Cohesive features in Rembarrnga narratives

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Abstract

A number of features found in spoken narratives in the Rembarrnga language of Arnhem Land can be seen to serve a cohesive function within the text. These include not only ellipsis of pronominal prefixes and tense marking from the verb complex but also the repetition of fully inflected verbs in subsequent sentences in order to background completion of one activity/event in the process of moving on to the next. Repetition of sentence elements in differing order allows focus to come upon different elements in turn. Incorporation of the noun into the verb complex allows cohesive backgrounding of a nominal element following its initial introduction to the text. A number of text examples of such apparently cohesive features are explored.

1.   Introduction — Cohesion

Cohesion is the set of language resources which express relationships or links through a text or discourse separate from the structural level of sentence grammar (Halliday 1994: 309–311). It forms part of the study of what Halliday calls *texture*, which in turn is part of the study of coherence (Halliday 1994: 334, Halliday & Hasan 1976: 2–3). The classic works on cohesion were treatments by Halliday & Hasan (1976) in the systemic functional grammar tradition and by Gutwinski (1976) in the stratificational tradition. Martin (2001) provides an overview of this work and of subsequent developments, which, he indicates, "concentrated on the semantics of these cohesive resources and their relation to discourse structure" (Martin 2001: 37ff).

Halliday (1994: 309) sets cohesion in context in the following terms:

> …the clause complex has certain inbuilt limitations, from the point of view of its contribution to the texture of the discourse. The things that are put together in it have to be clauses; and they have to occur next to one another in the text. These are inherent in the nature of grammatical structure.
>
> As we saw, a very wide range of semantic relationships is encoded through nexuses within the clause complex. But in order to construct discourse we need to be able to establish additional relations within the text that are not subject to these limitations; relations that may involve elements of any extent, both smaller and larger than clauses,

from single words to lengthy passages of text; and that may hold across gaps of any extent, both within the clause and beyond it, without regard to the nature of whatever intervenes. This cannot be achieved by grammatical structure; it depends on a resource of a rather different kind. These non-structural resources for discourse are what are referred to by the term COHESION.

There are four ways by which cohesion is created in English: by reference, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical organization.

Halliday & Matthiessen (2004: 536) note that "cohesive resources make it possible to link items of any size, whether below or above the clause; and to link items at any distance, whether structurally related or not."

Drawing on earlier work by Halliday and Hasan but coming from a stratificational point of view, Gutwinski (1976: 26) describes cohesion with similar effect, though he includes both intra-sentence and inter-sentence links or relations:

The term COHESION is used in this investigation for the relations obtaining among the sentences and clauses of a text. These relations, which occur on the grammatic stratum, are signalled by certain grammatical and lexical features reflecting discourse structure on a higher, semologic stratum. These features, such as anaphora, subordination and coordination, are called COHESIVE. They account for what may also be referred to as the textual connectivity of sentences and clauses. They do not by themselves constitute cohesion but they mark which clauses and sentences are related and in what manner. This relatedness of clauses and sentences of a text constitutes the internal cohesion of a text. Cohesion as defined in this study does not constitute discourse structure but it reflects indirectly, perhaps in part only, the underlying semologic structure of a text, that is, the discourse structure conceived at the semologic stratum.

Halliday & Hasan (1976: 3) use the term *tie* to refer to "a single instance of cohesion, … one occurrence of a pair of cohesively related items". There are a number of types of cohesive tie summarised as follows (Halliday 1994: 309–310, 334, Martin 2001: 36):

- reference (co-reference)
- ellipsis
- substitution
- conjunction
- lexical cohesion

Gutwinski (1976: 54–82) followed Halliday and Hasan in listing all of these except for ellipsis, while adding three further cohesive resources to this list:

- order of clauses/sentences
- enation (=grammatical parallelism/structural similarity)
- agnation (= a pattern where clauses have the same major lexical items but different grammatical structures, e.g. active/passive, fronting etc.)

Enation and *agnation* are the nouns derived from the adjectives *enate* and *agnate*, invented by Gleason (1965: 199, footnote 2). See further clarification below.

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976: 4):

> Cohesion occurs where the INTERPRETATION of some element in discourse is dependent on that of another. The one PRESUPPOSES the other, in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it.

This works well for instances such as the reference of pronouns and demonstratives, for substitution and ellipsis and also for conjunction (e.g. the use of *however* or *nevertheless* cannot be properly interpreted without the preceding sentence which provides the contrast). On the other hand this definition is less convincing for some other forms of lexical cohesion in the sense that strings of occurrences of repeated lexical items, synonyms or even related terms (collocation) do not necessarily require a preceding item for interpretation but do nevertheless establish linking chains with those other items, marking the unity of the text/discourse. In other words, the function of cohesion is perhaps to provide a broader and more diverse range of links within a discourse or text than this definition would imply. In fact a feature such as rhyme in poetry might also provide a more general cohesive link of this type. In the present paper we will treat as cohesive those features which provide a link to another sentence in the discourse, even if, in some cases, interpretation is not dependent on that link.

