* 'nose', the possessor of the body part always expanded as *durrk* 'emu'. The final meaningless syllable *-ya* is not explained or expanded.

In general, there is great variation as to whether or not placenames are understood to be structurally non-arbitrary, that is composed of a particular stem or lexeme explicitly relatable to other words by which it is expanded. There are some for which there is no linguistic expansion given which clearly relates the name to its understood mythic significance. Illustrating this contrast are (36) and (37):

(36) *jarukmele*

Expansion: *jaruk got-mi-yi-nay*  
red.apple put-AUX-RR-PCON  
'Red Apple (*Syzygium suborbiculare*) put itself'

Here *jaruk* in the name corresponds exactly to the word for 'red apple', and identity is assumed between the two (while *mele* is not related to any word, though there is a *ngan*-class nominal, *mele* 'bed, bedroll'). The linguistic relation of identity supports the continuing link of name and expansion (however the identity may have originated).

(37) *leliyn*

This name designates Edith Falls, where the creator figure is understood to be *bemang* 'Blanket Lizard'. I have never heard an expansion which supports, or relates the form of the placename to this understood story context. There is a considerable number of other placenames of this sort, e.g. *Jiberm*, *Gatjam*, *Jatjbarl*, *Bambort(luk)*, and others (most, like these, apparently monomorphemic). All of these places were standardly understood to have particular significances, but were not characterised by systematically related placenames and formulaic expansions as illustrated above.

We come finally to one of the most common, and seemingly simplest, type of Jawoyn placename, which nevertheless may be seen as being realised by several slightly variant structures. This type is realised by name of the creator being or that which is understood to inhere in place, with some kind of clearly identifiable toponymic prefixal and/or suffixal structure. The most common variant is composed of the name of that which is understood to inhere in the place, followed by the locative suffix *-luk*. Other variants are creator followed by the suffix *-la* (also locative, but probably to be most closely identified with other languages of the region)<sup>5</sup>; and suffixed with *-gorrang/-worrang*, or *-jarang/-yarang*. The former seems to designate 'general location of, surrounds'; while the latter is undoubtedly the lexeme 'dreaming'. Examples follow:

- |      |                          |                |  |
|------|--------------------------|----------------|--|
| (38) | <i>balatj-luk</i>        | <i>balatj</i>  | 'leech', 'leech place'   |
| (39) | <i>jokbarl-luk</i>       | <i>jokbarl</i> | 'hornet', 'hornet place' etc.  |
| (40) | <i>jawarl-luk</i>        | <i>jawarl</i>  | 'tawny frogmouth'  |
| (41) | <i>ngan-jutja-yarang</i> | <i>jutja</i>   | 'water goanna'   |
| (42) | <i>nguk-jarang</i>       | <i>nguk</i>    | 'excrement' (place where a devil is said to emerge and defecate on one's bedding at night) |
| (43) | <i>bukbuk-gorrang</i>    | <i>bukbuk</i>  | 'pheasant coucal'  |
| (44) | <i>jarlapo-worrang</i>   | <i>jarlapo</i> | 'gecko'  |

Compared to the others we have considered, this general type of placename is relatively explicit rather than presupposing, in that the character or entity explicitly signalled is understood to be the significant feature of place.

The recent two decades of land claims, site recording, and many other sorts of visits to country, have resulted in many occasions upon which Jawoyn people have been placed in the position of designating places where a name was not widely known, or known at all. (For an extended account of one such place, see Merlan 1998, Chapter 7). On a number of such occasions I have seen places designated by senior Jawoyn people with a name of the general type under consideration here, e.g. *Lorr-luk* 'Catfish place' (in the case referred to in Merlan 1998), where a salient feature in the landscape was a fish-shaped rock, and this rock was assumed to be a dreaming. I have also seen places designated in this way where the nominal chosen designates some noticeable physical attribute of place or a resource to be found there, and does not connote a mythic association. For example, on one occasion I was visiting a portion of the Katherine River downstream from the township with a woman who had lived there and worked on a peanut farm in the vicinity. When I asked her what the area was called, she said she could not remember a name. After a time she recalled that men had come to get wood for spears there, and wound up designating the place *Winja-luk* (*winja* 'spear'), using this as a name on several subsequent occasions in following days. It is undoubtedly through minor acts of creativity and repetition of this and similar kinds that some of the placenames of the more elaborate sorts described above also came to be routinised. But undoubtedly in the past when people were regularly on the move through country, such acts

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<sup>5</sup> The *-la* ending may be characteristic of placenames to be attributed to Dagoman and/or its congeners, which was probably the time-of-contact language of the immediate township area, and the area directly to the east. The word for 'camp' in Dagoman is *lan*. Dagoman, no longer spoken, was closely related to Wardaman and Yangman, not at all closely related to Jawoyn.

of creativity would have been frequent, and more densely interlinked with already widely known storied frameworks, and thus often less transparent in linguistic structure and associated meaning.

## 5. Conclusions

This paper has explored aspects of practices which sustained a general cultural structure: non-arbitrariness of the relationship between placenames and the places they designated. It has provided insight into differences between formal placename structures which range from those which were, in my experience, normally matched with particular kinds of expansions, and others which were maximally transparent. Some routine 'expansions', like that illustrated for Jeywunay, contribute new elements of a presupposed story context, and thus are additive rather than directly explanatory of the placename. The most common kind of expansion I encountered was illustrated through a number of examples. This involves a play on formal linguistic similarity between elements in the placename and other words which figure in the formulaic expansion, the relationship achieving and projecting the meaning normally associated with the place (usually, its dreaming identity or some motif of the dreaming story).

Elements of iconicity can be seen in various aspects of these practices: we have touched on the pervasive, even if somewhat abstract iconicity of placenames in general, in their conjuring up and recapitulating the dreaming content of place; and the more specific iconic modalities of delocutionary and onomatopoeic placenames. Another level at which the relationships within dreaming stories recapitulate other relationships is illustrated by at least two cases in which a dreaming story is a model for and of human relationships to these places. This can be seen in the understanding of the placename *Nimondurrngdurrng*: this place was created as a circumcision place by Kangaroo, and was a place for the circumcision of young boys in terms of the 'law' laid down by Kangaroo. It can also be seen in the understanding of *Jambala Warl'may*: as dreaming, Longnecked Turtle dug here, providing a model of and for the human exploitation of turtles in this place.

Finally, the simplest form of the motivated relationship between placename and its object is that in which the placename directly and transparently designates the being or thing understood as the entity inherent in place. I have indicated that this is used by speakers as the productive structure for the contemporary designation of unnamed places. It seems likely that this kind of designation will persist after the more highly textually related and linguistically least transparent types may have fallen out of general use.

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