Discourse and Djambarrpuyŋu: three features

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Abstract

Some of the world's lesser known linguistic systems have discourse features that are not in accord with the usual topic-vs.-comment splits, whatever contents are ascribed to either (Chafe 1976; Li and Thompson 1976). The data and observations presented here should be of value in revising or redefining terminology and concepts relating to discourse at a universal level, since in Djambarrpuyŋu, most of the characteristics of the various discourse functions are packaged quite differently and cross-cut the bounds discussed in much of the literature on the subject. It follows that this language presents yet another case which does not fit traditional models but must be described on its own terms, thereby enriching our overall understanding of discourse structure. Three discourse tactics will be discussed herein: (1) fronting (as opposed to unmarked word order), which is a means of EMPHasis, (2) the suffix nydja, *which is a mark of OPPosition, and (3) the suffix* -nha, *which is a mark of SEQuence (either logical or chronological). Fronting and* -nydja *can be stylistic, i.e. they have no syntactic relevance and can, to a large extent, be present or not according to an individual speaker's preference. However, this is not the case for* -nydja *in its use as a switch-reference marker, nor for* -nha *as a sequence marker.*

NOTE: FOR A COMPLETE LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS ARTICLE, SEE THE APPENDIX ON PAGE 873.

1. Background notes on Djambarrpuyŋu[1]

Djambarrpuyŋu is a dialect of the Yolŋu subfamily (Schebeck n.d.; Wood 1978; Zorc 1978), which has also been called the Murrngic family (Voegelin and Voegelin 1977: 241), which in turn is a member of the Pama-Nyungan family of Australian languages. This dialect is spoken in

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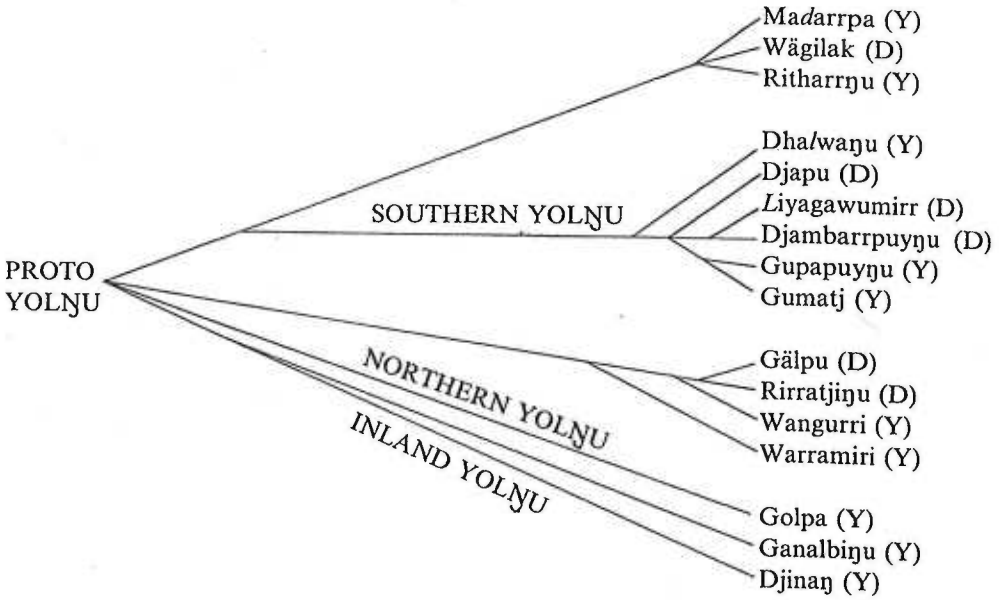