In relation to conjunction, Halliday and Hasan focus their attention on cohesive ties between separate sentences, while Gutwinski's discussion of coordination and subordination ranges across both the intra-sentence and the inter-sentence levels (Martin 2001: 36, Gutwinski 1976: 73–75). In this paper we will focus attention only on inter-sentence cohesion. Because it deals with inter-sentence relationships, cohesion is not the same as information packaging within the clause, though these two phenomena are related.

Cohesion in Australian Aboriginal language texts has not been discussed in depth, though McGregor dealt with lexical cohesion and other forms of repetition in a recent conference presentation (McGregor 2006).

In this paper I propose to look at ellipsis, repetition and noun incorporation in narratives in Rembarrnga, a polysynthetic language of central Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia, in terms of their function as possible cohesive devices. I will not address reference, substitution, conjunction or lexical cohesion. We will be looking at features that most closely relate to ellipsis, enation and agnation. We will find that Rembarrnga has some parallels but also some differences in comparison with how these forms of cohesion work in English.

In the light of this, it is relevant to briefly characterise ellipsis, enation and agnation before proceeding.

Ellipsis (in which they include substitution) is described by Halliday & Matthiessen in the following terms (2004: 535, cf 561):

> Ellipsis makes it possible to leave out parts of a structure when they can be presumed from what has gone before

or, less formally (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004: 569):

> …ellipsis is a relationship at the lexicogrammatical level: the meaning is 'go back and retrieve the missing words'.

Cohesive ellipsis in English is particularly common in adjacency pairs in conversation such as *Who was going to post the letters? — Jill was*, in which the ellipted words *going to post the letters* need to be retrieved from the preceding utterance. This provides a cohesive tie between the two utterances. Gutwinski does not deal with ellipsis in his discussion of cohesion except in the limited form of zero anaphora (Gutwinski 1976: 62–63), which occurs within compound sentences and thus does not come within the inter-sentential scope of our discussion.

Enation is mentioned as a possible cohesive feature by Gutwinski (1976: 75–77), who quotes Gleason (1965: 199) as saying:

> Two sentences can be said to be enate if they have identical structures, that is, if the elements (say, words) at equivalent places in the sentences are of the same classes, and if the constructions in which they occur are the same.

Alongside various literary and Biblical examples, Gutwinski (1976: 76) quotes a nursery rhyme to exemplify enation used as a cohesive device:

> This little pig went to market
> This little pig stayed home
> This little pig ate roast beef
> This little pig had none …

Halliday does not list enation (or parallelism) among the cohesive features he recognises, though Martin (2001: 48–49, note 19), with reference to work by Gutwinski and Hasan, notes that grammatical parallelism is a strong cohesive feature of children's texts in general.

Agnation is presented by Gutwinski (1976: 78) in the form of a quote from Gleason (1965: 202):

> Pairs of sentences with the same major vocabulary items, but with different structures (generally shown by differences in arrangement, in accompanying function words, or other structure markers) are agnate if the relation in structure is regular and systematic, that is if it can be stated in terms of general rules.

The two examples given by Gutwinski are an active–passive pair of sentences (*James wrote this book. — This book was written by James.*) and a sentence with and without marked fronting of the direct object (*She couldn't do this. — This she couldn't do.*) He notes that the choice between these "will usually be motivated by considerations which have to do with appropriate transitions from sentence to sentence" — in

other words the choice relates to information packaging in successive clauses. He then quotes literary examples from Rudyard Kipling and Dylan Thomas in which enation and agnation interact but essentially each has a clause with unmarked constituent order (SV...) followed by a clause with a marked word order in which a constituent is fronted before the subject — in one case the object and in the other a location clause.

Enation and agnation are both types of parallelism. Enation involves a parallel structural pattern with (at least partially) different content, while agnation involves parallel content but different structural patterns. Clause repetition may perhaps be seen as one extreme of enation, with parallel content and structure. In all these cases, while the following (enate or agnate) clause does not require the preceding clause for interpretation, nevertheless the existence of the parallelism links the two clauses structurally or in terms of content with one another.

2.   Rembarrnga grammar

Rembarrnga is a polysynthetic language of central Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, Australia. The only major descriptions of the language to date are a grammar by McKay (1975) and a detailed analysis of the verb, together with a dictionary, by Saulwick (2003).

