

## **Turn management in Garrwa mixed-language conversational storytelling**

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Studies of interaction in Australian Aboriginal contexts have been largely limited to ethnographic accounts of larger group interactions, e.g. Liberman's (1985) account of behaviour at public meetings. Claims have been made about the particularity of talk among Aboriginal people, and its apparent incompatibility with patterns found the talk of Anglo-Australians. For example, Walsh (1991) observes that Murinh-Patha people tend to treat talk as an 'open channel', whereby they may enter conversation without attending to the talk of others, while Anglo Australians prefer directed talk which observes strict turn management principles. Garde's (2003) recent long term study contains many perceptive observations concerning conversational language, particularly on reference to persons. There is also a substantial literature on narrative in Aboriginal culture, but little on interactional storytelling. We have been unable to find any empirical studies of turn management grounded in detailed transcription of talk in Aboriginal communities.

Findings in the Conversation Analytic tradition on turn management have focussed largely (but not exclusively) on Anglo and European conversations (but see, for example, Moerman, 1988). There one finds, for example, frequent but usually brief overlap, a lack of silence, particularly inter-turn silence, and large numbers of response tokens, brief assessments and other 'backchannels' by the story recipient. We will briefly show three 'typical' examples of such talk from Australian, British and US data.

Our data are sequences of conversational storytelling recorded in Borroloola between two elderly Garrwa women, using mixed language (Garrwa, Kriol, Aboriginal English). We have examined four of their conversations which occurred on a cabin porch during breaks in working with the second author (who is mostly not present). These have been backed up by a less detailed analysis of two other conversations involving three other elderly Garrwa women. We find that turn-internal silences are unusual, but inter-turn silences are common; response tokens are relatively infrequent, and appear to occur particularly after assessments by the main storyteller, and recipient response tokens and assessments are typically delayed. These findings support the anecdotal and ethnographic observational claims that there is a greater tolerance for silence amongst Aboriginal Australians, though a more differentiated picture of this tolerance is emerging from our study. However, many underlying turn-taking practices, including the construction of turn units, orientation to transition relevance places, orderliness in turn-taking, structuring of multi-unit storytelling turns, reveal a similar fundament to those that have been described for other linguistic-cultural groups.

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