

DISCOURSE VERBS [IDEOPHONES] IN YOLNGU-MATHA

R. David Zorc
School of Australian Linguistics

November 1984

1. IDENTIFICATION OF DISCOURSE VERBS.

There is a distinct part of speech in the Yolngu-Matha family of languages, which I call "discourse verbs". The term "ideophone" would be equally suitable, although it does not encapsulate the specific discourse function they have. They are identifiable on the basis of four intersecting criteria: (a) phonologically, they are monosyllabic, (b) morphologically, they are uninflected, (c) grammatically they are replacive, i.e., they stand for verbs or verb phrases with which they share a rather straightforward semantic connection, and (d) contextually, they can only occur within a given discourse structure. Further details and examples can be found in section 2 below.

Waters (1984) calls them thematic verbs, and points out that for Djinang "this set of verbs has mainly stylistic and discourse functions" (191), and "add colour to a narrative, in circumstances where events are highly predictable" (253). Otherwise, I have found that these are a poorly understood, if not ignored, area of (discourse) grammar. Morphy (1983:92f) treats them as uninflected verb roots, which "have the same lexical meaning as the verb to which they correspond, and fulfil exactly the same functions as uninflected N [= THun (DZ)] conjugation roots. Lowe (1976) treats them as Interjections that go with fully inflected verbs, such modification is clearly one of their functions. Such an analysis does recognise their significance at the discourse level. However, in discussions with some linguists interested in the Yolngu family, I have gotten the impression they were treating these as uninflected verbs (of which there is a separate class) and/or as loanwords. In this presentation, I hope to draw these to your attention and to receive information about similar phenomena in other Aboriginal languages where they must surely occur.

It may be useful to start out with what discourse verbs are not, i.e., how they contrast within the overall linguistic system of the Yolngu-Matha group.

1. They are not simply monosyllables, of which there are many occurring in all major parts of speech:

ḡoy	[Noun]	'belly'
mel	[Noun]	'eye'
nha:n	[Pron]	'he/she' (Dhangu dialects)
nhe	[Pron]	'you (singular)'
nha:	[Ques.part]	'what?'
yol	[Ques.part]	'who?'
mol	[Adj]	'black'
ya:tj	[Adj]	'bad'
mak	[Dp/Adv]	'maybe'
ga	[Preverb]	[progressive] 'is/are...ing'
dhu	[Preverb]	[future; obligatory] 'will, should'
ma:rr	[Conj]	'so that, in order to'
yow	[Intj]	'yes'
ḡetj	[Intj]	'Serves you right!; Did you learn a lesson?'

2. They are not simply uninflected verbs, of which there is a separate class (most of which are of foreign, usually Macassan, introduction):

ba:yarra	[V-tr-6]	pay, revenge [Mkr bayara' 'pay']
ba:yim	[V-tr-6]	buy [Eng buy, via Kriol bayim]
bothurru	[V-tr-6]	count [Mkr botoro' 'gamble, play at dice']
buthuwa	[V-in-6]	defecate, go to the toilet [source?]
dharray	[V-tr-6]	look after [source?]
dja:ka	[V-tr-6]	take care of, mind [Mkr jaga 'watch, look out' via Malay from Hindi]
= dja:ga		
dja:ma	[V-tr-6]	work, make [Mkr jama 'do, work; handle, touch']
djambi	[V-tr-6]	exchange [Mkr sambe 'money changer'; Iban sambi' 'exchange']
ganan	[V-in-6]	leave [source?]
wukirri'	[V-tr-6]	write [Mkr ukiri' 'inscribe, write upon']

3. They are not establishable as loanwords (see 2 above). The resemblance of some forms to foreign words is best interpreted as the product of chance resemblance or accident, e.g., day 'die, stop' (Eng die), or diy 'hit/strike with a weapon' (Mkr badi' 'knife'). It is unlikely that such a large and intricate grammatical system could be subject to wholesale borrowing.