Like other languages of the region, the central and often the only element of the clause or sentence is a verb complex. This verb complex comprises a verb root with up to three core participants marked by pronominal prefixes or incorporated nouns, together with suffixes marking tense, aspect and mood. Various other elements can occur within the verb word such as derivational affixes, incorporated nouns and adverbs. McKay's original analysis, for instance, showed sixteen different slots making up the maximal verb complex — verb root plus fifteen affix or incorporation slots (McKay 1975: 194). Saulwick (2003) has analysed the verb morphology and semantics of Rembarrnga in more detail.

While the verb is clearly the centre of the clause, Evans' comments (2003: 548) on the nearby language Bininj Gun-wok apply to Rembarrnga also: "the delineation of the unit 'clause' is difficult to achieve in a watertight way". Generally the verb and any core nominal groups associated with it plus any circumstantial elements all occurring within the same intonation contour are considered clearly to belong to a single clause. In the case of phrases or words occupying their own intonation group or separated by pauses it may be unclear what clause they should belong to (cf. Heath 1985: 102–103 on the related language Ngandi). Frequently, pauses (symbolised as '|' in the examples given here) coincide with clause boundaries too.

The clause can be expanded by adding separate nominal groups representing one or more of the participants (usually marked by suffix for case) and/or circumstantial material such as adverbs, or case marked nominals indicating location, time, etc. None of this additional material is obligatory and its presence is normally due to pragmatic factors, for example to express contrast or focus or clarification. The non-verbal elements of the clause show a range of possibilities of order but this is in the main not grammatically determined (cf. Saulwick 2003: 76 on Rembarrnga and

Evans 2003: 549 on Bininj Gun-wok). Typically, initial position is associated with 'newsworthiness' (cf. Mithun 1987) but the pragmatic and discourse factors behind other orders of constituents have not been studied in detail, though Saulwick (2003: 76–86) has provided some word order analysis based on two texts. For a more extensive treatment see Mushin's (2005a) study of the pragmatic factors behind different word orders in Garrwa sentences — Garrwa being a suffixing language spoken in the Gulf of Carpentaria region, south-east of but not contiguous with Rembarrnga. See also Evans' preliminary comments on discourse factors behind word order in Bininj Gun-wok, a group of dialects closely related to Rembarrnga (Evans 2003: 551–555), Saulwick's discussion of order of core participants in relation to the verb in Rembarrnga clauses (Saulwick 2003: 76ff) and McGregor's discussion of the textual organisation of clauses in the Kimberley language Gooniyandi (McGregor 1990: 360–381).

A brief study of 1202 Rembarrnga clauses in five texts by four different speakers showed that 36.4% of clauses comprised a verb complex alone, while a further 21.9% involved the verb plus possible non-core material such as adverbials but without core participants marked as independent nominal groups. In other words more than half the clauses mark the core participants solely within the verb complex itself, normally as pronominal prefixes or incorporated nouns, not as independent nominals. Only 2% of clauses were transitive clauses with a verb complex plus separate nominal groups representing both major participants (Agent and Object).[1] Given the paucity of use of separate nominal groups to represent the core participants in the clause, these nominal groups are seen here as optional expansions of the pronominal reference on the verb rather than as being elipsed after cross-referencing on the verb. In discussing Bininj Gun-wok, Evans suggests a similar position, noting (2003: 548) that it is

> difficult to show that a particular nominal is truly a subject or object of the verb rather than an adjoined nominating word serving to give extra information about one of the arguments.

Evans' reason for this position — the lack of case marking on core participant nominal groupss in Bininj Gun-wok — does not apply so well to Rembarrnga. Nevertheless it seems better not to treat ellipsis of core participant nominal groups as the norm.

3.   Ellipsis in Rembarrnga

In Rembarrnga narratives, the ellipsis of pronominal prefixes and tense-aspect marking from certain non-initial verb complexes is one feature that seems to have cohesive function in the sense defined by Halliday and Hasan (see above) that interpretation of such verb complexes depends on the preceding context. Ellipsis, therefore, provides a cohesive link to a previous clause because adequate interpretation cannot be achieved within the clause containing the ellipsis itself.

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[1] Regarding Bininj Gun-wok, Evans notes (2003: 549): "By far the commonest pattern is for clauses to lack any overt nominal group, and to rely on the pronominal prefixation on the verb."

In example (1)[2] the first two lines presented here have only fully inflected verbs, though it happens that the third person minimal (here = singular) subject prefix on the intransitive verb *yininy* has a zero form in contrast to a non-zero form for all other persons and numbers. In the third line of the example, however, we find two uninflected verbs: *rditj* 'return' and *durh* 'sit down' (bolded for clarity). These verb forms have no overt pronominal prefix and no tense-aspect suffix, but comprise the root alone. For interpretation of subject and tense we need to rely on the preceding clause. It is this reliance on the preceding clause for interpretation that establishes a cohesive link between these uninflected verb forms and previous inflected verbs.