Figure 1. *Genetic position of Djambarrpuyŋu within Yolŋu-Matha. Zorc has expanded his preliminary subgrouping (1978), based on 50, to 100 functors (pronouns, demonstratives, case-marking suffixes, numerals, temporals, preverbal particles, etc.), and posits the above tree. Data for Ganalbiŋu and Djinaŋ have been kindly supplied by Bruce Waters (SIL). This subgrouping does not differ substantially from that of Wood (1978: 59) derived from a lexicostatistical classification, but Wood's tree includes many more dialects and communilects*

northeastern Arnhemland in communities such as Yurrwi (Milingimbi), Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island), Raminginiŋ, Gapuwiyak (Lake Evella), and Yirrkala, and is used in the bilingual education program on Elcho Island. It is closely related to speech varieties such as *L*iyagawumirr, Gupapuyŋu, and Gumatj, spoken in the same area and often in the same communities. Speakers are polylingual, knowing the above dialects and understanding (if not speaking) several more distantly related members of this Yolŋu subfamily, such as Gälpu, Rirratjiŋu, Wangurri, and Ganalbiŋu (see Figure 1 for genetic relationships). Each of these speech varieties is represented by one or more clans belonging to one of two moieties (Dhuwa or Yirritja).[2] Marriage rules dictate a selection of spouse from the opposite moiety (and, further, from the proper totemic subsection):[3] parents will speak distinct dialects, if not languages. Children grow up learning their mother's language, but as young adults they are expected to make a transition to father's language. Because of this and other factors,[4] Yolŋu-Matha shares a large and common lexical pool, whereas grammatical and discourse features clearly distinguish and mark the various speech varieties.[5]

The phonology of Djambarrpuyŋu is given in Table 1. We follow the

Table 1. *Phonology of Djambarrpuyŋu*

	Bilabial	Lamino-dental	Apico-alveolar	Lamino-palatal	Apico-domal (retroflex)	Velar
Lenis (word-initial and medial)	b	dh	d	dj	*d*	g
Fortis (word-medial and final)	p	th	t	tj	*t*	k
Nasal	m	nh	n	ny	*n*	ŋ
Glide	w		rr	y	r	
Lateral			l		*l*	
Vowels (short)		u	i	a		
Vowels (long) (in first syllable only)		o	e	ä		

In addition, there is a glottal stop ('), which is a feature of syllable prosody, and does not have segmental status (Wood 1978: 80ff; Morphy i.p.); in the orthography it is written where it appears phonetically, e.g., *bala'* 'house' (contrast *bala* 'away, thither'), *djawar'yun* 'to pierce, spear' (contrast *djawaryun* 'to be tired/bored'). Syllable types: CV, CVC, CVCC; e.g. *ga* 'and', *goŋ* 'hand', *gulk* 'cut'. A large number of dissimilar clusters occur across syllable boundaries; e.g. *gur.tha* 'fire', *gany.bu* 'fishnet', *gal.ŋa* 'skin, bark', *män.ŋu* 'take it!', *burk.thun* 'float'.

established orthography, designed by B. Lowe, which is now in use for Djambarrpuyŋu, Gupapuyŋu, and Gumatj literature in bilingual schools.

2. Word order

2.1. *Unmarked word order*[6]

In Djambarrpuyŋu (Dj) word order is not relevant for the indication of NP functions; however, it does have a discourse function (2.2). Case is indicated by a variety of suffixes (see Table 2), and the normal unemphasized word order for statements[7] is SVO, as in

(1) *D*irramu -y nhä-ŋal garrtjambal -Ø.
man ERG see P_1(2) kangaroo UNM
'The man saw a/the kangaroo.'

