

## Global Australian Languages Workshop 2021

**A poster about... y'know.... filler terms**

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# Thanks to:

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and the broader Thaayorre / Pormpuraaw community



# Defining fillers

- Per Hayashi & Yoon (2010:43), a (placeholder) filler:
  1. appears to be motivated by constraints in cognitive processes, such as difficulty in remembering or “accessing” an appropriate lexical item.
  2. participates in the syntactic structure of an unfolding utterance.
  3. is used as a referential expression.
  4. is [frequently] subsequently replaced by a more specific lexical item.



# Fillers

- Most languages have a number of terms that can be used as substitutes when the speaker experiences a disfluency / word retrieval problem:

*Did you see where I left that whatchamacallit / wossname  
/ whatsit / thingamajig?*

- Some languages have dedicated “placeholder” filler terms  
(Evans 2004, Bradley p.c. ...)



# Yanyuwa (John Bradley, p.c.)

Dedicated form: *ngabiya*

- Noun class inflection:

*a-ngabiya* 'what is that feminine thing I am trying to recall?'

*ma-ngabiya* 'what is that (non-meat) food I am trying to recall?'

*na-ngabiya* 'what is that arboreal thing (derived from plant based materials) I am trying to recall?'



# Yanyuwa (John Bradley, p.c.)

Dedicated form: *ngabiya*

- Case (locative):

*kalu-wingka waykaliya kalu-arri ngabiya-la....ngabiya-la.... aaa wakara  
kalu-arri wayka barra Yamirri*

*'they went downstream, they were there at-what's-that-place... at-  
what's-that-place... aa I have it, they were down there at Yamirri.'*



# Yanyuwa (John Bradley, p.c.)

Dedicated form: *ngabiya*

- Verbal inflection and/or derivation:

*Kurda kalinyamba-ngabiyamanthaninya... kalinyamba-ngabiyamanthaninya  
kalinyamba-ramanathaninya wayka nungku-wurramala*

'Dear me, they would all be doing that thing to each other, they would  
all be doing that to each other, they would all be fighting each other  
down there at the fighting ground'



# Fillers

- Most languages have a number of terms that can be used as substitutes when the speaker experiences a disfluency / word retrieval problem:

*Did you see where I left that whatchamacallit / wossname  
/ whatsit / thingamajig?*

- Some languages have dedicated “placeholder” filler terms  
(Enfield 2002, Evans 2004, ...)
- Many other languages use pronouns and/or demonstratives for this function  
(Diessel 1999, Podlesskaya 2010)





# Kuuk Thaayorre



# Why study Kuuk Thaayorre fillers?

- To cheat at speaking Kuuk Thaayorre
- They are the final frontier in understanding (non-space-bound, non-exophoric) uses of demonstratives
- They “raise both fascinating and fundamental questions about the nature of linguistic meaning” e.g. sensitivity to the addressee’s knowledge state



“[placeholders] are explicitly oriented to the interactional nature of the speech context, drawing attention to a speaker’s assumption that the listener can figure out what the speaker is referring to.”  
(Enfield 2002: 101)



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# Kuuk Thaayorre demonstratives



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- Adnominal demonstratives

*inh* 'this', *ith* 'that', *ulp* 'the'

- Pronominal demonstratives

*inh* 'nhul ~ *inhul* 'this one', *yuunhul* 'that one'

*Cf. nhul* '3sgNOM', *i* 'i' 'here', *ii* 'there', *yuuw* 'far away'



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# Kuuk Thaayorre demonstratives

*inhul* 'this one'

- (1) *raak thaapirri inhul*, Station Creek  
place nearby this.one Station Creek  
'Station Creek, that place is nearby'

*yuunhul* 'that one'

- (2) *pam-al ii (radio) yuunhul* too high *yik<ik>a-n-r!*  
man-ERG there radio that.one too high playing  
'(those) people are playing that one (radio) too loud!'



# Filler functions of demonstrative pronouns





- Speakers of Kuuk Thaayorre use fillers to either:
  - avoid disruption
  - signal disruption



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  - avoid disruption
  - signal disruption
  
- *Inhul* ‘this one’, ‘nondisruptive’
  - reference need not be made explicit for the conversation to progress
  - referent is ‘accessible’ to speaker
  - speaker has reason not to mention referent explicitly
  
- *Yuunhul* ‘that one’, ‘disruptive’
  - reference must be established for the conversation to progress
  - referent is ‘inaccessible’ to addressee



# Inhul 'this one'

(3) *inhul ulp, peln*  
this.one the 3pINOM

*Donald, Cyril, peln ulp walmeerem=unh*  
Donald Cyril 3pINOM the remember=3sgACC  
'those whatsits, like Donald and Cyril, they all remember him'

(4) *ngul nhul irra yat... inhul wanhul-ak*  
then 3sgNOM to.there go:P.PFV this.one who-DAT  
'then she went off to that whatsit [other man]'