In fact the uninflected verb *rditj*, which forms a clause on its own, is immediately followed by an inflected form of the same verb, this time with a reduplicated root to signify duration of the activity.

The form claimed here to be uninflected, *rditj* in the third line, is in fact not as clear as might be. The lack of a tense/aspect suffix is obvious if one compares with the following verb, where the tense/aspect suffix is present. The pronominal prefix form for third person singular subject with the past punctual is, however, a zero form, as is also apparent from the following fully inflected verb. Example (3) below, however, shows an uninflected verb (*rdurh*) where the pronominal prefix would be a non-zero form, as shown by the following fully inflected repetition (*ngarra-rdurh-miny*). Based on such examples, the form *rditj* in the third line of example (1) is treated as undergoing ellipsis of both the pronominal prefix and the tense/aspect suffix.

(1)   *'Dakku-na*   *yarr-yappah-ma-ngara,'* |
       baby/little-3MIN.M.POSS   1A>3-UA-get-FUT

         barr-bak-yini-ny. | *gen* | *barr-bak-yini-ny* | *yini-ny.* |
         3>3-IMPLIC-say-PAST.PUNCT   woops   (3+)say-PAST.PUNCT

         Rditj. | *Rditj-rditj-miny.* | *Battœ*   **durh.** |
         return   (3+)REDUPL-return-PAST.PUNCT   there   sit.down

         Guweny   *barran-dehwa.*   [43/39–41]
         kangaroo   3>3A-give+PAST.PUNCT
         'We'll get the babies [eagles],' he said to him. Woops. He said to him? He said [i.e. to himself]. [He] came back. He was coming back. He sat down there. He gave them kangaroo [i.e. to his brother and all their wives].

I am treating the lack of inflection on verbs such as those discussed here as a form of ellipsis appropriate to a polysynthetic language. While in English different elements of the clause (such as verb phrase or subject) might be subject to ellipsis

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[2] The text examples here were all recorded in the early 1970s. Tapes and transcriptions have been deposited with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Canberra. References to the transcriptions are given for each example in the form [Text number/line numbers]. In the present work the text numbers are given in arabic numerals which are simple restatements of the original roman numerals. For example the original text XLIII is rendered here as text 43. The upright mark | signifies a pause.

for cohesive purposes (Halliday 1994: 316–323), they have in common with such Rembarrnga examples the reliance on preceding context for interpretation.

Example (2) provides a further example of this phenomenon but with an additional twist. In the case of the two uninflected verbs in this example a noun has been incorporated into the verb root to give a more specific verb root. (The fact that the noun is incorporated into the verb root here is shown by the fact that it does not carry the possessive suffix *-na* that it would normally need if occurring as an independent nominal in the clause.) This type of noun incorporation has been termed 'logical noun incorporation' (McGregor 1997, McKay 2007: 42–43). The first clause of this example contains an uninflected verb root with an incorporated noun but this verb does not stand alone, since it is followed by a fully inflected auxiliary verb, which carries the applicable inflectional elements. Thus it is not an example of the cohesive use of an uninflected verb root. The past punctual suffix *-nginy* shows that the *ga* here is the independent verb *ga* 'take' used as an auxiliary (McKay 1975: 165–170) rather than the compounding verb *-ga* CAUSATIVE, which takes the past punctual suffix *-ba* as in the immediately following verb. Once again the fact that this particular example has a zero pronominal prefix form is potentially confusing but examples of the use of *ga* as an auxiliary with non-zero prefixes are given by McKay (1975: 166–167).

(2) *Mobalh-rdayh ga-nginy.* | *Yan-bak-ngarkka-rdayhwurrhga-ba.* |
     knee-break   (3>3+)take-PAST.PUNCT 3>1/2-IMPLIC-bone-break-PAST.PUNCT

     manga-rdet. | *guh-rdorrorrh.*   [3/80–81]
     neck-hit   body-drag/pull
     He [kookaburra] broke his [kangaroo's] knee. He broke his bone, **you know**.
     [He] hit his neck. [He] dragged the body.

The ellipted subject and object and tense/aspect of the final two verbs in example (2) can only be interpreted in the light of the verb of the preceding clause. This constitutes a cohesive link between the clauses.