A different construction can obtain according to the referential hierarchy (Silverstein 1976) of the object — totemic or nontotemic[8] (henceforth TO and NT respectively). Compare (1) above and

Table 2. *Case-marking suffixes of Djambarrpuyŋu. The cases are distributed over five classes of nominals:* totemic *(TO)*[8] *(including personal names, kin terms, and animals of some sacred significance),* nontotemic *(NT) (including inanimate objects, plants, and nontotemic animals),* place names, pronouns, *and* deictics

	Totemic nouns	Nontotemic	Place	Pronouns	Deictics
ERGative	-y (-dhu, -thu)	-y	#	(ŋa)rra-θ[10]	dhiyaŋ
UNMarked	-θ	-θ	-θ	(ŋa)rra-θ[10]	dhuwal
ACCusative	-ny (-nha)	-θ	#	ŋarrany	dhuwal
GENitive	-w (-gu, -ku)	-w	#	(ŋa)rraku[10]	dhiyak
ABLative	-Galaŋaŋur	-ŋur	-ŋur	ŋarrakalaŋaŋur	dhipuŋur
LOCative	-wal (-gal, -kal)	-ŋur	-θ	ŋarrakal	dhiyakal
ALLative	-wal (-gal, -kal)	-lil	-lil	ŋarrakal	dhipal
PERgressive	-Galaŋakurr	-kurr	-kurr	ŋarrakalaŋakurr	balakurr
ASSociative	-Galaŋawuy	-wuy/-puy	-wuy	ŋarrakalaŋuwuy	dhiyakuwuy
PRODuctive	-wuŋ (-guŋ, -kuŋ)	-wuŋ	#	ŋarrakun	dhiyakun
EXIStential	-mirriŋu	-mirr	#	#	'dhuwalmirr'
PRIVative	-miriw	-miriw	#	'ŋarramiriw'	#

Certain terms may be reserved for syncretic surface cases; e.g. ABSolutive for the Nontotemic and Deictic UNM + ACC, or NOMinative for Pronoun ERG + UNM. Note also that the Totemic and Pronoun LOC + ALL, Nontotemic ABL + LOC, and Place UNM + LOC are syncretic respectively. In the case of *-ŋur*, this is the result of final vowel loss among certain functors in Dj; in Gumatj and Gupapuyŋu the NT-ABL is *-ŋuru*, while the NT-LOC is *-ŋura*. The first allomorph listed is that found after stems ending in vowels or continuants, the second after nasals, and the third after fortis stops. Other conventions: -G is a morphophoneme that behaves as do the allomorphs for the TO-GEN. # = such nominals do not occur in that respective case. Quotes (' ') enclose forms limited to idiomatic expressions.

(2) *D*irramu -y nhä-ŋal garrtjambal -nha.
man ERG see P_1(2) kangaroo ACC-TO

(2) has the same translation as (1), but here the informant considers *garrtjambal* 'kangaroo' as part of his totemic system.

When the object NP (in the broad sense of ACC, ALL, ABL, etc.) is a pronoun, the normal word order is SOV,[9] as in

(3) *D*irramu -y ŋarra- ny nhä -ŋal.
man ERG I ACC see P_1(2)
'The man saw me.'

(4) *D*irramu -θ ŋarra- kal marrtji -n.
man UNM I ALL go P_1(3b)
'The man came to me.'

(5) *D*irramu -θ (ŋa)rra- ku[10] waŋa -n.
man UNM I GEN talk P_1(4)
'The man asked for me.'

Table 3. *Djambarrpuyŋu verb suffixes and provisional classification*

Group	Base	Future	$Past_1$	$Past_2$	Comment
1	-un	-urr	-urr	-una	most productive class
2	-ma	-ŋ(u)	-ŋal	-nha	CAUSative, FACTitive
3	-mirr	-mirr	-min	-minya	REFLexive, RECIProcal
3a	-i + rr	-θ	-n	-nya	INCHoative
3b	-i +	-θ	-n	-nya	7 stems
4	-a +	→ + i	-n	-nha	historically old stems
5	-an	-ul	-ar	-ana	approximately 50 stems
6	-θ	-θ	-θ	-θ	Makassarese/English loans

Note: the verbal system of Dj has yet to be described clearly and convincingly. The labels used here reflect one basic semantic attribute of each of the four verb forms. Other scholars (Lowe, Ross, Christie) use labels that identify the inflections on a strictly formal basis; see Table 4 for a comparison.