4. Many are simple roots forming a Discourse Verb + -thun or -marama series, e.g., bak 'break' :: bak/thun [V-in-1] 'break, get hurt', bak/marama [V-tr-2] 'break'. However, at least some of the following are probably suppletive forms, i.e., having no known inflected variants nor any phonological or morphological similarities to other Yolngu-Matha stems:

bat 'throw (away)'
Rep: dup/thun, gutjparr'/yun, ŋurrka/ma; Syn: dup

bat 'touch, hold, have, reach'
Rep: ŋayathama, mulka(ma)

bay' 'leave'
Rep: ganan, ganarrthama

bur(') 'arrive, come'
Rep: buna

dal 'hit'
Rep: boyan, buma, dar'/marama, li/yun, wut/thun;
Syn: dar', ditj, diy, gut, wut

day 'die; stop, quit'
Rep: dhiŋgama, rakuny-dhirri;
Exp: daynha 'He/she/it died'

- ditj 'hit'
Rep: boyan, buma, dar'/marama, li/yun, wut/thun
- dulk 'run'
Rep: ga:t/thun, wandi, yut/thun; Syn: naŋ
- du^htj 'return'; [Conj] 'again'
Rep: roŋiyi-rri
- duy 'lie down, sleep'
Rep: ŋorra, ŋoya
- dharr 'see'
Rep: nha:/ma
- dhurr 'give'
Rep: gungan, gurrupan; Cf: ga' [imp]
- dhut 'sit'
Rep: nhina, nyina
- djut 'spear, pierce'
Rep: dharpu/ma; Syn: dharrk, git
- ga [Imp] 'listen'
Rep: ŋa:ma
- ga' [Imp] 'give it!'
Rep: gūan, gurrupan, wekama; Cf: dhurr
- git 'pierce, stab, spear'
Rep: dharpu/ma, Syn: dharrk, djut
- gul' 'Let's go!'
Rep: marrtji ŋali, ŋarruŋaya ŋali; Syn: go; Cf: larr'
- larr' 'Go (on)!, Come here!, Let's go'
Rep: law'yun, marrtji; Cf: go, gul'
- ma' [Imp] 'Quick(ly)!, Get on with it!, O.K.'
Cf: bondi, wadtja

5. Not all forms of this type constitute a Discourse Verb + -thun or -marama series. Note, for example, nya:l [n] 'lie' :: nya:l'/yun [V-in-l] 'tell a lie, pretend', djiw' [n] 'silent fart' :: djiw'/yun 'blow a silent fart'.

2. FUNCTIONS OF DISCOURSE VERBS.

Waters [Op. cit.] has pointed out that for Djinang "this set of verbs has mainly stylistic and discourse functions" (191), and "add colour to a narrative, in circumstances where events are highly predictable" (253). These ideophones have only been noted to occur in clause initial or final position, a frame otherwise used for highlighting or EMPHASIS in discourse (see Tchekhoff and Zorc, 1983:853ff). They are used in the following contexts.

1. REPLACIVE. Within a story, or given a clear context, they serve in place of fully inflected verbs:

Bat ŋayi ŋunhiyi dhum'thum.
grab he that wallaby
'...[Then] he grabbed for that wallaby.'

Bat laypa ŋayi gurtha yolŋu'yulŋu.
lit-fire other-side it fire people
'Some people lit a fire on the other side.'

Dal ŋayi yolŋu/nha.
hit he person-ACC
'...He hit the man.'

Darrk/nha ŋanya wuŋgan/dhu.
bite -SEQ him dog -ERG
'...Then he got bit by a dog.'

Dulk ŋayi raŋi/kurru godarr'/mirri miyapunu/wu.
run he beach-PER morning-EXIS turtle-GEN
'...He ran along the beach for turtle early in the morning.'

Bili ŋayi marrtji yawungu ga ra:liyi ŋayi dutj.
and he go yesterday and this-way he return
'Well, he went away yesterday and came back straightaway.'

Dhut ŋayi warraw'/lili bili ŋayi gorrmur'/thirri walu/yu.
sit he shade - ALL because he hot - INCH sun-ERG
'[Then] he sat down in the shade because he got too hot in the sunlight.'

2. EMPHASIS/MODIFICATION. Discourse verbs can be used to emphasize or modify a synonymous full verb.

Bat ŋurrka/ŋa dhuwali galpu.
throw throw-IMP here spear-thrower
'Throw that woomera over here.'

Bat biya/ka mulki/ya!
hold thus/IMP hold/IMP
'Hold it like this [really tight]!'