Example (3) provides two further examples of such ellipsis. The uninflected verb *rdurh* in the second line is more clearly uninflected than the verbs discussed up to this point because the subject prefix would be a non-zero form. In fact this uninflected verb is followed by a 'repetition' of the verb (for the significance of which see section 4 below) which is fully inflected (*ngarra-rdurh-miny*). The uninflected verb *bolh* in line four of the example is also followed by a fully inflected form of the verb. In this latter case the fully inflected form of the verb is not a simple repetition of the verb with its contextually appropriate subject and tense, but rather it repeats this information from preceding clauses as well as providing additional information in the form of the added 'implicated' participants by means of the applicative prefix *bak-* plus a third person augmented (ie plural) participant marked by the initial prefix element *ba-*.

(3) *Ngattu*   *ngarr-ba-wa*   *wattœ*   *ju-tjju-miny*
   cycad.nuts 1/2A > 3-leave-PAST.PUNCT behind (3 +)REDUPL-soak-PAST.PUNCT

   yurrah. | *yurrah.* | *yurrah.* | *battœnda* *yenehgurra* | *Gujurttœ* **rdurh.** |
   eastwards   there   what's.the.place? [place]   sit.down

   Gujurttœ   *ngarra-rdurh-miny*   *bœnda-tjja*   *baya-ba-wa.* |
   [place]   1/2A-sit.down-PAST.PUNCT there-LOC   1/2 > 3A-leave-PAST.PUNCT

   Yurrah. | *Yurrah* *ya-warna-yurt-miny*   **bolh**   *Mowarngœ.* |
   eastwards   1/2-still-walk-PAST.PUNCT arrive   [place]

   Baya-bak-bolh-miny.   [29/108–111]
   1/2 > 3A-IMPLIC-arrive-PAST.PUNCT
   We [plural inclusive] left the cycad nuts soaking and [we went] east. East.
   East. to what's the place? [We] sat down at *Gujurttœ*. We [plural inclusive]
   sat down at *Gujurttœ* and you and I left them there. [We went] east. You
   and I kept walking east and arrived at *Mowarngœ* [Murwangi]. You and I
   came up to them [some other people].

What I have termed ellipsis here may be contrasted with what Mushin calls "clause chaining" in reference to Garrwa.[3] Mushin describes Garrwa clause chaining as follows (Mushin 2005b: 13):

> In Garrwa, clause chains are formed when a clause containing a tense marking is followed by one or more clauses that lack tense marking. Otherwise clause chains show no overt signs of connectedness—neither subordinate verb morphology nor connector particles.

She goes on to note that a common use of clause chaining is to express "associated motion" linked back to the inflected verb. Furthermore

> Most of the non-associated motion clause chains in my corpus seem to provide some kind of elaboration on an event/situation that is introduced in the tensed clause, rather than present a wholly independent new narrative event. (Mushin 2005b: 14)

Garrwa clause chaining seems to parallel the ellipsis I have described for Rembarrnga in form (except that Rembarrnga verbs subject to ellipsis have not only tense suffixes but also pronominal prefixes to omit). The function, however, is not one of associated motion, "sub-events" or "some kind of elaboration" of an action that has just been introduced. In the three Rembarrnga examples given here the uninflected verbs are used to express the next action or event.

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[3] See also Myhill & Hibiya's (1988) discussion of clause chaining in relation to foreground and background.

4. Backgrounding repetition

What I am calling *backgrounding repetition* is where the inflected verb of one clause is repeated (with or without additional material) to introduce a following sentence. This repeated verb backgrounds the preceding action (already given) as a transition to what is now being introduced, which is foregrounded as the next step in the narrative. The repeated verb form sits within the same intonation contour as the clause that follows it. Evans calls this 'linked repetitions' in his grammar of Bininj Gun-wok (Evans 2003: 553).

Repetition such as this provides a cohesive link of the *enation* type mentioned by Gutwinski. It goes beyond mere lexical repetition to repetition of the essential elements of the clause — all of which are included within the verb complex, though not as separate words. Such a repeated verb form does not require one to look back for interpretation (any more than the various clauses of the rhyme 'This little pig …' do) but it nevertheless provides an opportunity for structural comparison and thus linkage with the previous clause. In repeating rather than omitting items for cohesive purposes it seems to contrast with ellipsis. In English, if such material were to be made overt, it would most likely be presented as a subordinate clause, especially a non-finite clause, as in the translation of example (4) ('Dawn having come …').

This type of pattern has been termed tail-head linkage by Longacre[4] (1996: 13) in relation to paragraphs and by van Kleef (1988) and Aziz (1988: 154) in relation to sentences. McGregor has also discussed tail-head linkage in his unpublished paper on repetition in Gooniyandi narratives (McGregor 2006), referring there to Carroll's brief discussion of "tail to head linkage" in Kunwinjku (Carroll 1995: 93–94). I have touched on the cohesive force of this type of repetition in Ndjébbana (McKay 2000: 282–283).