Table 4. *Comparison of verbal system labels*

Our label	Alternate label	Function(s)
Base (BAS)	Primary	simple present, past, or future (with preverbal particles, e.g. *ga* PROGgressive, *dhu* FUTure)
Future (FUT)	Secondary	definite or tomorrow future; positive or negative imperative; past negative for nonspecific or today inflection
$Past_1$ (P_1)	Tertiary	specific or recent past
$Past_2$ (P_2)	Quaternary	remote past; negative of specific past; used in derivations for CAUSatives, RECiprocals, ADJectivals, INFinitives

Elements followed by + are considered to belong to the base or stem, e.g., *wäŋa + wäŋ + i*, *wäŋa-n*, *wäŋa-nha* (group 4) 'to speak' or *marrtji+*, *marrtji+θ*, *marrtji-n*, *marrtji-nya* (group 3b) 'to go, walk'.

Examples (3–5) also give a glimpse of the complex verb morphology exhibited by Dj. A provisional classification of these verbs and their various forms can be found in Tables 3 and 4.

2.2. *Fronting*

Fronting in Dj involves bringing any syntactic phrase forward from (or to the left of) its unmarked position in the sentence or clause; this may be accomplished by movement to initial position (FI), or merely by dislocation to the left of its normal position (FR). Fronting can obtain with any

syntactic phrase, except subjects (see 2.1 and 3), and often does so in conjunction with either *-nydja* or *-nha* (the allomorphs of which can be found in Table 5).

(a) *Fronting verbs.* In the following example, a man is out in the bush looking for food:

(6) Galk -urr ŋayi, bala *d*irramu -y nhä-ŋal- nha garrtjambal
wait P_1(1) he then man ERG see P_1(2) SEQ kangaroo
-θ.
UNM
'He stood quiet, then the man saw a kangaroo.'

The informant glossed this sentence as, 'The first thing he did was wait, then the man saw a kangaroo.' The 'seeing' + *-nha* is a consequence of his waiting in hiding (section 4). Contrast also examples (24) and (25).

(b) *Fronting NPs.* In the UNM (Object) case for nontotemic nouns, compare

(7) Narra -θ nhä-ŋal bäpi -θ.
I UNM see P_1(2) snake UNM
'I saw a snake.'

(8) Nunhi bili bäpi -θ ŋarra -θ nhä-ma yawungu.
DEIC-2 same snake UNM I UNM see BAS(2) yesterday
'This same snake I saw yesterday.'
---FI-----

In the ACC case for totemic nouns,

(9) Wa*t*u -ny ŋarra-θ bu -mar.
dog ACC I UNM kill P_1(2b)
--FI--
'The dog, I killed (it).'

The above is said by Speaker B in answer to a question from Speaker A:

(10) Wanha ŋunhi ŋarra -ku wa*t*u?
where DEIC-2-UNM I GEN dog
'Where is that dog of mine?'

Again, the following example (12) answers the question (11):

(11) Nhaltj -an Yukuyuku -nhɑ[11] -ny?
do-what? BAS(5) YB ACC OPP
'What happened to Younger Brother?'

(12) Yukuyuku -ny dharpu -ŋal Ŋapipi -y.
YB ACC spear $P_1(2)$ MB ERG
---FI---
'Younger Brother, Uncle speared (him).'

On a parallel with the last example, note the following:

(13) Napipi -ny dharpu -ŋal Yukuyuku -y, muka?
MB ACC spear $P_1(2)$ YB ERG Qp
--FI--
'Was it Uncle whom Younger Brother speared?'

answered by

(14) Yaka, Yukuyuku -θ dharpu -nha -wuy[12] Ŋapipi -wuŋ.[12]
no YB UNM spear $P_2(2)$ ASS MB PROD
'No, it was Younger Brother who was speared by Uncle.'

Consider the following fronted phrases in a brief dialog elicited by the question, 'What did you do on Saturday?'

(15) We*ti*' -lil ŋarra -θ marrtji +θ.[13]
wallaby ALL I UNM go BAS(3b)
---FI---
'I went after wallaby.'