Boy' waŋi ga yindi boy'/yun.
blow wind [prog] big blow-VI-BASE

Bur gay' buna/na ŋarra/ku yolŋu/nydja.
arrive oh! arrive-P₁ I - GEN person-OPP
'Oh, my friend has arrived!'

Ditj ŋayi wut/thurru/na nhan/ŋu/way miyalk.
hit he hit- VI -P₁ he-GEN-own woman
'Wham!, he hit his wife.'

3. IMPERATIVE. A small subclass of these operate exclusively as imperative forms; they have been marked [Imp] in the full list (#3): ga, ga', go, gul', larr', ma'. These may replace the BASE or IMP forms of their full verbal synonyms, but do not substitute in other uses, e.g., PAST, FUTURE, or PROGRESSIVE. It is noteworthy that all other discourse verbs cannot be used in an IMP function when standing alone, but can modify a full verb in that mode (as bat and bat in #2 above).

REFERENCES

- Lowe, Beulah. 1976. Temporary Gupapuyŋu Dictionary. Ed. Michael Christie. Milingimbi. Roneoed.
- Morphy, Frances. 1983. "Djapu, a Yolngu Dialect," Eds. R. M. W. Dixon and Barry J. Blake. Handbook of Australian Languages, Volume 3:1-188.
- Tchekhoff, Claude and R. David Zorc. 1983. "Discourse and Djambarrpuyŋu: Three Features," Linguistics 21:849-878.
- Walker, Alan and R. David Zorc. 1981. "Austronesian loanwords in Yolngu-Matha of Northeast Arnhemland," Aboriginal History 5:109-134.
- Waters, Bruce Edwin. 1984. Djinang and Djinba: a Grammatical and Historical Perspective. M.A. Dissertation, The Australian National University.
- Zorc, R. David. 1982. "Yolngu-Matha Verb Stem Classification." Manuscript. School of Australian Linguistics.

3. LIST OF DISCOURSE VERBS IN YOLNGU-MATHA

- bak 'break'
 Rep: bak/thun, daw'yun; Syn: dak
- bar 'whip, flog, beat, hit, slap'
 Rep: bartjun/marama
- bat 'throw (away)'
 Rep: dup/thun, gutjparr'/yun, ŋurrka/ma; Syn: dup
- bat (1) 'make fire'
 Rep: bat/thun
- bat (2) 'touch, hold, have, reach'
 Rep: ŋayathama, mulka(ma)
- ba:w' 'burst, explode; fart loudly'
 Rep: ba:w'/yun
- bay' 'leave'
 Rep: ganan, ganarrthama
- bil 'turn'
 Rep: bil/yun
- bul' 'fall; [noise of something dropped, e.g., stone]'
 Rep: galkirri(na)
- bur 'arrive, come'
 Rep: buna
- but 'fly away' [singular]
 Rep: but/thun
- boy' 'blow (at/on); have sexual intercourse'
 Rep: boy'/yun
- dak 'break; cut'
 Rep: bak/thun, dak/thun
- dal (1) 'break'
 Rep: bak/thun
- dal (2) 'hit'
 Rep: boyan, buma, dar'/marama, li/yun, wut/thun; Syn: dar', ditj, diy, gut, wut
- dap 'come together, meet [e.g., two lines of people surrounding something]'
 Cf: dap/marama, dap/thun; Exp: liw-w-w dap 'They surrounded it and then came together.'
- dar' 'hit'
 Rep: boyan, buma, dar'/marama, li/yun, wut/thun; Syn: dal, ditj, diy, gut, wut

darrk 'bite'
 Rep: darrk/thun, lawuma

day 'die; stop, quit'
 Rep: dhiŋgama, rakuny-dhirri; Exp: daynha 'He/she/it died'

ditj 'hit'
 Rep: boyan, buma, dar'/marama, li/yun, wut/thun; Syn: dal,
dar', diy, gut, wut

diy 'hit'
 Rep: boyan, buma, dar'/marama, li/yun, wut/thun; Syn dal,
dar', gut, wut

