

## DIALECTAL DIFFERENTIATION IN BĀGANDJI

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### 1. THE BĀGANDJI DIALECTS

Already in very early days the Europeans were struck not only by the fine appearance of Bāgandji people, but by the vast extent of the country occupied by the Bāgandji 'nation'. The views expressed by Cameron (1884:346) are typical. As Curr (1886:167) points out:

That speech varies so little amongst the several tribes that some of my correspondents are under the impression that there is but one language on the Darling.

That the languages of the Darling tribes differ so much from all others ...that I had some difficulty in tracing them to their source...

and he (Curr 1886:172) paints a picture of 'the flight of the Darling Adam, and of his descendants spreading themselves to the mouth of the Culgoa on the one hand, and to the mouth of the Murray on the other'. (Curr was anxious to include the Yaralde-type language of the lower Murray with Bāgandji).

Unfortunately, by the time recent fieldwork became possible the vast group of people speaking different Bāgandji dialects had declined pitifully in numbers. In 1957, S.A. Wurm was still able to work with a Bārundji speaker and to obtain some fractional information on Wiljagali, while the present writer has worked whenever possible over ten years with the last speakers of Bandjigali, Guṇu and Southern Bāgandji, hampered by quite particularly difficult and depressing fieldwork conditions: the most knowledgeable Southern Bāgandji man was only able to help with linguistic work on Good Fridays. Apart from the Guṇu and Bārundji dialects for which we have a short grammar and a sketch-grammar by R.H. Mathews (1902, 1904, and also one page of 'Ngunbalgo' MS), we are reduced to the use of old vocabularies and a

short text in Marawara, the southernmost Bāgandji dialect (Tindale 1939). From a comparison of the data in the vocabularies it would be easy to arrive at a distorted and exaggerated view of the great similarities between the dialects. A lexico-statistical comparison based on old vocabularies from the two dialects that represent the geographical extremes of Bāgandji territory, Guṇu from the Bourke area and Marawara from near Wentworth (Bulmer 1878) shows agreement in over 85 per cent of the items. There are many obvious mistakes in the old vocabularies: for instance Bulmer's vocabulary gives '*win, to see*', a word which would contravene the phonotactic rules of all Bāgandji dialects, including what we know of Marawara. Tindale's text (1939) shows that the normal Marawara word for '*to see*' was *bami-*. If one were to eliminate this kind of error, the correspondences between Guṇu and Marawara would be around 90 per cent. The correspondences between the extremes of the 'dialect chain' are therefore very close, and between intermediate dialects they are even closer.

Bāgandji people were conscious of the great lexical similarity and the few items that differed were always the subject of comment. George Dutton, the last Bandjigali, was a man of wide linguistic interests (Beckett 1958). He, for instance, stated "ḍilburu, that's my word for 'water'. Those other Bāgandji people say ḡugu". There was also the type of comment on articulation and intonation that one hears so frequently from speakers of Australian languages: Bandjigali was said to sound 'light' and Guṇu 'heavy'. Nevertheless everyone was agreed that they were all really one language, Bāgandji.

## 2. THE MAIN MORPHOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

There is however a major distinction within Bāgandji, just as there is in the Kamilaroi language group (Austin 1976): the northern dialects Guṇu and one Bārundji dialect (Mathews MS) use free person-markers, and the other dialects, as exemplified by S. Bāgandji, generally use bound person-markers. There are a number of other major differences. Some of these are presented in Table 1 (see also Wurm and Hercus, forthcoming):

TABLE 1  
 GUṂU - S. BĀGANDJI MORPHOLOGICAL FEATURES

	Guṁu	S. Bāgandji
Bound person markers are prevalent	-	+
Personal and demonstrative pronouns can be marked for tense	+	-
Personal possession markers are usually affixed	-	+
The allative is marked by 'an accented' morpheme and differs from the dative	+	-
Ergative case marking is restricted to singular pronouns	-	+

### 3. THE VERBAL WORD

Due to the morphological features listed above, the structure of Guṁu sentence is markedly different from S. Bāgandji. This can be illustrated, for instance, by the S. Bāgandji sentence