In example (4) the second clause of the first line has been repeated in full (adverb plus inflected verb) as a backgrounded introduction to the following sentence. It has the effect of putting one event (the dawn) behind and moving on to the next event (the conversation between the two brothers). We could translate this backgrounded clause as "Dawn having come …".

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[4] I am grateful to Alexandra Aikhenvald for drawing Longacre's mention of tail-head linkage to my attention.

(4) *Barra-yu-weny* │ *gurdarrtjjina* *jordoh-miny.* │ ***Gurdarrtjjina***
  3A-lie-PAST.CONT in.the.morning (3+)dawn-PAST.PUNCT in.the.morning

  jordoh-miny *bak-yini-ny,* │ '*Boy* │ *wawah* │
  (3+)dawn-PAST.PUNCT (3>3+)IMPLIC-say-PAST.PUNCT hey big.brother

  biyangdungga *nattœnda* *nga-dakku-ba-wa* │
  wedge.tailed.eagle there 1>3-baby-leave-PAST.PUNCT

  garra *borloh-gah'* [43/42–44]
  up tree-ALL

  They slept. In the morning the dawn came. Dawn having come in the morning, he said to him, 'Hey. Brother, there's a wedge-tailed eagle there and I left its babies up in the tree.'

Example (3) contains a further example of this backgrounding repetition involving the verb *rdurh* 'sit down' at the beginning of line three. What is interesting here is that the 'repetition' is fully inflected while the initial occurrence of the verb was uninflected, drawing on preceding context for interpretation of subject and tense, which are then spelled out inflectionally in the backgrounded repetition.

In both examples (3) and (4) the backgrounded repetition involves not only the verb but also an adverb. In the last line of example (5) below there is yet another example of backgrounding repetition but in this case only the inflected verb is repeated, and the other elements of the preceding clause (instrument and location) are omitted. The inflected verb in Rembarrnga can constitute a clause in its own right, so the minimal clause is being repeated.

5.   Focusing repetition

Focusing repetition involves the repetition of a clause with its various constituents in a different order, in order to focus on different constituents in turn. It differs from backgrounding repetition both in the fact that it involves deliberately different orders and also in that focusing repetitions are intonationally separate clauses. Backgrounding repetitions, on the other hand, form a single intonation contour with the following clause, which they introduce.

Rembarrnga, as is normal for polysynthetic languages and as discussed in section 2 above, shows a pattern in which the basic sentence is fully contained within the verb complex. As noted above, in a sample of over 1200 clauses, over one third of clauses consist of a verb alone.

Additional elaboration is frequently provided in the clause by means of words following the verb, as 'afterthoughts' (cf. Evans 2003: 548, 553) or increments, while initial position is used to focus or highlight constituents, for example as contrastive. Mithun suggests that a pragmatic *newsworthiness principle* underlies the initial placement of the "most newsworthy" item in some languages — using as her examples Cayuga, Ngandi and Coos (Mithun 1987). Of these languages Ngandi is a neighbour of Rembarrnga and is considered to belong to the same sub-group of the Gunwinyguan family of Arnhem Land languages as Rembarrnga (Evans 2003: 33).

Similar patterns characterise Ndjébbana (McKay 2000: 275–282) and Bininj Gun-wok (Evans 2003: 548–555).

In example (5), compare the wording in the second and third lines as presented here. The second line forms the final sections of a sentence commencing on the previous line. In the first occurrence of this material in the first sentence the location (*banh badumungarkka*) comes before the verb but is grouped intonationally with it, while the instrument (*bardangayih*) is presented as additional material after a pause, almost like an afterthought. In the second occurrence — the sentence constituting the third line of the example (bolded) — the instrument is fronted to go with the verb and the location is relegated to 'afterthought' position. The new subject marker *warrkka* and the deictic *banh* are omitted from the repeated sentence.

Clearly this allows the various key circumstantial elements to be focused on in turn in initial/pre-verbal position, while each circumstantial element is also relegated in turn to 'afterthought' status following the verb after a pause.

This pattern of repetition of the elements of a clause in different orders clearly matches the description of what Gutwinski calls agnation. It is readily seen to have a cohesive or discourse-linking effect, though it is harder to argue that the repetition of the sentence requires the first for interpretation or that it presupposes the first in any sense, since each has exactly the same propositional content.

