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Abstract

Discourse function of determiners in Roper River Kriol

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The subject of this paper is to present an analysis of some discourse particles used in Roper River Kriol (as spoken in Ngukurr in South-East Arnhem Land in the NT of Australia). This includes investigating a part of speech that at first glance looks like (and is historically derived from) the English demonstrative ‘*that*’ or ‘*those*’, i.e.

- (1) Yu-mob luk **det** dubala jet
2pl look **DET** two aeroplane
Look at those two aeroplanes

Or used anaphorically as in the English ‘*the*’, to refer to previously mentioned referents in the discourse e.g.

- (2) gat **det** ki-holda ai bin bayim
INST **DET** keychain 1.sg PST buy
With the key-chain that I bought

But on further analysis this determiner-like pronominal marker does not exhibit the expected distribution to fit these categories. For example, *det* can occur before proper nouns, such as people’s names and place names. As in:

- (3) maitbi im jeya pobala **det** B.
Maybe 3sg there poor.thing **DET** [personal name]
Maybe she’s there, poor thing (that) B.

There is evidence to suggest that this marker is similar to pronominal articles that mark topic in the substrate languages of Roper River Kriol, as these can also precede proper names (e.g. from Ngalagkan, Baker 2005; Nunggubuyu, Heath 1984 and Munro 2004). Thus using theories of discourse analysis as developed by Myhill (1992) and Givon (2001;1983) this analysis aims to investigate what function this pronominal marker plays in Kriol discourse, whether like the English ‘*the*’ or ‘*that*’ or more akin to the pronominal articles found in the substrate influences of Kriol.

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