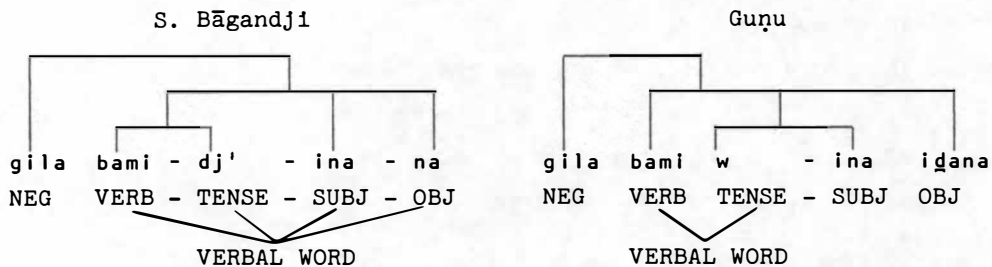
gila bami -dj- ina- -na  
 not see -PAST- 1 pl SUBJ- (bound) 3 sg OBJ (bound)

'We never saw her.'

The order of elements is the same in Guṁu, though the sentence is basically different in its constituent analysis:

gila bami wina idana  
 not see PAST we he OBJ

The difference in structure may be illustrated as follows:



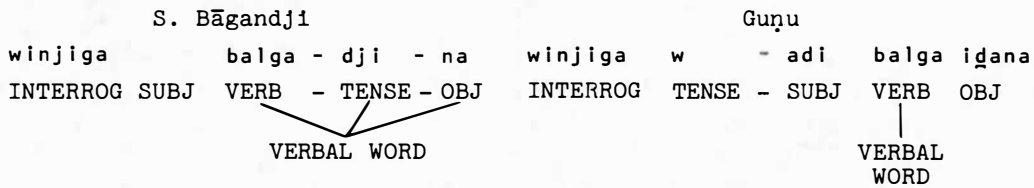
Interrogative sentences differ only slightly in the order of elements between the two dialects:

S. Bāgandji: winjiga balga - dji - na  
 who hit - PAST - 3 sg OBJ (bound)

'Who (pl.) hit him?'

and Guṁu: winjiga wadi balga idana  
 who PAST-they hit he OBJ

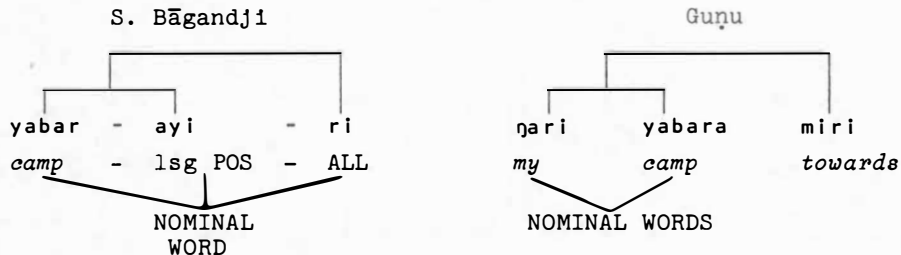
But the constituent analysis differs considerably:



It is evident from these examples that the verbal word in Guṇu is much briefer than in Southern Bāgandji. In Guṇu, the verbal word generally incorporates only the aspect markers if these are present; in S. Bāgandji the verbal word incorporates aspect and tense markers as well as pronoun subject- and object-markers.

#### 4. THE NOMINAL WORD

In noun phrases the difference between the two dialects is less marked, as is shown by the following example:



*'towards my camp'*

This is the preferred word order, but when focusing on the possessor it is possible to say in S. Bāgandji:

ṅayi yabar-ayi - ri  
my camp -lsg POS - ALL

and in Guṇu it is also possible to say:

yabara ṅari miri  
camp mine towards

The order of elements can still be regarded as basically the same, as for instance also in:



*'for his fat (we kill him)'*

In noun phrases, as is evident from these examples, both the order of elements and the constituent analysis in the two dialects are identical,

and yet the nominal word in Guṇu is clearly much shorter than in S. Bāgandji.

#### 5. PHONETIC DISTINCTIONS

These differences in the verbal and nominal word lead to the major surface phonetic distinctions that make Guṇu 'sound different though it is really the same'.

As shown above, both verbs and nouns have normally added to them many more bound morphemes in S. Bāgandji than in Guṇu, and these affixes are subject to morphophonemic rules at the junctures. These rules concern mainly the assimilation of vowels that become contiguous: thus a + u and u + a result in a long open mid vowel [ɔ̄] or diphthong [ɔ̄<sup>u</sup>] that is accented and on a rising intonation. This phonetic unit is totally absent from Guṇu, but is very common in S. Bāgandji, as for instance in:

gaṇmadjinduana  
 gaṇma - dj' - indu - ana  
 take - PAST - 2sg Ag - 3sg OBJ  
 [kǎṇmadjindɔ̄na]  
 'You took it.'