(5) *Yarra gœhdœ*   *ga-yi-ngerre-yu-weny*   *warrkka* | *warrkka*   *banh*
    inside this.one   3-*yi*-asleep-lie-PAST.CONT   NEW.SUBJ   NEW.SUBJ   here

    ba-dumu-ngarkka   *barr-mirri-ya,* | *bardanga-yih.* |
    LOC-small.of.back-bone   3>3-spear-PAST.PUNCT   hook.spear-INSTR

    Bardanga-yih   **barr-mirri-ya** | **ba-dumu-ngarkka.** |
    hook.spear.INSTR   3>3-spear-PAST.PUNCT   LOC-small.of.back-bone

    Barr-mirri-ya   *durra-bolh*   *many.*   [43/107–109]
    3>3-spear-PAST.PUNCT   alive-emerge   (3+)went
    This [brother] was sleeping inside. That [brother], right here in the small of the back he speared him, with the hook spear [which he had just made]. With the hook spear he speared him, in the small of the back. Having been speared, he came out alive.

In example (6) we find a sentence with the agent placed first in focus or contrastive position followed by the verb and lastly by the goal/object. This sentence is followed by a partial repetition in which the agent is omitted since it no longer requires focus and the object is highlighted in initial position in its turn. Once again the repetition with change of word order provides a clear agnate cohesive link to the preceding sentence, but that sentence is hardly necessary for interpretation.

(6) *Da-gorrorh-ngadœ-yih*
FEM.-younger.sibling-3MIN.F.POSS-ERG

dala-yœrrœk-ka-ba   *jerrh.* |
(3>3+)mouth-be.untied-CAUS-PAST.PUNCT   dilly.bag

Jerrh   dala-yœrrœk-ka-ba.   [5/10–11]
dilly.bag   (3>3+)mouth-be.untied-CAUS-PAST.PUNCT
The younger sister untied the mouth of the dilly bag [in which she and her sister were imprisoned by the devil *Nakkarran*, while he was preparing a fire to cook them]. The dilly bag she untied the mouth of.

6. Noun incorporation

A phenomenon which has cohesive force in Rembarrnga narratives but which has no counterpart in English is noun incorporation. In particular we will focus on the type of noun incorporation that involves what Mithun calls 'manipulation of discourse' (Type III) (Mithun 1984). This is one of the types classified as textural noun incorporation by McGregor (1997). The various types of noun incorporation have been exemplified for Rembarrnga in more detail elsewhere (McKay 2007, Saulwick 2003: 328–411).

The examples of noun incorporation to which we refer here are those in which a noun is initially introduced into a discourse as an independent nominal. Subsequent occurrences of this noun have it backgrounded by being incorporated into the verb. Once again there is no doubt that this provides a cohesive link between the sentences or clauses containing the first and subsequent occurrences of this nominal. Variants of this type involve the incorporation of a specific noun following the independent occurrence of a more general noun, as well as the incorporation of a secondary predicate denoting a quality or condition (e.g. 'wounded', 'alive') linked back to an unincorporated noun (McKay 2007).

While noun incorporation occurs in Rembarrnga and not in English, it can be seen to have something in common with three different types of cohesive link listed above: lexical repetition or collocation, reference, and agnation. This cohesive function sits alongside any other function of this phenomenon, such as backgrounding.

Example (7) is an example of this form of backgrounding noun incorporation. The noun *balttarr-na* 'fork' occurs independently in the first sentence in focused initial position. This noun belongs to a group of nouns which require a possessive suffix when they occur independently. In the second, repeated sentence, the noun is incorporated into the verb root, shedding its possessive suffix. Pronominal prefix elements here have zero form. There is a cohesive link between the unincorporated noun of the first sentence and the incorporated noun of the second — alongside the backgrounding function of incorporation.

(7) **Balttarr-na**   bart mi-ya. | **Balttarr**-mi-ya.   [43/57]
fork-3MIN.M.POSS   seize (3>3+)get-PAST.PUNCT (3>3+)fork-get-PAST.PUNCT
The fork [at the top of the tree where he was trapped] he grabbed. He grabbed the fork.

Example (8) contains two occurrences of backgrounding noun incorporation involving different nouns: *durrppa-na* 'broken grass' and *morh* 'fly'. In each case the noun is introduced initially independently and subsequently is incorporated into the verb complex. In the case of *durrppa* this occurs within the complement clause of the main perception verb, but in the case of *morh* the incorporated noun occurs in the verb of a subsequent sentence, providing a clear cohesive tie. (*Durrppa-na* is another noun that requires a possessive suffix when independent but not when incorporated.   *Morh* does not require such a suffix.   The verbs containing incorporated nouns in example (8) both have non-zero prefix forms.)