(16) Bu -ma[13] nhe -θ, wo bäyŋu?
kill BAS(2b) you UNM or none
--FI--
'Did you get any or not?'

(17) Ŋi,[14] lurrkun' -θ ŋarra -θ bu -ma.[13]
yes three UNM I UNM kill BAS(2b)
--FR--
'Yes, three I got.'

(c) *Fronting adverbs.* Note the answer to the following question:

(18) Bala nhaltj -an -a nhe?
then do-what? BAS(5) SEQ you
'Then what did you do?'

(19) Räli ŋarra roŋiyi +rr bala wäŋa-lil napurru -ŋgal.
hither I return BAS(3a) to home ALL our (excl) ALL
-FI-
'Here I returned to our home.'

The locative deictics also function adverbially:

(20) Nunhi-y ŋunhi-θ *d*irramu -θ nhina +θ
DEIC-2-PRES DEIC-2-UNM man UNM sit BAS(4)
--FI--
ga.
PROG
'There that man is sitting.'

There is a small class of stems that function as adverbs, even though they are inflected as verbs; they modify the verbs with which they agree and which they usually follow:

(21a) Djawar+y -urr ŋayi mirithi -n.
tired P_1(1) he INTENSIVE P_1(3a)
'He was very tired.'

(21b) Mirithi -n ŋayi djawar+y -urr.
INTENSIVE P_1(3a) he tired P_1(1)
---FI---
'He was VERY tired.'

(22a) Mirithi -r ŋarra dhuwal dja*n*ŋarr(th-irr).[15]
INTENSIVE BAS(3a) I DEIC-1 hungry BAS(3a)
---FI---
'I am VERY hungry.'

(d) *Fronting adjectives.*

(22b) Dja*n*ŋarr ŋarra dhuwal mirithi -rr.
hungry I DEIC-1 INTENSIVE BAS(3a)
--FI--
'I am very hungry.'

(23) Manymak ŋayi *d*irramu.
good he man
--FI--
'He is a good man.'

(e) *Paragraph cohesion.* The repetition of this same strategy can be used to mark the boundaries of a paragraph, as in a story entitled

(24) Linyu bala we*t*i -w' marrtji+θ.
we-2-excl toward wallaby GEN go BAS(3b)
----FR----
'We two went wallaby hunting.'

Note that *bala wetiw'* is here dislocated from its normal place after the verb; this NP cannot be interpreted as forming a compound verb (with *marrtji*) precisely because of its GEN case ending.[16]

The first line of the story proper then sets the picture, but it bears no discourse strategy of any kind. However, each of the following two sentences of the first paragraph starts with the same verb which is fronted and followed by its subject:

(25) Waŋgany -dhu walu -y, ŋarra ga rra -ku bäpa' -mirriŋu
one ERG time ERG I and I GEN father EXIS(TO)
linyu marrtji +θ weti -w'. Marrtji +θ linyu
we-2 go BAS(3b) wallaby GEN go BAS(3b) we-2
--FI--
ga
PROG
dhumuk -kurr, yurr linyu ŋunhi märr weyin' marrtji -n.
thicket PER but we-2 then quite long go P_1(3b)
--FR--
Manymak, marrtji +θ linyu ga, bala linyu nhina-n
'well' go BAS(3b) we-2 PROG then we-2 sit P_1(4)
---FR-- 'stopped'
gandarr -ŋur -nha yän djawar -djalk+th -un...
halfway LOC SEQ so-that tired throw BAS(1)
'relieve exhaustion'
'One time, my father and I, we-two went (hunting) for wallaby. We walked and walked through heavy bushland, and we went on for quite some time. Well, we kept on walking, and then we stopped about half-way so that we could rest ourselves...'