dulk 'run'
 Rep: ga:t/thun, wandi, yut/thun; Syn: naŋ

dup 'throw'
 Rep: dup/thun, gutjparr'/yun, ŋurrka/ma; Syn: bat

dur' 'push'
 Rep: dur'/yun

dutj 'return'; [Conj] 'again'
 Rep: roŋiyi-rri

duy 'lie down, sleep'
 Rep: ŋorra, ŋoya

dhar 'rain'
 Rep: dhar/yun, nya:rr'/yun; Cf: waltjan

dharr 'see'
 Rep: nha:/ma

dharrk 'pierce, spear, stab'
 Rep: dharpu/ma, dharrk/thun; Syn: djat, djut, git

dhurr 'give'
 Rep: gungan, gurrupan; Cf: ga' [Imp]

dhut 'sit'
 Rep: nhina, nyina

djalk 'throw (out), toss, discard'
 Rep: djalk/thun

djat (1) 'chop (with knife or axe), hit with something
 sharp'
 Rep: djat/thun, gut/thun; Syn: gut

djat (2) 'spear, pierce'
 Rep: dharpuma; Syn: dharrk, djut, git

djaw' 'take away, snatch'
Cf: djaw'tjawmirri, djaw'/yun

djip 'stay (seated/standing), put (on/down)'
Rep: nherran; Opp: rur'; Cf: djip/thun; Exp: djiptjip
"Wait for me!, Hang on!"

djut 'spear, pierce'
Rep: dharpu/ma; Syn: dharrk, git

djuy' 'go'
Rep: marrtji, ĵarruĵan; Cf: djuy'/yun 'send; let someone
go'; Exp: djuy' lakarama 'allow, permit'

ga [Imp] 'listen'
Rep: ĵa:ma

ga' [Imp] 'give it!'
Rep: guĵan, gurrupan, wekama; Cf: dhurr

git 'pierce, stab, spear'
Rep: dharpu/ma, Syn: dharrk, djut

go [Imp] 'Come here!, Come on!'
Rep: marrtji ra:li, ĵarruĵaya ra:li; Cf: gul', larr'

gul 'stop'
Rep: gul/yun

gul' [Imp] 'Let's go!'
Rep: marrtji ĵali, ĵarruĵaya ĵali; Syn: go; Cf: larr'

gulk 'cut'
Syn: mit/thun; Rep: gulk/thun

gut 'hit'
Rep: boyan, buma, dar'/marama, li/yun, wut/thun; Syn: dal,
dar', ditj, diy, wut

gut 'chop'
Rep: djat/thun, gut/thun

larr' [Imp] 'Go (on)!, Come here!, Let's go'
Rep: law'yun, marrtji; Cf: go, gul'

law' 'get up and go [plural]'

liw' (1) 'go around'
Rep: liw'/yun

liw' (2) 'paddle, row'
Rep: gawuluma, liw'liw/yun

ma' [Imp] 'Quick(ly)!, Get on with it!, O.K.'
Cf: bondi, wadutja

milŋ' 'shine'
Rep: milŋ'/thun

mit 'cut'
Syn: gulk/thun; Rep: mit/thun

muk 'be silent, quiet'
Rep: muk/marama, muk/thun

naŋ' 'run'
Rep: ga:t/thun, naŋ'/thun, wandi, yut/thun; Syn: dulk

rur' 'stand'
Rep: dha:rra, dha:ya; Cf: rur'/yun, rur'/marama

war 'urinate'
Rep: war/yun

warr 'take; lead the way; pull, push'
Rep: ma:rrama, warr/yun

wirrk 'scratch'
Rep: wirrk/thun

wut 'hit'
Rep: buma, dar'/marama, li/yun, wut/thun; Syn: dal, dar',
ditj, diy, gut

yaw' 'dislike, reject'
Rep: ŋuyulk/thirri; Syn: yew', yitj

yitj 'dislike, reject'
Rep: ŋuyulk/thirri; Syn: yaw', yew'

yew' 'dislike, reject [expression of distaste]'
Rep: ŋuyulk/thirri; Syn: yaw', yitj

The following disyllabics appear to behave as discourse verbs:

bularr 'lie down'
Rep: ŋorra, ŋoya

burrwarr 'snatch, take away; beg for'
Rep: gombuma

gurray 'put down'
Rep: gurrunharra, rulwaŋ-dhun; (sometimes also: gurrupan,
gungan)

widi' 'get lost, stray'
Rep: widi'/yun, winya'/yun