(8) **Durrppa-na**   *barra-warnh-miny*   *ga-**durrppa**-yu-ru.* |
broken.grass-3POSS   3A-see-PAST.PUNCT   3-broken.grass-lie-PRES

Mitjjindah   **morh-yih**   *barr-rdih-miny,* |
long.before   fly-ERG   3A>3-hit-PAST.PUNCT

mittjindah   *ngayang-miny.* |…
long.before   (3+)devil/dead-become+PAST.PUNCT

Golong-yih   *barr-**morh**-wa-winy.*   [47/127–131]
magic-INSTR   3A>3-fly-follow-PAST.PUNCT
His broken grass, they saw his broken grass there. The flies had already struck him and he had already long become a devil/dead person … By magic they followed his flies. [Referring to a young boy whose father had been shot and who stayed by the body until he himself died.]

Example (9) involves yet another noun which requires a possessive suffix when it appears as an independent noun, but loses this suffix when incorporated. The focus of the first sentence in this example is on the verb, which is not only in initial focus position but is also marked by extreme length and a significantly raised pitch on the final syllable — marked by a series of colons. This is a very common feature in languages of Arnhem Land, including Aboriginal forms of English, to indicate significant duration of the activity. In this first sentence the subject noun occurs after the verb. In the following sentence, however, which describes the next significant event, the noun *ngarkka-na* is placed first for focus. The noun is then incorporated into the verb of the same clause as well as being incorporated into the repeated verb in the following clause. These two verb forms are different but equivalent. *Ngarkka-rdungh many* comprises a verb root with incorporated noun in combination with an inflected auxiliary. When *many* is used as a compounding form (meaning PROGRESSIVE) it is always preceded by a formative *-yi-* or *-yu-*, which in this case would have given the form *ngarkka-rdungh-yu-many* 'His bones were falling'. *Ngarkka-rdungh-miny* has the inflections directly on the verb root with the incorporated noun.

(9) *Warna-yingani-yima:::ny*   ***ngarkka-na*.** | ***Ngarkka-na***
     (3+)still-lie+stem-PROGR+PAST.PUNCT   bone-3MIN.M.POSS

     garra-wala   *wœr wœr wœr wœr wœr*   ***ngarkka*-*rdungh***   *many* |
     above-ABL   [sound.of.bones.falling]   bone-fall   (3+)went

     ***Ngarkka-rdungh-miny*.**   [43/82–83]
     (3+)bone-fall-PAST.PUNCT
     His bones stayed there. Then his bones fell from up there — *wœr wœr wœr*
     wœr wœr. His bones fell.

In example (10) we have an example of secondary predicate incorporation. The
incorporated secondary predicate *gartpurr* marks the object of the second clause as
'wounded', which clearly links back collocatively to the verb of the preceding clause
as a form of cohesive link.

(10) *Banh-ja*   *barr-gurrhwarr-miny* |... *Guwa*   *barr-**gartpurr**-gurrhwarr-mœ* |
      there-LOC   3>3-shoot-PAST.PUNCT   PURP   3>3-wounded-shoot-IRR

      barr-na   *bonh*   *war-yimany* | ...
      3>3-see.PAST.PUNCT   as.a.result   (3-)float-PROG.PAST.PUNCT

      Barran-bak-yurduh-miny.   [47/89,96–98]
      3>3AUG-IMPLIC-trick-PAST.PUNCT
      There he shot him … He was going to shoot the wounded man [ie again]
      when he saw him floating in the water [playing dead]. … He tricked them.

7.   Conclusion

Apart from cohesive ties of wide currency across languages such as pronominal
reference, conjunction and lexical cohesion, Rembarrnga narratives have some
cohesive patterns whose specific nature relates to the polysynthetic nature of the
language. These include ellipsis of verbal inflections, backgrounding repetition of
clauses, focusing repetition of clauses and the backgrounding incorporation of nouns
into the verb. These last are in fact language-specific realisations of enation and
agnation as discussed by Gutwinski. The cohesive function of these features obtains
alongside the other functions of these features, including backgrounding or focus.

Abbreviations

1, 1/2, 2, 3	first (exclusive), first (inclusive), second, third person (minimal number unless specifically marked otherwise)	INSTR	instrumental
		IRR	irrealis
		LOC	locative
A	augmented number (minimal plus more than one)	M	masculine
		MIN	minimal number for person category (=singular except for first person inclusive)
ABL	ablative		
ALL	allative	NEW.SUBJ	new subject
AUG	augmented number (=minimal plus more than one)	PAST.CONT	past continuous
		PAST.PUNCT	past punctual
		POSS	possessive
CAUS	causative	PRES	present
ERG	ergative	PROGR	progressive
F	feminine	PURP	purposive
FEM	feminine	REDUPL	reduplication
FUT	future	UA	unit augmented number (minimal plus one)
IMPLIC	implicative (applicative)		

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