Marrtji linyu could be translated as 'walk we did' or 'we walked and walked'. The second sentence contains the dislocated adverbial *märr weyin'* in its second clause, which serves to emphasize 'quite a long time'. The third sentence begins with a discourse particle, *manymak*, often employed in narratives of this kind for audience rapport. The three instances of fronting have been used to stress the main ideas and cohesion of the paragraph.

From the above examples can be inducted the effect and discourse value of fronting in Dj: everywhere the fronted item adds extra information to a stock of presuppositions (Keenan 1971; Schiebe 1978), either immediate (from an earlier context) or general and cultural, which speaker and addressee share in common.

However, if we are constrained to give an overall and yet precise account of the details or rules that obtain in Dj discourse from the terminology extant in most literature on the topic, we run into difficulty. Among examples in our corpus, some represent *given* information (9, 12, 14, 25, 41), while others are *new* and also *contrastive* (13, 15, 17); others again are better accounted for as *contrastive only*, for instance, some of the fronted adverbs and deictics

(19, 20, 21b, 22a). This list is by no means exhaustive, but since all these items bear the same construction, it suffices to illustrate that the common denominator of fronting must be found elsewhere. It is clear that this device in Dj is a means of emphasizing the fronted element, in a very general and broad sense: through the very mechanics of displacing the FRonted element to the left of its expected position, FR gives it added importance, insists on it, and strengthens its impact on the flow of discourse. Whether the phrase is moved to sentence-initial position or merely dislocated to the left of its normal place is just a question of degree. Obviously, the strategy does not apply to subjects, since their rightful place is at the start of an unmarked sentence. It follows that a different strategy will have to be used for them. This will be discussed in the next section, along with further precisions as to the EMPHasis function of FRonting in Djambarrpuyŋu.

3. -nydja

The allomorphs of this discourse morpheme are given in Table 5. Note in the examples below that it is added to syntactically complete phrases, but can only occur ONCE per clause, except in instances of agreement between two phrasal elements (e.g. Adj + N, Deic + N, Pro + N [32]).

As to the meaning of *-nydja*, it is the following: for the very reason above of its occurring only once in a clause, a unit marked with *-nydja* is singled out, therefore highlighted/EMPHasized, i.e. expressed with extra vigor,

Table 5. *Allomorphs of Djambarrpuyŋu discourse-sensitive suffixes*

Stem ending in	*-nydja* opposition	*-nha* sequence	Totemic accusative
Vowel	-ny	-n	-ny
Continuant		-a	
[l,*l*,r,rr,w,y]	-nydja	-nha	-nha
Voiceless C	-tja	-nha	-nha
Nasal	-dja	-nha	-nha

Note: Several syncretic forms occur with the TO-ACC; however, they are generally disambiguated in context. The *-nha* SEQuence morpheme is also syncretic with the $PAST_2$ form of certain verbs (see Table 3), e.g., *nhä-ma* 'see'→*nhä-nha* 'seen', *mo-ma* 'forget'→*mo-nha* 'forgotten', *bu-ma* 'hit, kill'→*bu-nha* 'hit/killed', *ŋä-ma* 'hear'→*ŋä-nha* 'heard', *dhärra* 'stand'→*dhärra-nha* 'stood', etc. Although possibly historically related, there is rarely any confusion between them because $PAST_2$ forms are always *-nha* (i.e. they do not lose the final vowel), while the discourse forms take the allomorphs *-n* or *-a* after the majority of verb inflections. Again, they are disambiguated in context on the basis of verb agreements (i.e. the discourse utilizes $PAST_2$ forms elsewhere, if not throughout) in contrast to logical or temporal SEQuence(s) to previous clauses.

just as it is when dislocated, whether FI or merely FR (see above, 2.2). In addition, a unit marked with *-nydja* is in OPPosition to all other possible units of the same grammatical class that are not so marked. The two, + *-nydja* and — *-nydja,* form the OPPosing and complementary subsets of a set that contains them both and is that particular universe of discourse.