Similarly the diphthong [ai] is extremely rare in Guṇu, but it is common in morpheme junctures in S. Bāgandji, where it may even occur twice within the same word:

ṇabayigayi  
 ṇaba - yiga - ayi  
 block - 3pl SUB - 1sg OBJ  
 [ṇapaikai]  
 'They lock me up.'

The corresponding Guṇu sentence is:

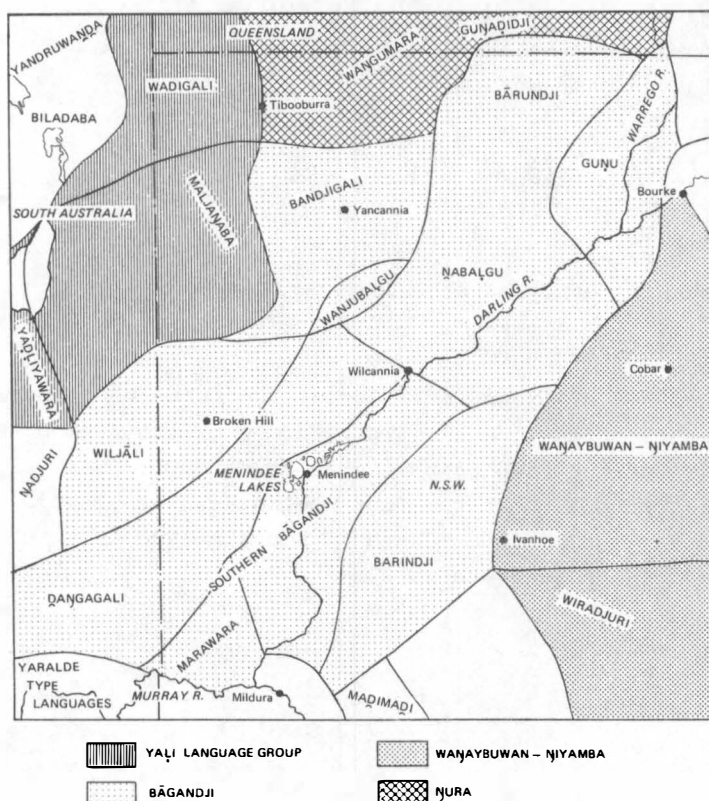
ḡaḡa - ṇadi - ṇana  
 block - PRES they - me

The sequence -uayi found only across junctures was pronounced [ɔ̄]. It was never recorded in Guṇu. There are many other minor phonetic differences, but the fact that weighed most heavily with Bāgandji speakers was probably that the Guṇu nominal or verbal word usually has only one accent, while in S. Bāgandji there are usually two, the second accent being on the juncture vowels.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In the sixties, speakers of Bandjigali, S. Bāgandji and Guṇu were still living on the reserve at Wilcannia, in the same street (the only one) and were able to communicate with each other without any great difficulty, all speaking 'Bāgandji'. The unifying features in the dialects were an identical phonemic system, great similarity in vocabulary and similarity, though not identity, in the order of elements. The dividing features were the major differences in morphology, constituent structure and phonetics. It was obvious that the similarities overrode the differences and constituted the notion of Bāgandji baḷgu 'Bāgandji speech'. These unifying features made the various forms of speech 'dialects' rather than separate languages. Attempts at diachronic studies (which are still in progress) of the dialects tend to confirm this view of unity which was evident socio-linguistically among the Bāgandji. Despite this unity, the problems of genetic relationship versus regional (areal) relations are still so much in need of clarification that no one would venture now to speak with Curr of 'the Darling Adam'.

MAP 1  
LANGUAGES OF NORTH-WESTERN N.S.W.



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- n.d. An unpublished MS, made available to me by the Mathews family and R.M.W. Dixon, has one page devoted to Ngunnbalgo which is probably 'Naualko'. There are also three pages which give a sketch of the 'Parndji' language. His notebook 2, pp.73-75, contains information on the 'Barrandyi' language.

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**WURM, S.A. and L.A. HERCUS**

- forth-coming 'Tense Marking in Guṇu Pronouns'.