It follows logically that each subset in this set is SPECifically determined by its very OPPosite. OPP and SPEC are thus NOT two separate characteristics: quite the contrary, they proceed from each other; the SPECificity of these subsets is generated by the fact that they are disjunct subsets of the same universe of discourse. This can be formalized as follows:

$E^+ \cup E^- = U$
$E^+ \cap E^- = \emptyset$

where U is the universe of discourse, E^+ the subset marked with *-nydja*, and E^- the unmarked subset. The same can be thus exemplified: X-*nydja* means 'that particular X and no other' (and see below). To sum up, a unit marked with *-nydja* shows both syntagmatic contrast — because it is the only unit in the clause to be so singled out — and systematic OPPosition because it is SPECifically OPPosed to all other possible unmarked units in the same universe of discourse. Here, SPEC is inherent to OPP and vice-versa. In some contexts, SPEC will be more immediately sensible than OPP, elsewhere the other way around; this depends both on the meaning of the verb and on the context; but in any case one cannot go without the other, for the two are inherently one and the same feature. This obtains quite apart from any given–new dichotomy (Bolinger 1961: 87; Chafe 1976: 33ff), which is irrelevant here. Accordingly, units marked with *-nydja* will be understood as containing OPP/SPEC as the same single meaningful feature.

3.1. *Subjects* + nydja

A subject, whether S_t or S_i, marked with *-nydja* shows the same highlighting as a fronted nonsubject. Examples of these have been opposed to suffixless subjects wherever possible:

(26) Dhuwal rrupiya ŋarra -ku. Dhuwal -nydja rrupiya *d*irramu -w.
DEIC-1 money I GEN DEIC-1 OPP money man GEN
'This money is mine. THIS is the man's money.'

There is an OPPosition[17] here between the first and second subject. This is specifically part of the meaning of *-nydja*, whether with a subject or a nonsubject.

(27) Ŋarra ga Lewukaŋ marrtji -n do' -lil,
I and [Name] go P_1(3b) store ALL
bala ŋayi -ny gärri -na[11] -n.
then he OPP enter P_1(3b) SEQ
Bala ŋarra -ny ga -n galk -urr ba*d*ak -nha yän.
then I OPP PROG P_1(4) wait P_1(1) still SEQ just
'Lewukang and I went to the store, and he went in.
'And I [OPP] just stayed (outside) waiting.'

(28) Djanda -ny wa*nd*i -n bala, ga bäyŋu wiripu -nydja
goanna OPP run P_1(3b) away, and not the others OPP.
'The goanna ran away, but not the other animals' (previously mentioned in the story, i.e. these and no others).

Again,

(29) *D*irramu -wurr -nydja marrtji -n garriwa -lil
boy PLURAL OPP go P_1(3b) turtle ALL
ga märrma dharpuŋal.
and two spear P_1
'A group of boys went for turtle and speared two.'

This last example brings home the fact that a unit marked with *-nydja* takes on an element of SPECificity: the story is told about a specific group of boys, that particular group involved, and no other (see gloss under [35] below).

(30) *D*irramu -y -nydja nhä -ŋal garrtjambal -nha,[19]
boy ERG OPP see P_1(2) kangaroo ACC
ga bäyŋu -n miyalk -thu -nydja.
and not SEQ woman ERG OPP
'[It was] the boy [who] saw the kangaroo, and not the woman.'

(31) Garrtjambal -nydja nhä -nha -ra- wuy *d*irramu -wuŋ,
kangaroo OPP see P_2(2) FM[20] ASS[21] boy PROD
ga bäyŋu -n djanda -ny
and not SEQ goanna OPP
'The kangaroo was seen by the boy, and not the goanna.'

(32) Narra ga -n nhina -n dhumuk -ŋur,
I PROG P_1(4) sit P_1(4) forest LOC
ga ŋayi -ny wäŋa -ny ba*d*ayala' -thi -na[11] -n.
and it OPP place OPP light INCH P_1(3a) SEQ
'I was sitting in the forest, and *the place* became bright.'